



Dear Colleague

Primary Care Optometry:

- **NHS Optical Voucher Eligibility**
- **Portable Slit Lamp Grant Funding**

Summary

1. This letter advises of:
 - Income Support and Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance ceasing to be a valid reason for eligibility to a NHS optical voucher on or after 1 April 2026;
 - time-limited grant funding being made available by the Scottish Government to support community optometry practices in possessing a portable slit lamp for use in the provision of General Ophthalmic Services (GOS) in domiciliary settings (i.e. the place where a patient normally resides).

Action

2. Health Boards are asked to immediately copy and issue the Memorandum to this letter to all:
 - optometrists, ophthalmic medical practitioners and body corporates on their Ophthalmic Lists, for whom they are the Host Health Board;
 - community optometry practices and dispensing only practices in their Health Board area;
 - Hospital Eye Service (HES) manager(s) in their Health Board, for onward distribution to relevant HES colleagues to advise them of the planned changes to NHS optical voucher eligibility (including HES(S)3 vouchers).
3. NHS National Services Scotland (NSS) should ensure it is familiar with the Memorandum to this letter, and in particular the requirement to have the necessary arrangements in place to manage the administration and payment of the portable slit lamp grant to eligible community optometry practices.

Yours sincerely,

Gillian Leslie

**Deputy Director
Dentistry and Optometry Division**

9 March 2026

Addresses

For action
Chief Executives,
Health Boards

Chief Executive,
NSS

For information

Health Board Optometric
Advisers

Enquiries to:

Any queries about this
Memorandum that relate to:

- The changes to NHS optical voucher eligibility, or prior to submission of a portable slit lamp grant claim form to NSS, should be emailed to the Scottish Government at: eyecare@gov.scot;
 - After submission of a portable slit lamp grant claim form to NSS, should be emailed to NSS at: nss.psdgopsig@nhs.scot.
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**MEMORANDUM TO NHS:
PCA(O)2026(03)**

Summary

1. This Memorandum advises on the following:
 - Income Support and Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance ceasing to be a valid reason for eligibility to a NHS optical voucher on or after 1 April 2026;
 - Time-limited grant funding being made available by the Scottish Government to support community optometry practices in possessing a portable slit lamp for use in the provision of General Ophthalmic Services (GOS) in domiciliary settings (i.e. the place where a patient normally resides).
2. Where this Memorandum has been received by an optometry practice via their NHS email account, it should be shared with all relevant practice staff.
3. References to the "Statement" mean the Statement of GOS Remuneration and CPD allowances which is available in its latest form on the eyes.nhs.scot website.

NHS Optical Voucher Eligibility

4. Following [changes being made to the reserved benefit system](#) by the UK Government, no one in the UK will be in receipt of Income Support and Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance on or after 1 April 2026. Persons in receipt of either or both of these benefits prior to this date have been, or are in the process of being, written to asking them to apply for Universal Credit or Pension Credit depending on their circumstances.
5. As such, on or after 1 April 2026 practices must no longer accept Income Support or Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance as the reason for a person's eligibility for a NHS optical voucher.
6. Where a person states, on or after 1 April 2026, that they are eligible to a NHS optical voucher on Income Support or Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance grounds, practice staff should first advise the person that this is no longer a valid NHS optical voucher eligibility category. Practice staff should then determine with the person whether they may be eligible to a NHS optical voucher on different grounds (such as Universal Credit or Pension Credit Guarantee Credit).
7. As is current practice, if a person states that they are eligible for a NHS optical voucher but cannot provide evidence of entitlement then practice staff should ensure the 'Evidence not produced/shown' box is marked/selected on both the relevant paper and digital NHS optical voucher forms.

8. [NHS Inform](#) will be updated by 1 April 2026 to reflect this policy, and the [NHS Business Services Authority website](#) also has further information. Relevant forms (paper and digital) and documents (such as 'Help with Health Costs' booklets and NHS Counter Fraud Services patient eligibility posters) will also be updated to reflect this change when the transition process from all impacted benefits is complete.
9. In the meantime:
 - paper NHS optical voucher forms containing references to Income Support and Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance can continue to be used by practices, without any need to destroy them;
 - NHS National Services Scotland (NSS) has configured its system for the purposes of fraud prevention, such that any attempt to submit a digital NHS optical voucher payment claim where the 'Date Signed' value in the 'Patient Declaration' section is on or after 1 April 2026 and the 'Voucher Entitlement' option selected is 'Income Support' or 'Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance' will be rejected in real time.

Portable Slit Lamp Grant

Background

10. As set out in [PCA\(O\)2025\(04\)](#), Appendix E of the Statement requires that a GOS practitioner must possess a portable slit lamp that meets the following **minimum** standards in order to provide GOS in a domiciliary setting in Scotland:
 - 10x magnification;
 - White and cobalt blue light;
 - An adjustable slit width;
 - Built-in illumination.
11. To support GOS providers in complying with this requirement in advance of it being introduced, the Scottish Government made grant funding available on a time-limited basis, as set out in [PCA\(O\)2025\(01\)](#).

New portable slit lamp grant funding available on a time-limited basis

12. The Scottish Government has identified sufficient financial year-end funding to make this grant funding available again, which will be paid under [section 1A](#) of the National Health Service (Scotland) Act 1978. This is being done on a time-limited basis, where the qualifying criteria set out in paragraph 16 are met, up to a maximum of £5,000 for each portable slit lamp. The value of the grant will be the actual amount paid (excluding VAT), supported by relevant receipted invoices.
13. There are no plans in place to repeat this grant funding process in future.

14. This grant funding is available to:

- practices premises that have additionally undertaken to provide GOS in a domiciliary setting (under [Regulation 6\(3\)\(e\)](#) of the National Health Services (General Ophthalmic Services) (Scotland) Regulations 2006 (“2006 Regulations”)), and that meet the qualifying criteria for the grant; and
- mobile practices that meet the qualifying criteria for the grant.

15. “Practice premises” and “mobile practices” take the meaning as defined under [Regulation 2](#) of the 2006 Regulations.

Qualifying Criteria for Portable Slit Lamp Grant

16. The qualifying criteria for the grant (all of which must be met) are as follows:

- A. The portable slit lamp in respect of which a grant claim is made must meet the minimum standards set out in Appendix E of the Statement (i.e. those summarised under paragraph 10).
- B. The portable slit lamp in respect of which a grant claim is made must have been **BOTH** ordered between 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026 inclusive **AND** the practice must be in possession of the equipment by 31 March 2026 at the latest (note: as set out in paragraph 18, claimants will be asked to evidence this by providing a relevant receipted invoice and the serial number for the equipment with their claim).

No claims will be accepted where the practice takes possession of the equipment after 31 March 2026. Practices placing a new portable slit lamp order on the basis of this circular are therefore doing so at their own financial risk, and are strongly advised to check with the supplier first regarding order fulfilment and delivery times prior to placing an order.
- C. The portable slit lamp in respect of which a grant claim is made must be maintained in accordance with the manufacturer’s guidelines. The cost of such maintenance is not included within the portable slit lamp grant.
- D. Either:
 - i. The practice premises or mobile practice making the claim must have provided at least one GOS eye examination in a domiciliary setting within the period 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026 inclusive, and commit to continuing to provide GOS eye examinations in a domiciliary setting until at least 31 March 2027.

or

- ii. Practice premises or mobile practices that have not provided at least one GOS eye examination in a domiciliary setting within the period 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026 inclusive, but commit to providing GOS eye examinations in a domiciliary setting until at least 31 March 2027, may claim as long as the rest of the qualifying criteria are met.

Where this is the case and the applicant is a practice premises, it must notify the relevant Health Board (in accordance with [Regulation 7\(2\)\(a\)](#) of the 2006 Regulations) that the practice premises is undertaking to provide GOS in a domiciliary setting, within seven days of submitting the grant claim form to NSS. The Health Board will then update the information held about the practice premises on the National Primary Care Clinician Database (NPCCD) system that Health Boards use to maintain their Ophthalmic List, and that practice will then be identified on the [NHS Inform](#) website as providing a domiciliary service. This will support the expansion of GOS provision in domiciliary settings. Contact details for each Health Board can be found on the [eyes.nhs.scot](#) website.

- E. Each practice premises can only submit a claim for one portable slit lamp. For mobile practices, the number of claims permitted must not exceed the number of mobile testing kits owned by the business.
- F. Grant claims will only be paid in respect of:
 - i. practice premises that have an active Payment Location Code (PLC) in the NPCCD system that Health Boards use to maintain their Ophthalmic List, on or after the date this Memorandum is issued.
 - ii. mobile practices where the owning business has at least one active PLC in NPCCD, on or after the date this Memorandum is issued.
- G. Grant claims will not be paid where an active PLC has previously received a grant payment for the portable slit lamp equipment being claimed for.

Process for Making a Grant Claim

17. The portable slit lamp grant claim forms (one for practice premises, one for mobile practices) can be accessed on the [eyes.nhs.scot](#) website. Note: as of the date of the publication of this circular (9 March 2026) the claim forms are not yet currently available – they are in the process of being finalised and will be available on the linked webpage as soon as possible.
18. Applicants must submit the relevant completed grant claim form from a personal NHS email account to NSS at nss.psdgospplg@nhs.scot with 'Portable Slit Lamp Grant' in the subject field **by Wednesday 8 April 2026**, and in addition provide a relevant receipted invoice and the serial number for each equipment.

19. The claim form must be completed and signed by the practice owner or a person who is authorised to sign on their behalf.
20. Where NSS is satisfied that a claim it receives meets both the qualifying criteria set out in paragraph 16 and complies with the process set out in paragraphs 18-19, it will notify the applicant accordingly and provide an indication of when payment is likely to be made.
21. The relevant grant amount will be paid to the bank account associated on NSS systems with the PLC stated on the grant claim form.

Provision of Data to Health Boards

22. Following the completion of portable slit lamp grant payments, NSS will provide to Health Boards a report detailing the practices to which a grant has been paid and the relevant equipment serial number(s). This information is intended to assist Boards with the integration of this equipment into their practice inspection programmes.

Payment Verification and Recoveries

23. Applicants must ensure that the information entered on the grant claim form is accurate and valid as this payment will be subject to payment verification.
24. Where a grant is paid, and it is subsequently discovered that the qualifying criteria have not been met, the whole grant will be recovered by NSS from other payments the relevant practice receives.

Enquiries

25. Any queries about this Memorandum that relate to:

- The changes to NHS optical voucher eligibility, or prior to submission of a portable slit lamp grant claim form to NSS, should be emailed to the Scottish Government at: eyecare@gov.scot;
- After submission of a portable slit lamp grant claim form to NSS, should be emailed to NSS at: nss.psdgospslg@nhs.scot.

**Dentistry and Optometry Division
Directorate for Primary Care
Scottish Government**