

Bangor Benefits for Pensions

Frequently Asked Questions

Introduction

These FAQ's explain how Bangor Benefits for Pensions and Salary Exchange work, and aim to answer any questions you may have. Please note that all amounts shown in this booklet are calculated as at April 2023 and may be subject to future changes in line with legislation.

Bangor Benefits for Pensions is a Salary Exchange scheme which changes the way employee pension contributions are made. Salary Exchange schemes are a cost-effective way of making payments and similar arrangements also exist for, Tir Na Nog Nursery payments, a Cycle to Work Scheme, and the ability to buy additional Annual Leave.

The scheme will form part of your terms and conditions of employment and we have set out below answers to some questions that you may have in relation to the arrangement.

If you have any additional questions please visit the HR web pages on the Intranet, contact the HR department directly on 01248 383865, or the University's Pensions Manager on 01248 383261.

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The Bangor Benefits for Pensions Scheme

1. How does Bangor Benefits for Pensions work?

- You do not make employee pension contributions to the Universities Superannuation Scheme (“USS”). From 1 April 2020, employee contributions are 9.8% of salary.
- The University will increase its employer contributions and pay an additional amount equivalent to your current employee pension contribution. The University will pay an employer contribution of 21.6% (from 1 April 2022). In addition they will pay the equivalent of your employee pension contributions of 9.8% making a total contribution of 31.4% to the USS.
- Your Base Salary plus any other Pensionable Allowances will be reduced by the amount that you would have paid into the USS if you had not participated in Bangor Benefits for Pensions.
- In most cases, your take home pay will increase because you are paying less National Insurance Contributions (NIC). This is because employee pension contributions are subject to NIC whereas employer contributions are not. The University will also make NIC savings in the same way.
- The overall level of contributions going into the scheme remain unchanged.
- Pay rises, overtime etc. is not affected.
- We will quote your Base Salary and Adjusted Salary for all external purposes, for example when quoting your pay for mortgage applications.
- Your pension and other benefits will be based on your Base Salary.

2. Why did the University introduce Bangor Benefits for Pensions?

In most cases, Bangor Benefits for Pensions will increase your take home pay by reducing your NIC – a winwin situation.

The increase in your take home pay under Bangor Benefits for Pensions depends on your Base Salary. The table below provides an indication of the annual NIC savings available to employees currently making contributions of 9.8% to the USS.

Base Salary	Annual Employee NIC saving (£)*
£15,000	£176.40
£20,000	£235.20
£25,000	£294
£30,000	£352.80
£35,000	£411.60
£40,000	£470.40
£45,000	£529.20
£50,000	£588.00
£55,000	£173.80

£60,000	£117.60
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*These savings are based on NIC rates for 2023/24

NIC savings are smaller for higher earners because the rate at which NIC is paid reduces from 12% to 2% for earnings over the NIC Upper Earnings Limit (£50,270 per annum for 2023/24).

3. Am I eligible to participate in Bangor Benefits for Pensions?

As a Member of the USS, you are eligible to participate in Bangor Benefits for Pensions. You will not be able to participate in Bangor Benefits for Pensions if your Adjusted Salary would be brought below the National Minimum Wage, ('NMW') £10.42 per hour from April 2023. We will monitor pay levels and advise you if you are likely to be affected, however if your circumstances change and you think you might fall into this category you should contact the HR Department on 01248 383865, or the University's Pensions Manager on 01248 383261..

4. How are new employees treated?

All new employees will be auto-enrolled into USS if they satisfy the auto-enrolment criteria. They will also automatically be opted into Bangor Benefits for Pensions if they are appointed on a fixed hours contract for a duration of three months or more, unless they complete a Bangor Benefits for Pensions opt-out form or we have identified that it is detrimental for them to participate.

5. How does this affect my pay?

Under Bangor Benefits for Pensions you do not pay employee pension contributions directly from your salary. Instead, your Base Salary will be reduced by the amount of pension contributions that you would normally pay into the USS. This revised salary is known as your Adjusted Salary. In exchange for this reduction in your salary, the University makes an equivalent additional employer contribution to the USS. This is known as "Bangor Benefits for Pensions".

Example 1

The example below highlights the pre and post Bangor Benefits for Pensions position of an employee earning £30,000 per year and contributing £2,940 (being 9.8% of Base Salary) per year into the USS. Under Bangor Benefits for Pensions the employee's Base Salary remains at £30,000 although the amount they are paid via payroll to take account of the Salary Exchange adjustment becomes £27,060

Pre Bangor Benefits for Pensions		Post Bangor Benefits for Pensions	
Salary	£30,000	Salary	£30,000
Less USS	(£2,940)	Less Bangor Benefits for pension	(£2,940)
		Adjusted Salary	£27,060
Less Tax Paid	(£2,898)	Less Tax Paid	(£2,898)
Less Employee NIC	(£2,091.60)	Less Employee NIC	(£1738.80)
Net Pay	£22,070.40	Net Pay	£22,423.20

The employee's net pay has increased by £352.80 per annum from 22,070.40 to £22,423.20 . Total contributions to the USS have remained the same. Calculations are based on 2023/24 income tax and NIC rates.

Example 2

The example below highlights the pre and post Bangor Benefits for Pensions position of an employee earning £50,000 per year and contributing £4,900 (being 9.8% of Base Salary) per year into the USS. Under Bangor Benefits for Pensions the employee's Base Salary remains at £50,000 although the amount they are paid via payroll to take account of the Bangor Benefits for Pensions adjustment becomes £45,100.

Pre Bangor Benefits for Pensions		Post Bangor Benefits for Pensions	
Salary	£50,000.00	Salary	£50,000.00
Less USS	(£4,900)	Less Bangor Benefits for Pension	(£4,900)
		Adjusted Salary	£45,100
Less Tax Paid	(£6,506)	Less Tax Paid	(£6,506)
Less Employee NIC	(£4,491.60)	Less Employee NIC	(£3,903.60)
Net Pay	£34,102.40	Net Pay	£34,690.40

The employee's annual net take-home pay has increased by £588.00 from £34,102.40 to £34,690.40. Total contributions to the USS have remained the same. Calculations are based on 2023/24 income tax and NIC rates.

Contributions to the USS post April 2022

6. *How will my contributions be treated if I earn more than the annual salary threshold?*

The salary threshold is a limit that is implemented and revalued each year by the USS, above which all member contributions are paid into the USS Investment Builder. All members will have access to the USS Investment Builder should they wish to. Contributions on salary above the salary threshold will be allocated to your individual account within the Investment Builder section in line with the pension scheme rules.

7. *Can I make AVCs and will these be included under Bangor Benefits for Pensions?*

You can choose to contribute more to your USS pension fund and this will go into your Investment Builder account (see question 6). AVCs will be based on all pensionable salary i.e. above and below the salary threshold.

If you decide to make AVCs, you will have the option to include these contributions under Bangor Benefits for Pensions (subject to the thresholds outlined in question 20).

Pay and Conditions

8. *What happens if there are several Salary Exchange benefits?*

The University offers various voluntary staff benefits under the Bangor Benefits heading. This includes, Tir Na Nog Nursery payments, a Cycle to Work Scheme, and the ability to buy additional Annual Leave. You will be

able to participate in all of these voluntary benefits as long as this does not bring your Adjusted Salary to below the thresholds outlined in Question 20).

9. If I agree to participate in Bangor Benefits for Pensions, will it affect any other payments?

All future pay rises will continue to be based on your Base Salary and will therefore not be affected by the participation in Bangor Benefits for Pensions. All your pay related benefits will also be calculated on your Base Salary.

10. If my pay is being reduced how will I be able to check my overtime etc. has been worked out correctly and paid to me?

Your payslip will show your Base Salary and any other pensionable allowances together with the Bangor Benefits for Pensions reduction labelled "Bangor Benefits - Pensions" which will show as an adjustment to gross pay, rather than as a deduction affecting net pay.

11. Will Bangor Benefits for Pensions affect Parental Pay (including maternity, paternity, shared parental or adoption pay)?

During periods of Parental leave, you will continue to participate in Bangor Benefits for Pensions.

Maternity Pay

Employees commencing maternity leave are entitled to the following;

- First eight weeks' leave on full salary (this is inclusive of any entitlement to Statutory Maternity Pay payable during the eight week period) – Next eighteen weeks' leave on half salary plus Statutory Maternity Pay as entitled, paid to the extent that full normal salary is not exceeded
- Next thirteen weeks paid at flat rate Statutory Maternity Pay, as entitled
- Up to thirteen further weeks unpaid

Your Statutory Maternity Pay will be based on your Adjusted Salary, and so the University will 'top-up' your pay to the level you would have received if you had not participated in Bangor Benefits for Pensions, to ensure you are not in a worse off position.

Your Maternity Pay will be based on your Base Salary (before any reductions for Bangor Benefits for Pensions, childcare vouchers or nursery). You will continue to exchange salary based on your Base Salary providing your Adjusted Salary is not brought below the Statutory Maternity Pay level. If your pay would be brought below the required level of statutory pay your Pension Salary Exchange Adjustment will stop. However, the University will continue to make the same level of pension contributions (including those committed to under Bangor Benefits for Pensions) whilst you are on paid periods of such leave.

During periods where you are in receipt of Statutory Maternity Pay only, you will cease to exchange any salary; however the University will continue to make pension contributions based on your Base Salary prior to Maternity Leave.

During unpaid periods of such leave, all pension contributions will cease until you return to work.

Adoption Leave

The qualification rules for Adoption Leave and Adoption Pay are complex. If you are considering, or going through an adoption placement, please contact the HR department on 01248 383865 for further advice. However, it is the University's intention that you will be no worse off as a result of participating in Bangor Benefits for Pensions.

12. Will taking part affect Statutory Sick Pay (SSP)?

If you receive Occupational Sick Pay from the University the reduction under Bangor Benefits for Pensions will continue to be applied to your pay, providing you have sufficient non-statutory pay.

If your pay would be brought below the required level of Statutory Sick Pay the reduction under Bangor Benefits for Pensions will stop.

When sick leave is unpaid, all pension contributions will cease until you return to work. **My Pension**

13. Does my Pensionable Salary remain the same?

Your Pensionable Salary is made up of your Base Salary plus any other contractual amounts allowed by the University (excluding non-contractual overtime). Under Bangor Benefits for Pensions your Pensionable Salary will continue to be based on you Base Salary.

14. What happens to my pension if I cease employment with the University and leave the USS?

If you cease employment with the University and leave the USS with more than two years' service, there will be no change. You will have the choice of a deferred pension or a transfer value of your deferred benefits.

For scheme leavers with less than two years' service, if you do not participate in Bangor Benefits you can opt for a refund of your contributions, less appropriate deductions, instead of deferred benefits or a transfer. **The option of a refund is not available for USS members who participate in Bangor Benefits.**

If you leave with less than three months' service, you will be entitled to a notional refund of contributions equivalent to the level of Salary Exchange. This will extinguish any right to a deferred pension or a transfer value.

15. What about Death in Service and Spouse's Pension?

These benefits are unchanged and will continue to be based on your Base Salary.

16. Will I still get the same USS pension at retirement if I participate in Bangor Benefits for Pensions?

Yes. Your pension at retirement is based on your service in the USS and your Pensionable Salary. Your Pensionable Salary will be unchanged.

Tax and National Insurance

17. Will Bangor Benefits for Pensions affect the amount of tax relief I receive? No, the amount of tax relief received should not be affected.

18. Are there any circumstances where it may not be possible or advantageous to participate?

As detailed in Question 3 you will not be able to participate in Bangor Benefits for Pensions if your Adjusted Salary were to fall below the NMW or NLW.

In addition, if your earnings were to fall below the NIC Lower Earnings Limit (LEL) this may negatively impact your ability to claim state benefits. To ensure this does not happen a Pay Protection Limit has been set up within payroll. We will not, therefore automatically opt you into Bangor Benefits for Pensions if your earnings are close to the Pay Protection Limit. If, however, you wish to take part in Bangor Benefits for Pensions you will need to complete an opt-in form available from the HR department on 01248 38 3865 or by visiting the HR web pages.

If during the year, your monthly adjusted salary falls below the monthly Pay Protection Limit you will automatically be opted out of Bangor Benefits for Pensions for the remainder of the year. You will be able to reassess your enrolment in Bangor Benefits for Pensions at the following 1 August, or if you experience any unforeseen circumstances. (see question 21).

If you do not have fixed hours you will not be automatically enrolled into Bangor Benefits for Pensions. If you wish to take part in Bangor Benefits for Pensions then you should contact the HR department on 01248 38 3856 or the University's Pensions Manager on 01248 383261 .

Please note: If you participate in Bangor Benefits for pensions you will not be eligible for a refund of contributions if you then leave the scheme within the first two years of membership.

19. What if I change my mind or my circumstances change?

If you experience any unforeseen changes in your personal circumstances, then you may be able to opt in/opt out of Bangor Benefits for Pensions (at the discretion of the University).

20. I am over the State Pension age and therefore do not pay NIC. Can I participate in Bangor Benefits for Pensions?

If you are over the State Pension age you will not pay NIC on your pay and as a result you will not see any change in your take home pay through participating in Bangor Benefits for Pensions. However, the University is still required to pay employer's NIC on the pay you receive and will therefore make a saving, which will help to reduce its costs and the savings the University makes will be utilised by your department. Based on this, you will be automatically entered into the Bangor Benefits for Pensions arrangement.

21. I pay NIC at the reduced married women's NIC rate. Will I benefit from NIC savings?

If you pay NIC at the reduced rate for married women and widows (applicable to those employees who made this election prior to 12 May 1977), you pay NIC at a reduced rate of 5.85% (rather than 12%) on earnings between £183.01 to £962 per week (£9,516.52 to £50,024 per annum)

You will still make NIC savings from participating in Bangor Benefits for Pensions but your savings will be based on these rates rather than the amounts referred to elsewhere in this document.

22. I am under the age of 21. Can I take part?

Yes. Even though the University is not required to pay NIC on the first £50,024 per annum of earnings of employees under the age of 21 and so will not make any savings. As you are still required to pay employees NIC, you will still make a saving as a result of participating.

23. I am an apprentice under the age of 25. Can I take part?

Yes. Employers of apprentices under the age of 25 are no longer required to pay employer's NIC on the first £50,024 per annum of earnings of apprentices, This means that the University will not make any savings under Bangor Benefits for Pensions for such employees but the apprentices themselves do pay NIC and therefore you will make a saving.

Other Matters

24. Will Bangor Benefits for Pensions impact on my Tax Credits?

No, participation in Bangor Benefits for Pensions alone will not impact on any HM Revenue & Customs Tax Credits as they are based on your Adjusted salary

25. Will Bangor Benefits for Pensions have any impact on my payments in relation to Child Maintenance/ to the Child Support Agency (CSA)?

You may make payments either to the Child Support Agency ("CSA") or in relation to Child Maintenance. Which payments you make will depend on when the arrangement started.

Child Support Agency - Payments to the CSA are calculated on your take home pay after tax and NIC. Due to the savings you make under Pension Salary Sacrifice your net income will increase and therefore your CSA payments may increase slightly as a result. You should notify the CSA of the changes in your net income immediately. Contact details for the CSA and further details can be obtained from the CSA's website at www.csa.gov.uk.

Child Maintenance - Payments in relation to Child Maintenance are calculated on taxable income before tax and NIC but after the gross level of personal pension contributions (including any tax relief). Therefore, as your salary is reduced by the gross level of personal pension contributions, this will have no impact on the calculation of payments calculated by the Child Maintenance Service.

26. Will my student loan repayments be affected?

If you are repaying a student loan taken out with the Student Loans Company, your student loan repayments may be reduced slightly as a result of participating in Bangor Benefits for Pensions. This is because your repayments are calculated based on your gross earnings which will be reduced under Bangor Benefits for Pensions by the Salary Exchange arrangement.

27. What about if I am asking for a reference for a mortgage or a loan?

We will advise lenders of the amount of your Base Salary, which is your pay before any reduction under Bangor Benefits for Pensions or any other Salary Exchange schemes and your Adjusted Salary, after any reductions for Bangor Benefits for Pensions or other Salary Exchange arrangements. This means that Bangor Benefits for Pensions should not adversely impact on your ability to qualify for a mortgage or other loan.

What to do now

28. What if I do not want to participate in Bangor Benefits for Pensions?

You can request a Bangor Benefits for Pensions Opt-out form from the HR department on 01248 383865. by visiting the HR web pages.

Opting out of Bangor Benefits for Pensions means that you will continue to participate in USS but will not be able to take advantage of the NIC savings resulting in an increase in take home pay which is achievable through participating in Bangor Benefits for Pensions.

29. Do I have to do anything to participate, e.g. sign any forms?

No. You do not need to take any further action as you will be included automatically in Bangor Benefits for Pensions.

30. How long will Bangor Benefits for Pensions last for?

Bangor Benefits for Pensions will continue to run indefinitely, unless it becomes no longer beneficial for employees or the University, in which case the University reserves the right to take contributions as a deduction from pay. In the meantime, you will have benefited from an increase in your take home pay (in comparison to making contributions as a deduction from pay).

31. Who can I ask if I have any additional questions?

If you have any additional questions please visit the HR web pages on the Intranet, contact the HR department directly on 01248 383865, or the University's Pensions Manager on 01248 383261.