

Pensions+:
a smarter way to pay for
your pension

USS

January 2020

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The University of Leeds is always looking for ways to improve your benefits package. In particular, we want to make sure it offers you good value and makes the most of your money. At the same time, it's important that the University makes the most of its money by providing your benefits efficiently.

That's why we introduced Pensions+ in June 2008. It means that almost all employees in the Universities Superannuation Scheme (USS) will make National Insurance (NI) savings.

Pensions+ is not another pension scheme – it's simply a more effective way of paying into your existing pension scheme.

As we expect almost all employees to benefit, when you join the pension scheme you'll usually be automatically included in relation to the standard USS member contribution– so you don't need to do anything else.

If you wish to pay additional contributions into the Investment Builder section of USS, you will need to opt into Pensions+ for these additional contributions when you register via My USS to pay these.

But if you decide you don't want to take part you can opt out – you'll need to complete an opt out form to do this.

If you are likely to be at the University for less than 24 months, and wish to retain the right to a refund of contributions on leaving, you will need to opt out of Pensions+.

You can still be a member of the pension scheme even if you do not wish to contribute via the Pensions+ route.

This booklet explains how Pensions+ works in more detail, including how to opt out. Further information can be found on the HR website www.leeds.ac.uk/hr/pensions

By taking part in Pensions+ you are agreeing to a change in your terms and conditions of employment from the beginning of the month in which you first start to participate in Pensions+.

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How does it work?

Although the same amount of money will go into the USS on your behalf, it will be paid by the University of Leeds. As a result, both you and the University pay less NI.

This is how it works:

1. You don't make pension contributions from your pensionable salary.
2. The University of Leeds will make an enhanced employer pension contribution representing its normal contribution and an amount equivalent to your contribution had you not participated in Pensions+
3. Under the salary sacrifice arrangement the University of Leeds will then reduce your contractual gross salary by an amount equal to your contributions that would have been deducted had you not participated in Pensions+.
4. This means you pay less NI, so your take-home pay will increase.

We will still keep a record of your original gross salary before Pensions+. This will be used for any salary related calculations, such as pay reviews, enhancements, overtime and paid leave (e.g. study leave, sick leave), so they will not be affected by Pensions+.

5 reasons why Pensions+ is good for you

1. You pay less NI so your take-home pay goes up, without affecting your income tax	✓
2. Your pay reviews and any enhancements and overtime are not affected	✓
3. Your pension still builds up based on your salary before any adjustment for Pensions+	✓
4. Life assurance and death benefits are based on your salary before any adjustment for Pensions+	✓
5. Your Basic State Pension is not affected	✓

Your original gross salary before any adjustment for Pensions+ will also be the amount used in any personal official letters e.g. mortgage letters, loan applications or job references etc

How much will I save by participating in Pensions+?

The following table shows approximately how much NI you can expect to save by participating in Pensions+ based on the NI rates for 2019/20.

This table shows the estimated savings for a USS member currently paying the standard employee contribution of 9.6% of pensionable salary, also the savings that can be made if 1% or 5% in additional contributions are paid to the Investment Builder section of USS.

Annual pensionable salary	Estimated annual saving		
	USS Member contribution 9.6% Per year	USS additional contributions 3% Per year	USS additional contributions 5% Per year
£10,000	£115.20	£36	£60
£15,000	£172.8	£54	£90
£20,000	£230.40	£72	£120
£25,000	£288.00	£90	£150
£30,000	£345.60	£108	£180
£35,000	£403.20	£126	£210
£40,000	£460.80	£144	£240
£45,000	£518.40	£162	£270
£50,000*	£576.00	£180	£300

* The rate of NI reduces from 12% to 2% on income above £50,004 meaning the NI saving is also restricted to 2%.

Here's an example to show what happens:

USS member, currently paying 9.6% contributions and earning £35,000 per year **before** Pensions+, paying a 5% additional contribution

Date	Payroll Ref.	Name	Month No.
30/06/19	12345678	Mrs Ann N Other	03
Pay Group		Location	
Monthly Salaries		Payroll Contact XXXXXXXX	
Pay Method	Tax Code	NI Number	NI Code
BACS	1250L	ZZ123456Z	A
PAYMENTS		VALUE	DEDUCTIONS
Salary		2,916.67	Tax Paid
			289.83
			National Insurance
			263.68
			USS
			280.00
			USS 5% additional contribution
			145.83
TOTAL PAYMENTS		2,916.67	TOTAL DEDUCTIONS
			979.34
		NET PAYMENTS	
		1,937.33	

USS member earning £35,000 per year **after** Pensions+

Date	Payroll Ref.	Name	Month No.
30/06/19	12345678	Mrs Ann N Other	03
Pay Group		Location	
Monthly Salaries		Payroll Contact XXXXXXXX	
Pay Method	Tax Code	NI Number	NI Code
BACS	1250L	ZZ123456Z	A
PAYMENTS		VALUE	DEDUCTIONS
Salary		2,916.67	Tax Paid
			289.83
Pensions+		-280.00	National Insurance
			212.58
USS 5% additional contribution		-145.83	
TOTAL PAYMENTS		2,490.84	TOTAL DEDUCTIONS
			502.41
		NET PAYMENTS	
		1,988.43	

As a result of Pensions+ take home pay is increased by £51 per month (£613 per year)

Your pensionable salary will be based on your salary before Pensions+, including any other earnings as may be recognised by the University as pensionable. Your state pension will not be affected.

Note: members over State Pension Age do not pay any NI and as a result will not make an NI saving. However, you will still be included in Pensions+ as the University will continue to make savings on the NI it pays.

What do I need to consider?

Although most employees will benefit from Pensions+, there are some who may not for various reasons. These include:

- Members who earn less than the Earnings Threshold for NI contributions, currently £8,632 (2019/20). This is because you would not make any savings as you start making NI contributions from this level. Also, anyone earning less than the Lower Earnings Limit (LEL) (£6,136 for the 2019/20 tax year) might see their State benefits affected.

We have therefore set a lower pay limit, which is currently £10,000 a year (£833 a month) to ensure that no employees are worse off under Pensions+. If your earnings fall below this limit, you will not be able to participate and will be taken out of Pensions+ automatically. You will continue to pay your monthly pension contributions in the usual way.

- Although the University does not pay below the National Minimum Wage (NMW) or National Living Wage (NLW), there may be staff whose pay could fall below the NMW or NLW by participating in Pensions+. These staff will not be able to reduce their actual earnings below the NMW or NLW as it is illegal to do so. Therefore if your earnings fall below the NMW or NLW, you would not be able to participate and will be taken out of Pensions+ automatically. You will continue to pay your monthly pension contributions in the usual way.
- In addition, members who work less than 16 hours a week may find some of their state benefits affected. This is covered in more detail in the FAQ's on page 8. You will need to decide whether this is an issue for you and whether you wish to participate in Pensions+ or not.

What do I do next?

If you want to take part in Pensions+ you don't need to do anything unless you wish to pay additional contributions. When you register via My USS to pay these you will need to opt into Pensions+ for this to also apply to your additional contributions.

If you want to opt out of Pensions+ you may do so, please contact the Pensions Department, ext 38823 for an opt-out form. You must complete and sign the form and return it to the Pensions Department, EC Stoner Building.

If you opt out you will still be a member of the pension scheme and will pay employee contributions however you will not benefit from any reductions to the NI you pay.

Where can I get more information?

If you have any questions, you may find the answers in the following section, if not, please visit www.leeds.ac.uk/hr/pensions or contact the Pensions+ Helpline on ext 38823.

If you are unsure about whether or not you should participate in Pensions+, you should seek your own financial advice and you may be charged for this service. Details of an independent financial adviser (IFA) near you can be found by at: www.unbiased.co.uk. Remember, however, that Pensions+ is designed so that most members will benefit from taking part.

Here are some FAQs we think might help

Does this affect the pension I will get from the scheme?

No. Your pension will not be affected and continues to be a valuable benefit to you.

How much will I save?

It varies depending on your salary and your level of Scheme contributions. Please see the section in the booklet 'How much will I save by participating in Pensions+' on page 4 for more information.

Why are savings different for different rates of pay?

The savings you make will depend on your actual contributions and the NI contribution rate applicable to you. For earnings up to £50,004 (2019/2020 tax year) you will pay 12%, above this you pay 2%.

Do I need to sign a new contract?

No. You will be deemed to have accepted the new terms unless you opt out and your existing contract will be varied to this effect.

Why are my terms and conditions of employment changed?

To benefit from the reduction in NI, it is necessary to reduce your contractual gross pay and increase employer pension contribution, which is a change to your terms and conditions of employment from the beginning of the month in which you first start to participate in Pensions+. This is the only change and there is no effect on any other element of your pay or benefits. In fact, you may be better off by participating in Pensions+.

I've only just started working at the University, am I eligible?

Yes. Every staff member is eligible, provided you are a member of the USS.

How long will Pensions+ last?

The University plans to operate Pensions+ indefinitely. However, if Tax, NI or pension law is changed or if it is no longer viable for the University, we reserve the right to withdraw any part of Pensions+ and you would begin making pension contributions again. However, you wouldn't have to pay back any of the additional take-home pay you had received from the reduction to your NI contributions.

Were the Trustee and Union consulted when Pensions+ was introduced?

Yes, the USS Trustees and the Unions were consulted when the scheme was introduced and they agreed to its implementation.

What happens if my personal circumstances change and I become worse/better off as a result of Pensions+?

There are a number of 'Lifestyle Events' that allow you to opt out or join Pensions+ at the discretion of the University. For example, if you change working hours, or go on maternity, adoption or paternity leave. If you experience a change in lifestyle, please contact the Pensions+ Helpline on ext 38823.

You'll need to make sure the Pensions+ Helpline receives your instructions to either join or opt out of Pensions+ by the penultimate working day in the month to be effective from the following month. For example, if your Lifestyle Event occurs on 23 September and you let the Helpline know you want to opt out of Pensions+ on 30 October, the change will be reflected in your November pay. However, if you let the Helpline know on 31 October, this change will not be reflected until your December pay.

Can I opt out of Pensions+?

Yes. You will need to complete and return an opt-out form as soon as possible once you join the pension scheme. If you wish to opt out after this date, you can do so by informing us before the next opportunity to change, which will be 1 April each year.

If I decide to opt out, can I opt back in?

You will be able to opt back in, please contact the pensions department to obtain a form.

If I have been opted out, can I choose to opt back in?

If you have been opted out of Pensions+ due to the level of your salary it is unlikely that you would benefit from opting back in. If your salary increases over the lower pay limit or your salary has increased and participating in Pensions+ would not adversely affect you, you may opt back into Pensions+ the following April. But, if any other personal circumstances change and you feel you may benefit from participating, please contact the pensions department on ext 38823.

What happens if I have more than one post at the University?

If you have more than one position with the University, we will use your **total** pay to see if Pensions+ will benefit you.

Will Pensions+ affect any benefits I get from the State?

Entitlement to some State benefits, such as Statutory Sick Pay, Incapacity Benefit, Employment & Support Allowance (ESA) and Job Seekers Allowance are based on the amount of NI you pay.

Provided you continue to earn more than the LEL (currently £6,136 a year) on a regular basis after the introduction of Pensions+, your entitlement to these benefits will not change. The University of Leeds has introduced a lower pay limit to ensure no-one is worse off; therefore anyone with annual earnings below £10,000 will automatically be opted out of Pensions+.

Will Pensions+ affect any statutory benefits I'm entitled to?

As Pensions+ reduces your gross basic salary this can affect the amount of certain statutory benefits to which you are entitled, such as Statutory Maternity, Paternity and Adoption Pay. These statutory benefits are calculated using your salary after the Pensions+ adjustment has been made and this could mean you get paid less Statutory Maternity, Paternity or Adoption Pay. The University of Leeds will top-up your payments so you get the same as if you had not participated in Pensions+. This does mean that the University will incur a small additional cost to provide you with this level of pay in these circumstances.

Please call the Pensions+ Helpline on ext 38823 to receive general guidance on the impact of Pensions+ and to help you decide whether or not to opt out. If whilst on maternity leave your salary drops below the lower pay limit (£10,000) then you will automatically be opted out. On your return to work, as long as your salary is above the lower pay limit, you will automatically be put back into Pensions+.

What happens if I am entitled or may be entitled to Working Tax credit or Child Tax credit?

The reduced cash salary paid to you (after the Pensions+ payment is deducted from your salary) is the figure used when calculating your entitlement to these credits. You should think about any impact on these credits before you participate in Pensions+.

I have other salary sacrifice arrangements such as childcare vouchers and Cycle to Work. Will these be affected?

This will depend on your personal circumstances, but for most people the answer will be no. Both these schemes work in the same way as Pensions+ and are known as 'salary sacrifice' by HMRC. Please note that the check for National Minimum Wage (NMW) or National Living Wage (NLW) and the lower pay limit will be on your combined sacrifices ie childcare vouchers and cycle to work and Pensions+. Any future similar arrangements will also need to be included as well.

In the event that you do not have sufficient salary to cover all sacrifice arrangements the priority order for deductions will be as follows; ordinary pension contributions, additional pension contributions, childcare vouchers.

I am on a secondment/have been posted abroad/on sick leave/on a sabbatical or on unpaid leave – am I eligible for Pensions+?

As long as you receive a salary of over £10,000 pa from the University, would not otherwise fall below the NMW or NLW, pay NI contributions and are a member of the USS, you will automatically be opted into Pensions+. If you do not meet one or more of these criteria you will automatically be opted out.

Will Pensions+ affect the pay I receive while on maternity/adoption leave?

You will NOT be automatically opted out and your pay may be affected. As this is a Lifestyle Event, you can decide to opt out of Pensions+ if you think it will adversely affect your pay.

Please call the Pensions+ Helpline on ext 38823 to receive general guidance on the impact of Pensions+ and to help you decide whether or not to opt out.

If you opt out of Pensions+ when on maternity/adoption leave and want to join when you return to work, you can do so as long it does not take your earnings below the £10,000 limit.

I have been on maternity leave – am I eligible for Pensions+ on my return?

Yes. If your earnings are above £10,000 pa when you return to work, you will be included in Pensions+ (unless you decide to opt out). If you are below this limit, you will be automatically opted out of Pensions+.

Will Pensions+ affect any pension I am entitled to from the State?

Pensions+ will not affect your State Pension.

What if I am over State Pension Age?

If you have reached the State Pension Age this means that you don't pay any NI so you will not make any savings, although the University still makes savings.

Will additional contributions be included in Pensions+?

Yes, with effect from 1 October 2016 it will be possible to include any monthly additional contributions in Pensions+. This will not happen automatically, when you register on My USS to pay the additional contributions you will need to opt in to pay via pensions+ (salary sacrifice).

It will be possible to vary the additional contribution amount if you experience a Lifestyle Event.

It is not possible to pay via pensions+ if you continue to pay AVCs via an added years/added benefit AVC contract.

What is the impact if I am subject to the Tapered Annual Allowance?

Any Pensions+ contributions will need to be added to your taxable income as part of the assessment against the Tapered Annual Allowance. For more details please see the USS website; <https://www.uss.co.uk/members/members-home/tax-considerations>

What happens if I leave the University of Leeds or the pension scheme?

If you leave the University or decide to leave the pension scheme, and have been a member of the USS for two years or more, Pensions+ will not change anything.

If you leave before completing two years' membership the following will apply:

- 0 - 3 months membership: you will receive a payment of an amount equivalent to your pension contributions, less a deduction for tax.
- 3 - 24 months: your benefits will be deferred in the USS, you will also have the option to transfer this to an alternative pension arrangement.

If you are likely to be at the University for less than 24 months and wish to retain the right to a refund of contributions on leaving, you will need to opt out of Pensions+.

What happens if I retire?

Participating in Pensions+ will have no impact on your retirement benefits.

Will my Student Loan be affected by Pensions+?

Student loans are based on pay that is subject to National Insurance (NI'able pay). The pay threshold for repayment of student loans will vary, depending on when you left higher education. As Pensions+ reduces pay (and hence the NI that is payable), the amount of student loan repayments you make may therefore reduce.

Pensions+ may result in earnings falling below the monthly threshold in which case no repayments would be made.

How will life assurance and death benefits be affected?

Your death in service benefits will not be affected by Pensions+. These will continue to be calculated before any adjustment for Pensions+.

Other useful resources

Tax Credit Helpline

For more information about whether this would affect your tax credits please call **0345 300 3900** between 8am and 8pm.

State Pension Advice Helpline

Visit www.thepensionerservice.gov.uk for more information, or you can call The Pension Service Monday to Friday from 8.00am to 8.00pm on **0800 731 0469**

Independent financial advice

Visit IFA Promotion Ltd at www.unbiased.co.uk.

General Financial guidance

The website www.moneyadviceservice.org.uk has an excellent section on pensions, together with many useful calculators