



Twenty20

BUYING PRESCRIPTION SAFETY EYEWEAR

There are a number of different companies offering prescription safety eyewear and each may be offering a very different service. The days are long gone when a prescription safety glasses wearer needed to feel at all self-conscious - so nowadays your choice is more likely to be made on the level of back-up and customer service available, rather than frame selection.

Before making any decision on price alone, it is highly recommended that you evaluate the level of customer support, optician service and delivery lead time before committing to a long term contract.

All prescription safety

eyewear issued in the UK market has to conform to the European (EN) standard EN 166: 2002. Your choice of product will be determined by the hazards faced in the work environment. The vital

first step in any prescription eyewear programme is to consider all the PPE options you may require in addition to low energy impact. These will have to be established by you together with your eyewear supplier ensuring correct product choice.

Having identified the correct products for the potential hazards in your workplace with your preferred supplier, the next step is to select the range of frames available and research the prescrip-

tion options. The price of an identical frame will vary markedly depending on the type of lens specified and any added features such as tints. Another important consideration, particularly if you have an aging workforce is the cost of different prescrip-

tions. Frames with bifocal and varifocal lenses may cost twice as much as a single prescription.

The leading safety eyewear providers can now offer a range of stylish frames that can be specified with both prescription or non-prescription lenses. Some plano frames can also take a prescription insert. The advantage of this approach is that all workers wear the same frames.

Having decided on the frames and been given a clear outline of costs the next step is to decide which payment option suits you best; voucher or 'pay as you go' (PAYG). Each has certain advantages.

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Figure 1 - Prescription eyewear service comparison

Scheme Property	Vouchers	PAYG
Simple to operate	++	++
Flexible	+	++
Costs	+	+

For example, some safety eyewear providers run a voucher system that you pay for up front. This may be attractive but may not be flexible enough for your specific needs in practice. Other services may provide vouchers that allow your employees to trade up to more expensive frames. This may be desirable for office frames but is impractical when using safety frames. The simplest and most convenient system is probably the tried and tested 'pay as you go' method, which ensures that you only pay for prescription safety eyewear as and when you need it.

Finally, having assessed the advantages offered by suppliers, it is worth asking how smoothly their system runs in practice. Where are the glasses made and how long will lead times be? Can your employees go to any optician or will you be requiring a nominated optician who may even visit your site? What fees are involved? Does the company update you on how they are performing as part of their service? Finally I would counsel you to look at the most obvious factor last: cost.

It is very easy to reduce costs and to cut corners in any service. However, it is less easy to provide a service that is well-proven and works to everybody's satisfaction. The

key driver is value for money. And some 'extras' may be worth paying for. Ask your supplier if they glaze frames themselves or sub-contract. Is anti-scratch standard or an extra? Also ask what the lead times are on both complex and simple prescriptions.

Customer service is all important and you will want your supplier to have a smooth working relationship with the optician. Every order should be able to be monitored at the touch of a button and a nominated point of contact should be able to keep you abreast of any issues or simply assure you that the service is proceeding smoothly.

Opticians' fees are well worth paying some attention to. Fees are unavoidable and may actually cost more than the actual spectacles but they are an integral part of the service. When members of the public buy glasses, they are aware that they pay for an eye test carried out by an ophthalmic optician (free in Scotland). They are less aware that they also pay a dispensing fee to have the frame fitted by a dispensing optician. Make sure all fees are covered in your analysis.

Fee management is something to consider. Your supplier can pay opticians' fees on your behalf. This may be via a voucher system or via invoicing with individual frames in 'pay as you go'. Alternatively, you may wish to stay in control of the costs of your optician and pay fees direct. Both systems have advantages but as an eye test and a dispensing fee is an integral cost of every frame, there are many benefits to including fee payment as part of the service. But as those of you who already pay opticians direct already know, fee management requires careful planning and logistics which are both time consuming and costly.

It is also worth considering various 'add-ons' such as lens tinting and difficult prescriptions. Personnel who work both inside and outside may benefit from tinted or even photochromic lenses for example, which may be available.

The role of the optician can also be crucial to the smooth management of your prescription safety eyewear programme. Firstly, if you are changing supplier or introducing a service, you may have sufficient employees to make an on-site visit viable. Obviously this service presents a considerable overhead to the optician, so it is beholden on your company to ensure that all employees attend the sessions which can be used for both eye testing and frame fitting (dispensing).

Also some suppliers work with opticians who are specialists in safety eyewear whose representatives may be qualified to fit safety spectacles or train company personnel. Finally, when your service is up and running remember that prescription glasses are precision instruments and should be looked after and cleaned appropriately. A small investment in appropriate cleaning stations can pay real dividends!

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Figure 2 - Understanding lens markings

Symbol	Lens Property
S	Increased robustness
F	Low energy impact
B	Medium energy impact
A	High energy impact
9	Non-adherence of molten metal and resistance to penetration by hot solids
K	Resistance to damage by fine particles
N	Non-fogging properties

