

**Reference No:** E107/29/90;      **Date:** 04/06/99

**Circular 16/1999:- Special Corrective Appliances required for work with display screen equipment and visual display units**

A Dhuine Uasail

I am directed by the Minister for Finance to refer to Circular 3/94 and to inform you that the Minister has decided to delegate to departments the authority to pay the cost, of the Special Corrective Appliances referred to in paragraph 8 of that circular. Payments, up to a maximum amount to be notified from time to time by this department, may be made without further reference to this department, subject to the conditions outlined in 3/94 and in this circular.

A new Examination Record form is attached. Copies of the form should be given to the optometrist selected to perform the eye and eyesight tests and s/he should be requested to return the form directly to the personnel section of the department or office for consideration. A photocopy of the record as completed by the tester should be supplied, as a matter of course, by personnel sections to every officer who has been tested. Officers who are referred for testing must ensure that they take their current spectacles with them to the test. They should be advised not to commit to purchasing special corrective appliances until personnel section has considered the examination record and authorised the appropriate recoupment. They should also be advised of the maximum amount recoupable. That amount currently stands at £45.

Officers dealing with applications for refunds should familiarise themselves with the Guidelines attached at Appendix 2. These guidelines have been agreed between by the Association of Optometrists of Ireland and the Department of Finance. The Guidelines have been issued to all members of the Association of Optometrists of Ireland for use in assessing references from civil service departments and offices. Some practitioners are not members of the Association of Optometrists of Ireland. If a non-member is selected to perform the tests, a copy of the Guidelines should be issued to him or her.

Examination records should be considered in accordance with the Guidelines. If the record has been fully completed and the tester certifies that an officer requires the special corrective appliances, the officer should be informed in writing that a vouched amount not exceeding the maximum amount recoupable will be recouped on presentation of a receipt for the appliances. If an officer has been refused recoupment by this department in the period of one year before the date of this circular, it will be sufficient for the optometrist who performed the test to sign a note in the form of the last paragraph of the attached examination record ("Having read the guidelines approved by the Department of Finance, I certify that the applicant requires special corrective lenses specifically to operate a Visual Display Unit and for no other purpose") to secure recoupment. In any other case of refusal, the officer may be sent for a fresh test, if s/he continues to experience visual difficulties which may be due to display screen work.

It has been agreed with the Irish Association of Optometrists that the percentage of applicants certified by each tester as requiring special corrective appliances will be monitored. Where the percentage of officers certified by an individual tester as requiring special corrective appliances exceeds 5% of the total number sent for testing, the examination records of those certified as requiring the special corrective appliances should be sent to this department for review. The minimum number of officers to be tested by one tester before any reference to this department is 100. If there are other concerns about a tester, or if a very high proportion of officers are being certified as requiring special corrective appliances (even though the total number sent for testing has not exceeded 100), copies of the records should be sent to this department for examination. Advice may also be sought by telephone at direct dial 01-604-5441 & 01-604-5442).

I am to inform you that the penultimate sentence in the first paragraph of section 7 of Circular 3/94 is deleted. Civil servants on the full rate of PRSI should now be referred for testing, and fees paid in respect of them, on the same basis as civil servants on the modified rate.

Mise le meas

J McGovern  
Assistant Secretary

V.D.U. USER'S EXAMINATION RECORD

Name:.....

Date of Birth:.....

RIGHT EYE

LEFT EYE

Ophthalmoscopy & External Exam:

Unaided Visual Acuity:

Refractive Findings:    Sph Cyl Axis Pr/Base  
   Sph Cyl AxisPr/Base

Corrected Distance Acuity:

Am of Acc. (with necessary Rx)

Intermediate Addition & V/A:

Near Addition & V/A:

Suppression    YES/NO            YES/NO

Muscle Balance (Distance):            Horizontal:  
   Vertical:            Method

Muscle Balance (33 cms):            Horizontal:  
   Vertical:            Method

Near Point of Convergence:  
   ----- centimetres

Corrective lenses currently used:

Distance \_\_\_\_\_ Close \_\_\_\_\_ Work Only \_\_\_\_\_

Remarks \_\_\_\_\_

Recommendation: (Tick point 1 or point 2 or point 3):

1. Satisfies the standards without corrective lenses: \_\_\_\_\_

2. Satisfies the standards with present lenses: \_\_\_\_\_

3. Fails to satisfy the standards: \_\_\_\_\_

New corrective lenses required: \_\_\_\_\_

4.

Requires normal corrective lenses to satisfy the standards for

Distance \_\_\_\_\_ Close \_\_\_\_\_ Work Only \_\_\_\_\_

Remarks \_\_\_\_\_

Having read the guidelines approved by the Department of Finance, I certify that the applicant requires special corrective lenses specifically to operate a Visual Display Unit and for no other purpose: \_\_\_\_\_

Reason: \_\_\_\_\_

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Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Practice Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Appendix 2

GUIDELINES AGREED BETWEEN THE DEPARTMENT OF FINANCE AND THE ASSOCIATION OF OPTOMETRISTS, IRELAND, IN RELATION TO THE APPLICATION OF THE VDU DIRECTIVE TO CIVIL SERVANTS

1. E.U. Council Directive 901270/EEC, Article 9 and Statutory Instrument No. 44 of 1993, Regulation 32, provide for the protection of workers eyes and eyesight in the use of V.D.U.s.

2. These place an obligation on employers -including the State - to provide for "appropriate eye and eyesight tests" for those working with V.D.U.s.

(a) before commencing Display Screen work

(b) at regular intervals thereafter, and

(c) if they experience visual difficulties which may be due to Display Screen work.

3. Workers shall be entitled to an ophthalmological examination if the results of the above tests show that it is necessary.

4. All those classified as "V.D.U. Users" are now being provided with these assessments - screening tests in some cases and full examination in others.

5. The purpose in these notes is to emphasise the differences in benefits which may exist between employees of the State, i.e. Civil Servants, and others.

6. An employer, other than the State, has freedom to provide payments and eye examinations and prescribed spectacles on whatever basis s/he chooses, provided his decisions do not breach the Regulations.

7 The State, as the employer of Civil Servants, does not have the same degree of freedom since it is spending public money and must be publicly accountable for that spending. The State has been and will be providing for appropriate eye examinations and it should be remembered that Civil Servants are not entitled to Treatment Benefits from the Department of Social Welfare.

8 The State is therefore particularly concerned with the working of Art.9(3) of the Directive and Regulation 32 of S.1 44 of 1993.

Each of these states..... "And if normal corrective appliances cannot be used the employee concerned must be provided with special corrective appliances appropriate to his work."

9 Objective consideration of this Regulation must attempt to distinguish between "normal" and "special" in this context. It follows, therefore, that those workers who are found to have refractive errors which may cause difficulty when using V.D.U.s. but not in any other circumstances could be considered to require "special corrections". Where, perhaps because of age and of the accommodative and/or converging capabilities of the person, a correction is required for the peculiar working distances involved, then such corrections are more easily classed as "special". Thus, where a presbyope requires an intermediate correction for the working distance and would not otherwise have use of it, such could be deemed to be "special". Where such a person has need for an accompanying near correction, then Bifocals with Intermediate upper portion and reading segment might be required.

10. It is not possible, other than in those general cases stated above, to be absolutely specific about those whose corrections may be labelled "special". Professional judgement must be allowed to assist a decision and members of the Association of Optometrists of Ireland should be scrupulous in making their decisions.

IN GENERAL, IT IS TO BE EXPECTED THAT BETWEEN 3% AND 5% OF A VDU WORKFORCE WILL NEED SUCH SPECIAL CORRECTIONS, ALTHOUGH THIS CAN VARY DEPENDING ON THE PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS OF A PARTICULAR GROUP OF SUCH WORKERS.

11 Since these "special" corrections will be claimed to be solely for V.D.U. use and since, as with the other hardware associated with V.D.U.s., the State will be paying for them, then it might reasonably be required that the "special corrections" required for V.D.U. use be left with the keyboard at the end of a working day.

12 Because the spending of and accounting for public monies is involved, the Department of Finance has indicated that it must apply very rigid parameters in its approval or rejection of claims for payment for spectacles provided under these Regulations.

13 In the case of Civil Servants, therefore, it is desirable that approval be obtained for spectacles to be supplied at State expense before the patient is led to believe that s/he is so entitled.

14 The examination records supplied by the civil service department must be completed fully, accurately and legibly, and contain no internal contradictions. If the record is unsatisfactory the department will return it to you for completion, or request clarification.

15 The following guidelines should be taken into account when completing the form

- a) Only one box of the first three points in the "Recommendation" section should be ticked, i.e. point 1 or 2 or point 3. If point 1 or 2 is ticked, a special recommendation cannot be recommended.
- b) Where special corrective lenses are recommended, a reason must be given in the space provided.
- c) Original Examination forms must be returned directly to the employing department or office, which will give copies to the V.D.U. users examined.

### Appendix 3

#### Explanatory Note Refractive Errors:

The eye is a lens system and 'film' (the retina at the back of the eye), rather like a camera. The process of light passing through such a system is referred to as "refraction". Defects in this lens system are therefore known as "refractive errors" and are usually corrected with spectacle lenses.

#### The Accommodative and Converging Capabilities of the Person

The lens within the eye is supported by ligaments which allow it to change its shape to alter the focus of the eye. This is known as 'accommodation' and is at its maximum when the person is young, allowing them to focus on things which are very close to their eyes. As eyes become older, the lens also ages and becomes less able to change focus. This usually becomes critical for persons in their mid forties requiring reading glasses. The loss is gradual but continuous and so reading (or close work) glasses require changing about every two to three years. A person in that category is said to be a 'presbyope' and to suffer from 'presbyopia' (old sight). At a certain stage of this loss, the spectacles will confine clear vision to a distance of about 15 to 20 inches, and looking at a VDU screen is difficult. They then need an

'intermediate' correction for that purpose but would also need their close work correction for the keyboard and documents. They may thus need a special form of Bifocal, with an intermediate correction in the top and a reading correction in the lower part- 'normal' bifocals would have a distance correction in the top and a reading correction in the lower part.

When a person needs to look at a near object, he or she must change focus to that object. If they have two working eyes, they must also point the two eyes at the near object and this operation is called 'convergence'. The change of focus and the change of convergence are linked, so that activation of one automatically activates the other, but not always adequately. The shortfall has to be provided for, possibly by the use of lenses. Thus because of the special working distance of the VDU screen, a person may be able to focus on it but have difficulty keeping both eyes pointed at it. The problems may be exacerbated by tiredness, illness, lack of interest and aspects of the work station.