

**Ophthalmic Services
General Ophthalmic Services Memorandum**

7 May 2019

**To all Optometrists and
Ophthalmic Medical Practitioners
providing General Ophthalmic Services**

Dear Practitioner

UNIVERSAL CREDIT AND HELP WITH HEALTH COSTS

Roll out of Universal Credit (UC) in Northern Ireland completed in December 2018. UC replaces the old income-related benefits and is paid to those people aged 18 or over and under State Pension age who are looking for work or are on low incomes.

In 2017, Department of Health (DoH) consulted on proposals to introduce an additional criterion in the form of earning thresholds for UC recipients as a means of passporting to automatic help under the Department's Help with Health Costs (HwHc) Scheme. In the absence of a Health Minister and legislative assembly, the Department decided in the interim to use the Health Service Low Income Scheme (LIS) to offer the necessary protection to those eligible individuals who were in receipt of UC.

This memorandum reminds practitioners, practice staff and HSC staff of those interim arrangements, which allow for the passporting of UC recipients to exemption from dental and ophthalmic costs and the remission of costs for travelling to and from hospital on referral. Other entitlements such as age and medical conditions which currently attract exemption or remission from charges remain unchanged.



Applying for help under the HwHc Scheme – UC Claimants

Individuals who are in receipt of Universal Credit must make an application under the HwHc/LIS Scheme to receive any help with the cost of their healthcare.

In order for a UC claimant to make an application for help under the HwHc/LIS scheme, they are required to complete form HC1 'Claim for help with health and travel costs'.

The HC1 can be downloaded [here](#), and is also available from [Jobs & Benefits offices](#) and hospitals. Some local medical, dental and ophthalmic surgeries may also stock copies.

Completed HC1 forms must be returned to the individuals' local [Jobs and Benefits office](#) for processing.

What happens after submission of Form HC1?

Successful applicants will receive a certificate entitling them to;

- Full remission of health costs for a 12 month period (the HC2 certificate); or
- Partial remission of health costs for a 12 month period (the HC3 certificate).

What if a patient cannot produce evidence of their entitlement for HwHc?

The practitioner should still provide the Health Service (HS) care the patient needs and, as with other entitlements, should put a cross in the "Evidence Not Seen" option on the respective treatment form.

The responsibility will then be on the patient to declare that they are in receipt of a LIS certificate, by ticking and signing the appropriate treatment/claim forms and showing proof of eligibility – patients should be made aware of their responsibility to determine the accuracy of the declaration they make.

Note: A patient **must** hold a live LIS certificate at the time of their treatment in order to seek remission from expenses and charges.



The Business Services Organisation (BSO) has a responsibility to check for erroneous and fraudulent claims and patients found to have wrongly claimed full or partial exemption from HS charges, could face a penalty charge. Patients should be made aware that the penalty charge is a civil fine of five times the amount owed up to a maximum of £100. This is in addition to the original charge. Patients should also be made aware that payment may be pursued by civil recovery through the courts if necessary.

Other benefits

The next phase of UC rollout is called 'Managed Migration'. During this phase, the old benefit entitlements will continue to be valid for HS eligibility (if in date). Practitioners, practice staff and HSC staff may therefore see some patients with 'legacy' benefit entitlements and some with UC entitlements.

No patient should have both entitlements. In the instance that they do, an in-date UC claim takes precedence and there is therefore a requirement for the patient to have a LIS certificate to claim exemption or remission from costs.

Enquiries

Any enquiries arising from this memorandum should be directed to the Business Services Organisation in the first instance.

