FAQ: An optometrist's guide to accessing the NHS e-Referral Service (e-RS)

This FAQ supports optometry practices in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly (CIOS) with setting up access to the NHS e-Referral Service (e-RS). It summarises the key steps required to gain access and answers common questions about each stage. For guidance on creating and managing referrals within e-RS, please refer to the separate user guide.

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What are the key steps required to set up access?
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What is e-RS and how is it accessed?
- The NHS e-Referral Service (e-RS) is a digital platform used to refer patients to secondary care providers.
- Approved users can sign in via this link: **https://ers.nhs.uk**
- Access to e-RS is restricted to verified healthcare professionals. The process of authorising users is managed by the Registration Authority (RA).
- For Cornwall and Isles of Scilly, the RA service is provided by Cornwall IT services (CITS), hosted by Royal Cornwall NHS Hospitals Trust (RCHT), **citsservicedesk@nhs.net**

What must my practice have in place before requesting access to e-RS?

- A valid Organisation Data Service (ODS) code: Organisation Data Service (ODS) - NHS England Digital

- A Data Security and Protection Toolkit (DSPT) submission with 'Standards Met' within the last 12 months. Practices can complete the DSPT via [Quality in Optometry (QiO)](#) or directly on the [DSPT website](#)
- A nominated e-RS lead (e.g. practice manager) responsible for coordinating user access, including new users and removal of users. All requests for new users and updates on leavers should be communicated via the e-RS lead.

What are the e-RS roles?
- Registration authority codes (RA codes) are assigned to each user to allow them to create and process referrals appropriately depending on their job role.
- **Referring Clinician** – appropriate for optometrists on the Ophthalmic Performers List. These users hold clinical responsibility for the referral.
- **Referring Clinician Admin** – a delegated authority role. These users can '*refer on behalf of*' the delegating clinician.
- Every practice will need at least one user assigned to the Referring Clinician role, because Referring Clinician Admin roles must select a named clinician within e-RS in order to process referrals.

Can locum practitioners be granted access to e-RS?
- Yes. The request for access must come from the practice manager or assigned e-RS lead, who must inform the RA team when the locum no longer requires access to e-RS at their practice. The process for assigning access for a locum practitioner is exactly the same as for any other user.

Does a Referring Clinician (including locum practitioner) need to use e-RS themselves?
- Not necessarily. A locum or permanent clinician can delegate referral entry to someone with the Referring Clinician Admin role - but they must still be registered and set up with a Care ID so they can be selected as the named clinician in e-RS.

Can I access e-RS from multiple practices?
- Yes. Please provide the RA team with the ODS code for each practice you require access to (please note that if the practices are owned by different organisations, the access request must come from the e-RS lead for each individual practice).

Can we use a shared or "store" e-RS login in our practice?
- Sorry, no. Shared e-RS logins are not permitted. Access to NHS IT systems is issued only at individual user level, so every user must have their own e-RS account and Care ID.

Do e-RS accounts expire if they haven't been used for a long time?
- No. e-RS accounts do **not** automatically expire due to inactivity. A user can remain inactive for an extended period and their account will still remain valid. For this reason, it is important to inform the RA team as soon as access is no longer required.

I no longer need to use e-RS, what should I do?

- Because e-RS enables users to access sensitive patient information, it is important that the practice e-RS lead notifies the RA team as soon as your access is no longer required.
  - The RA team will remove e-RS access, but the user's Care Identity profile will remain in place and can be reactivated if required in the future.

Requesting access via Registration Authority (RA)

How do I request access to e-RS?

- The e-RS lead (e.g. practice manager) should email the RA team to request access to e-RS on behalf of users within the store: citsservicedesk@nhs.net
- Please provide the following information for each user:

Practice ODS code	User First Name*	User Last Name*	User email	User mobile	e-RS role required	Performer number (if optometrist)**

*name must match the format shown on the user's identity documents to ensure successful ID verification

**recommended to ensure correct e-RS role assignment

What email account can I use?

- Each user must have their own unique email (no shared accounts). Accepted email domains include:
  - nhs.net
  - Gmail, Yahoo, Hotmail, Outlook, iCloud
  - Others listed here: https://digital.nhs.uk/services/care-identity-service/applications-and-services/apply-for-care-id/care-identity-email-domain-allow-list

I do not have an appropriate email address, what should I do?

- You could consider applying for an nhs email account (noting this allows for up to three user accounts per site): Registering Optometrists (GOS Contractors) – NHSmail Support
- Alternatively, you could consider creating a new personal account with one of the accepted providers (Gmail, Yahoo, Hotmail, Outlook or iCloud).

Creating an NHS Care Identity (ID) profile

What is an NHS Care Identity profile?
- National IT systems for health and care need to ensure that users of these systems are identified correctly and are given appropriate access. This is achieved by identity verification and creating a national digital identity for each user – an NHS Care Identity profile.

How do I create an NHS Care Identity profile?
- Each user is responsible for creating their own NHS Care Identity profile.
- After your access request has been submitted, you will receive an email from NHS England Digital saying "you have been invited by your organisation to apply for an NHS Care ID."
- The link will take you to the Apply for Care ID service – a secure online ID verification service which enables staff to verify their own identity and create their care identity profile.
- The NHS Care ID invitation **expires after 3 days** so it is important you begin your application as soon as possible once you receive it.

What should I do if the NHS Care ID invitation link expires?
- The Apply for NHS Care ID invitation expires after 3 days so it is important you complete it promptly.
- If the link expires, the RA team will be notified and can request a new invite is issued. However, if you do not receive a new link within a few days, please contact the RA team to request a new link (using the email address included in your invitation email).

Not received an Apply for Care ID invitation?
- If you have **not** received an email inviting you to use Apply for NHS Care ID, please check your junk or spam folder.
- If it is not in there, please contact the RA team to see if they can resend the email.

What happens to my personal data when I apply for an NHS Care ID?
- Your personal data is handled with strict privacy and security protocols, in line with UK data protection laws.
- Full details can be found here: Privacy notice - NHS England Digital

Where can I find further support with my Care ID application?
- Troubleshooting guidance and support materials for applying for your Care ID can be found here: Support with applying for my Care ID - NHS England Digital

Adding an authenticator (secure log in method) to your NHS Care ID profile

What authentication methods can I use to access e-RS?
- To access e-RS via the public internet, there are a number of secure sign in methods available:
  - [Microsoft Authenticator](#) app installed on your phone (recommended)
  - Your NHS.net Connect account
  - A passkey
- We recommend using the Microsoft Authenticator app and will only cover this method in these FAQs. If you are interested in one of the other methods, please contact the RA team.

How do I add an authenticator to my Care Identity profile?
- Each user is responsible for adding an authenticator to their own NHS Care Identity profile.
- After your Care Identity profile is approved, the RA team will assign the appropriate e-RS role to your account and send you a link to a self-service application where you can add an authenticator to your profile.
- You will need:
  - a device with the [Microsoft Authenticator](#) app installed
  - your national insurance number
  - access to your Care Identity email address (the one used to apply for your NHS Care ID)

What if I experience a problem adding the authenticator?
- Please check that your email and national insurance number are correct.
- If you are using an iOS device or Mac, you may wish to try completing the process on a windows PC instead (anecdotally we have seen more technical issues on iOS/macOS devices).
- If the problem still occurs, please contact the RA team who can investigate and if necessary, will schedule a short video call to set up the authenticator.

What happens if I change my device?
- If you change the mobile device the authenticator is registered to, you will need to transfer it to the new device.
- If you still have the old device, you can perform a backup and restore on the new device between like-for like systems (Android or iOS). Further guidance here: [If you change your mobile device](#)
- Alternatively, please contact our RA team for assistance.

What if I forget my password?
- If you have forgotten your password, please contact our RA team for assistance.

Using your authenticator to access e-RS

How do I use my authenticator to access e-RS?
- After you have registered your authenticator, you will be able to log in to e-RS via this link: **https://ers.nhs.uk**
  - Select the Authenticator App as your login method
  - You will be prompted for your Care Identity email and password, and will need to enter the 6 digit code generated by your authenticator app

Who is responsible for training staff to use e-RS?
- Each practice is responsible for ensuring that all staff who use e-RS are appropriately trained. This includes existing team members, new starters, and anyone whose role requires routine or occasional use of e-RS. Please refer to the separate user guide for information on creating and managing referrals within e-RS.

Further support and information:

Useful guides for onboarding:
Support with applying for my Care ID - NHS England Digital
Add an authenticator to your Care Identity profile - NHS England Digital
e-Referral Service - NHS England Digital

NHS Kernow referral management ophthalmology pages:
Ophthalmology

Useful contacts:

For technical support and help to get set up on e-RS, please contact our Registration Authority (RA) via: citsservicedesk@nhs.net

For queries about your referrals after you have access to e-RS, please contact our Referral Management Service (RMS): ciosicb.health@nhs.net