

Should the University of Leeds provide...

**Free eyesight examinations for
all PhD students?**

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PhD student expectations:

- University requires full time PhD students to work **for 37 hours per week + any paid work + necessary additional hours**, for the duration of 3-4 years.
- University of Leeds **provides PhD students desk space and computing equipment** (in many cases more than one display screen) at University campus.
- PhD students are **expected to be on campus** and **use the** computing eq. + desk **space provided.**
- PhD students are treated in some regards similar to employees, e.g., we **need to submit holiday requests if we want time off.**
- Many **PhD students are expected to supervise/support** summer interns, support Masters' student projects and help with grant applications / research projects.

The problem:

- **By law employers** must provide for workers who use display screen equipment **”for continuous periods of an hour or more”** a screen safety assessment and also **“provide an eye test if a worker asks for one”**. *
- As **PhD students**, we are **not classified for free eye care** as we are not employed by the University, despite expected to **work similar hours in similar conditions to staff** that are employed by the University.

Summary: In many ways we are treated as staff but do not receive the same health and safety protections.

Since we are not employed, the trades union cannot cover this problem. LUU is the workers union for PGRs

Eye safety importance

It is recommended to go to opticians every two years, that is equal to two appointments during PhD studies.

Eye tests detect [1]:

- Diabetes
- High blood pressure
- High cholesterol
- Eye cancers
- Brain Tumours
- Detached retinas

... and more

In 2020, 4.3 million missed their eye test, for which the economical cost was £2.5 billion in sight loss [2].

There are currently over 3,000 PhD researchers in this university.

These PhD students experience financial strain from

- **Limited funding**
- **Ongoing cost of living crisis**
- **Cost of eyewear and examination tests leading to many of them potentially not attending their check up and creating a safety risk.**

What should be changed?

- University of Leeds should **classify PhD students the same way as staff for display screen equipment safety purposes**
- This should **provide PhD students the right for University-funded eye tests**, including other staff perks with eye sight vouchers, as discounts for frames and lenses.

Benefit of PhD students?

- **Improve the health and wellbeing of PhD students** by helping to prevent eye damage, eye strain, visual problems or other health conditions.
- **Support students with disabilities** that do not meet the threshold for disabled student allowance.
- **Subsidised medical care for international students.**
- Clear **guidance on screen safety and eye healthcare**, preventing eye strain, neck strain etc..
- **Increased student satisfaction rate**
- **Reduce financial strain** that can prevent PhDs from attending the eye examination regularly.

Other universities:

Many universities do not publish who qualifies for their display screen equipment protection on a publicly accessible website.

- University of Manchester provides a health and safety induction and gives PhDs free eye examinations in their clinic.
- University of Reading provides a workstation checklist to PhD students for creating a safe study space, which then goes through local display screen equipment assessor – suggests they provide free eye exams?
- University of Exeter provides all PGRs with a free eye care voucher.

To summarise

- PhD students are treated as staff but do not receive the same health and safety protections.
- Hence the University should provide PhD students with free eye care examinations.
- This will reduce any health risks, allowing PhD students to come to work healthy.
- This will also reduce financial burden on students from low-income backgrounds or without external funding.

