

Sight testing legislation: Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

In this FAQ, “contact lens optician”, “dispensing optician” and “optometrist” mean someone registered with the General Optical Council (GOC) as such. “Registered medical practitioner” means someone who is registered with the General Medical Council and holds a current licence to practise.

1. Who can perform a sight test?

Section 24 of the Opticians Act 1989 (“the Act”) provides that a sight test can be conducted only by an optometrist or a registered medical practitioner (with special provision for students under supervision).

2. What is a sight test?

Section 36(2) of the Act defines “testing sight” as *“testing sight with the object of determining whether there is any and, if so, what defect of sight and of correcting, remedying or relieving any such defect of an anatomical or physiological nature by means of an optical appliance prescribed on the basis of the determination”*.

3. What duties must be performed on sight testing?

Sections 26(1) and 26(2) of the Act set out that when a sight test is performed, it shall be the duty of the person testing sight to:

- perform examinations of the eye that are required for the purpose of detecting injury, disease or abnormality in the eye; and
- immediately following the test, issue a written statement that the above examinations have been carried out, that the patient is / is not being referred to a medical practitioner and the reason for the referral (in practice, this is usually combined with the prescription mentioned below); and
- provide a signed, written prescription for an optical appliance or a signed, written statement confirming that no optical appliance is necessary.

Further to this, section 3 of The Sight Testing (Examination and Prescription) (No. 2) Regulations 1989 provides that the person testing sight must conduct:

- an examination of the external surface of the eye and its immediate vicinity;
- an intra-ocular examination, either by means of an ophthalmoscope or by such other means considered appropriate; and
- such additional examinations as appear to be clinically necessary.

4. What should a spectacles prescription contain?

Regulation 5 of The Sight Testing (Examination and Prescription) (No. 2) Regulations 1989 sets out the particulars as follows:

- particulars of any spherical power of each lens to be included and, where appropriate, the particulars of any cylindrical power (including its axis), prismatic power (including its orientation) and near addition of each such lens, as well as any other particular that may be necessary to enable each lens to be replicated;
- the date of the sight test;
- the name and address of the patient (and date of birth if under 16 years of age);
- the name of the person carrying out the sight test and the name of the practice;
- the address of where the sight test was carried out; and
- if relevant, a statement that no change in the patient's existing optical appliance is necessary.

5. Who can issue a prescription?

Section 27(7) of the Act and article 3(2)(a) of the Sale of Optical Appliances Order 1984 provide that a spectacles prescription can be issued only by an optometrist or registered medical practitioner.

6. Can there be pre-conditions on the testing of sight?

Section 26(4) of the Act prohibits pre-conditions that require the patient to:

- purchase an optical appliance as a condition of having a sight test; or
- pay a fee before the test is carried out.

7. Can any parts of the sight test be delegated?

Our [2013 statement on the testing of sight](#) provides that no part of the sight test can be delegated to anyone, not even under supervision, including to dispensing

opticians or contact lens opticians. The only exceptions are for student optometrists and student doctors testing under supervision.

This statement is under review while we consider whether, particularly in the light of current technological and professional developments, the GOC's position should be revised to allow refraction to be delegated provided that an optometrist or registered medical practitioner is in control of the process.

8. Can the sight test be separated by time/place/person?

We consider that different elements of the sight test can be separated by time/place/person.

9. Can the sight test be conducted remotely?

We consider that some elements of the sight test can be conducted remotely, provided that an optometrist or registered medical practitioner remains in overall control of the process. The appropriateness of conducting the sight test remotely would be a matter for the professional judgement of the optometrist or registered medical practitioner.

10. Who can supply spectacles?

Section 27 of the Act and article 3 of the Sale of Optical Appliances Order 1984 contain no legal restrictions on the supply of spectacles by a dispensing optician, optometrist or registered medical practitioner.

If the user is under 16 years of age or registered sight impaired / severely sight impaired, spectacles can be supplied only by or under the supervision of a dispensing optician, optometrist or registered medical practitioner.

For other users (i.e. those 16 years of age or over and not registered sight impaired / severely sight impaired):

- anyone can supply ready-readers (where both lenses have the same power, between 0 and +4 dioptres) for alleviating age-related long-sightedness, without a prescription; and
- anyone can supply any other spectacles in accordance with a prescription issued in the previous two years, but (except for specified reading spectacles) the supplier must first verify the spectacles with a focimeter, and must first confirm/adjust the back vertex distance and optical centre alignment.