

General Optical Council Witnesses Expense Claims

1. Introduction

The General Optical Council (GOC) is one of 13 organisations in the UK known as health and social care regulators. These organisations oversee the health and social care professions by regulating individual professionals. The GOC is the regulator for the optical professions in the UK. The Council currently registers around 23,500 optometrists, dispensing opticians, student opticians and optical businesses.

The GOC has four core functions:

- Setting standards for optical education and training, performance and conduct.
- Approving qualifications leading to registration.
- Maintaining a register of individuals who are qualified and fit to practise, train or carry on business as optometrists and dispensing opticians.
- Investigating and acting where registrants' fitness to practise, fitness to train or carry on business is impaired.

The GOC's Investigation Committee considers all complaints concerning the fitness to practise of a GOC registrant. The Investigation Committee decides whether a complaint ought to be referred to the independent Fitness to Practise (FTP) Committee for a public hearing. Further information about the GOC's fitness to practise process can be found at www.optical.org.

The FTP Committee usually holds its hearings in public. At hearings, the GOC acts as the 'prosecutor' and both the GOC and the registrant may call witnesses to give evidence to the independent FTP Committee.

Witnesses who give evidence at hearings of the FTP Committee play an important part in assisting the GOC in carrying out its regulatory role.

This document is the GOC's witness expenses policy. The policy aims to ensure that witnesses who are called by the GOC to give evidence are reimbursed for expenses incurred in attending an FTP Committee hearing. There are limits to the reimbursement of some items, such as loss of earnings, and the GOC recognises that this means that not all witnesses called by the GOC to give evidence may be fully compensated. The purpose of this policy is to provide reasonable compensation and relieve hardship, while recognizing that witnesses have a public duty in giving evidence at a regulatory hearing.

This policy is based on the Public Legal Services Division's "Guide to Allowances under Part V of the Costs in Criminal Cases (General) Regulations 1986", which was issued in June 2005. Where the provisions of this policy are different from that guidance, this policy shall prevail.

2. Procedure for claiming reimbursement

All claims for reimbursement must be submitted on the enclosed form, and should be accompanied by **original receipts for each item claimed** and marked for the attention of the Finance Team. Any claims that are submitted without the original receipts may not be paid (the GOC usually applies a £5 limit to payment of claims submitted without original receipts).

The form should be submitted as soon as possible, preferably within seven days of attendance at the hearing and certainly no later than three months after the conclusion of the hearing. The GOC will not reimburse claims made more than three months after the conclusion of the hearing.

3. Travel expenses

Journeys should be made by public transport wherever possible. The GOC will only reimburse standard class rail fares (subject to receipts). If there are exceptional circumstances which mean that you cannot travel by standard class rail, you must obtain advance authorisation if you want the GOC to reimburse you for your journey.

If you wish to use alternative transport, e.g. private car, air travel or taxi (or first class rail), you must first obtain **advance authorisation** from Kisha Punchihewa in the Legal and Fitness to Practise team. Such authorisation will be given only where the proposed alternative transport is more economical than standard class rail, or where public transport is unavailable or very inconvenient.

Where private car use is authorised, the GOC will reimburse reasonable car parking and congestion fees in addition to a mileage allowance fixed at **40p a mile**. The mileage claim must be accompanied by a signed statement from you confirming the start and finish points of the journey and confirming that you used the shortest or fastest route.

Reimbursement of taxi fares is subject to an overall ceiling of **£20.00 per journey**. You will need to submit a taxi receipt that confirms the journey's start and finish point.

The GOC will reimburse other costs such as meals on the train, depending on how long you are away from home and provided you supply us with the original receipts. The following maximum limits apply:

Lunch up to £20 (unless lunch is provided by the GOC)¹ Dinner up to £35 and actual parking fees.

4. Accommodation expenses

Please contact Kisha Punchihewa for **advance authorisation** if you believe that you will need overnight accommodation either before or after the day of the FTP Committee hearing. Claims for reimbursement of overnight accommodation costs which have not been authorised in advance will **not** be paid by the GOC.

Where overnight accommodation is authorised, the usual practice is for the GOC to arrange and pay for you to stay at a nearby hotel. If you are authorised by the GOC to arrange your own overnight accommodation, the GOC will reimburse you up to a maximum of **£140.00** per night (to include breakfast).

In addition, the GOC will reimburse the cost of an evening meal (including non-alcoholic drinks), subject to receipts, up to the sum of **£35.00 per night**.

5. Loss of earnings

Many employers will allow employees time off to attend hearings without loss of earnings. If your employer will not permit this, the GOC will reimburse net loss of earnings, depending on the period of absence, subject to documentary evidence (e.g. payslip or letter from your employer). The following maximum limits apply to witnesses (except for professional witnesses):

- £33.50 for a period of 4 hours or less
- £67 per day for a period exceeding 4 hours

The maximum limits¹ are higher for witnesses within certain professions whose evidence relates to matters arising out of their profession. These higher limits apply to: pharmacists, doctors, dentists, veterinary surgeons, solicitors, barristers or accountants (if a member of the ICAEW, ICAS, CIPFA, CIMA or ACCA). If you believe that you fall within one of these categories of witnesses, you must obtain **advance authorisation** from Kisha Punchihewa. Reimbursement will be subject to documentary evidence and the following upper limits:

- £83.50 for a period of 2 hours or less
- £117 for a period of 2-4 hours
- £174 for a period of 4-6 hours
- £234 per day for a period in excess of 6 hours

6. Reimbursement of locum fees

If you are a healthcare professional your employer (or yourself, if you are the proprietor of the business) can claim for the cost of employing a locum to cover the period of your absence.

You must obtain **advance authorisation** from Kisha Punchihewa if you wish to claim reimbursement of locum fees. Any claim that has not been authorised in advance will **not** be paid by the GOC. The claim must be supported by a receipted invoice for the locum fees and reimbursement will be subject to an overall ceiling of **£270.00**. If you (rather than your employer)

¹ Set out in the Public Legal Services Division's "Guide to Allowances under Part V of the Costs in Criminal Cases (General) Regulations 1986

make the claim, you must confirm whether the locum is a person connected to you, e.g. family member or colleague etc. If a locum fee is claimed, you will **not** also be allowed to claim for loss of earnings as discussed in Paragraph 5 above.

7. Claims in respect of non-witnesses

The GOC will not normally reimburse the cost of a non-witness accompanying you to the hearing. Exceptions can however be made, subject to **advance authorisation** (e.g. in respect of someone accompanying a child witness or an elderly/disabled witness, or where the witness has to bring a young child and needs someone to help care for that child).

8. Expert witnesses

An expert witness is someone who has been asked to give evidence, usually opinion evidence, because of their expertise in a particular field. The GOC will agree fees, **in advance**, for preparing a report and attending a hearing, and the GOC will reimburse travel and accommodation expenses on the basis specified in Paragraphs 3 and 4 above.

9. Advance payment of travel/accommodation costs

If there is a particular reason why it would be difficult for you to pay for your travel (and other) costs before the hearing and be reimbursed by the GOC afterwards, please contact **Kisha Punchihewa** to discuss any ways in which the GOC may be able to assist. For example, if we know about it sufficiently far in advance of the hearing we may be able to buy your train tickets for you and send them to you by post.

10. Further information

If you have any further queries, please contact Kisha Punchihewa in the Legal & Fitness to Practise team at the GOC, or the external solicitor who is instructed to represent the GOC in the case.

You can contact the Fitness to Practise team by calling the GOC on (0)20 7580 3898 (select option 5).