



Schools' HR Bulletin

Spring Term 2024

For all staff

Welcome to the Schools' HR Bulletin for spring 2024 (post-Christmas edition) for all staff. This is the third HR Bulletin of the 2023/24 Academic Year. The HR Bulletin is aimed at providing relevant information to all staff on a half-termly basis.

Note - any supporting documents referenced in this edition of the HR Bulletin can be accessed in the Schools' HR Bulletin area of West Sussex Services for Schools (WSSfS) by your school's Headteacher, Bursar or School Business Manager.

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For All Staff



Latest On Local Government Pay – 2023/24 NJC Pay Award Agreed

Following negotiations at a national level an agreement was reached for the 2023/24 annual pay award for NJC employees.

This means that all staff on [National Joint Council \(NJC\) pay grades](#) received a pay increase of £1,925 (pro rata for part-time employees), backdated to April 1st 2023. This increase, and any associated arrears, was reflected in December 2023's pay. December's pay date was December 19th, 2023.

Important Information Regarding The 2023/24 NJC Pay Award

Introduction

The NJC pay award was paid on December 19th, 2023, and included backdated pay to April 1st, 2023. If you either have a **student loan** or are in receipt of **Universal Credit**, and your pay was higher in December, you may experience some changes to your payments or deductions. Regrettably there was no alternative way of paying the backdated pay and no option of phasing the payment. The following information may therefore be helpful to you.

Universal Credit

If you are in receipt of Universal Credit (UC) payments, the amount you receive is likely to change if your take home pay changes, including any amount of backdated pay following a pay award agreement. UC is calculated on your personal circumstances, so we, as your employer, do not know if, or how, you may be affected.

If you get any additional pay within a UC assessment period (month), e.g., when the pay award is implemented and backdated to April, your UC payment for the following month will be less than you normally receive, or your income may be too high to qualify for a payment. If your income is too high for you to qualify for a payment your UC claim will close, and you will see a message on your online UC account.

All employees in receipt of Universal Credit will see a reduction in their payments the month following the one-off backdated payment, because earnings in the assessment month have increased. You only need to take action if your UC payment has stopped.

Will Universal Credit payments start again automatically?

No. If your payments are stopped, due to receiving additional pay, you must start up your claim again. You should do this as soon as you can.

How to reclaim Universal Credit

You will need to log into your UC account and follow the advice about how to 'reclaim'. You will be asked to answer a few questions. You can access your UC Account at www.gov.uk/sign-in-universal-credit

If you have any problems, contact your Work Coach, or visit your local Jobcentre Plus. There is also a Universal Credit helpline – 0800 328 5644.

Student loans

If you have a student loan, please be aware of the following:

- If the backdated pay award puts you above the monthly repayment threshold, then a student loan repayment will be deducted from wages. However, if in the following months, wages return to below the relevant monthly repayment threshold then further student loan repayments should not be taken.
- If you are repaying a student loan you are likely to see an increase in your student loan deduction in December 2023 as the backdated pay award increases your overall income for the month.
- In some instances, the pay award may increase normal monthly pay above the monthly repayment threshold, in which case student loan repayments will be deducted for as long as wages remain above the threshold.

At the end of the tax year if total wages for the year are below the annual repayment threshold, you can request a refund of the student loan repayment/s that you have made. Details on how to get a refund can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/repaying-your-student-loan/getting-a-refund>

Latest Editions Of Your Health Newsletter From Health Partners

The December 2023 and January 2024 newsletters can be viewed online by clicking on the images shown below (use Google Chrome or Microsoft Edge for best results).



Links to back copies of the *Your Health* newsletter published during 2023 can be found in previous editions of the Schools' HR Bulletin. In addition, links to all 12 editions of the *Your Health* newsletter published in 2022 and 2023 are available

in compilation documents. All can be found on West Sussex Services for Schools alongside the Schools' HR Bulletins.

New Employee Benefits Portal – Available Now!

Introduction

We have made some exciting changes to our employee benefits portal, West Sussex Choices, which became available on November 1st, 2023.

West Sussex Choices is now provided by our new partner Vivup, who were awarded the contract following a successful tendering process. Vivup is one of the UK's leading employee benefits companies.

Access To The New Employee Benefits Portal Is Available Now!

This new portal brings together all of our employee benefits into one easy to access website and a supported mobile app.



Employees will still be able to find all the current benefits on the new portal, including retail discounts (Lifestyle Savings), the Cycle To Work Scheme, and financial wellbeing support through Salary Finance.

The new portal is still called West Sussex Choices but will have a fresh new look and be easier to navigate.

To discover more, simply register via [West Sussex Choices](https://westsussexchoices.vivup.co.uk/):

- Go to <https://westsussexchoices.vivup.co.uk/>
- Click on Register
- Select "West Sussex County Council – Schools"
- Complete your registration details
- Accept the terms and conditions
- And click Next

If you experience any registration issues, you can contact the Vivup Customer Services team for support:

- **Phone:** 01252 784540

- **Email:** customersupport@vivup.co.uk

The Customer Services opening times are as follows:

- Mon-Fri, 8am-7pm for phone and email
- Sat-Sun, 10am-2pm for email only

Additional Information

What does the move to the new employee benefits portal mean for those schemes that you participate in currently?

For more information on **Childcare Vouchers**, the **Cycle To Work Scheme** and **Retail Discounts / E-Vouchers** see the FAQs listed in the articles below.

For **Salary Finance**, **AVC Wise** and the **Health Cash Plan** with BHSF, there are no changes to the scheme or provider, all of the existing arrangements continue to apply.

New Employee Benefits Portal - Childcare Vouchers FAQs

The Childcare Vouchers scheme has been closed to new members since 2018, following the introduction of the Government's Tax-free Childcare scheme.

However, the following FAQs (Q1-Q9) and the additional information provided will be of assistance to existing members of the **Childcare Vouchers** scheme:

Q1: Is the Childcare Vouchers scheme changing?

A1: Yes, we will be transferring the Childcare Vouchers scheme from our current provider, Sodexo, to a new provider, Bravo Benefits.

Q2: Do I need to register with the new provider?

A2: If you currently participate in the Childcare Vouchers scheme with Sodexo, then you will have received further information advising you how to register with the new scheme provider, Bravo Benefits.

You needed to ensure that you registered with Bravo before **November 10th, 2023**, in order to continue to receive vouchers in November. Further details about the registration process were communicated separately.

Q3: What do I do if I want to leave the scheme / no longer require deductions to be taken for childcare vouchers?

A3: You can cease deductions through your online account at any time. Your account will continue to remain active until you have used up the value in your account. You can continue to use the vouchers remaining in your account until they are spent or until they expire, whichever is the sooner.

Q4: Can I still access my Sodexo childcare voucher account after 31st October?

A4: Yes, you will still be able to access your Sodexo childcare voucher account. Simply log in as normal via <https://childcare.mysodexo.co.uk/login/parent>

Q5: What do I do if I've forgotten my account login details?

A5: If you've forgotten your password, just click on the 'forgot your password' link. You will then be prompted for your email address so that you can be sent a password reset link.

Q6: Do my Sodexo childcare vouchers have an expiry date?

A6: All Sodexo childcare vouchers have an expiry date. They will expire 30 months after being added to your account. Expiry details will be listed in your online account – see the details below:

1. Log in using your details as usual.
2. Scroll halfway down the home page to "Statement".
3. Any unused vouchers will have the expiry date quoted. For example, the expiry date may look something like this: "(£124.00 will expire on 05/01/2025)".
4. If you've part-used a voucher (the oldest voucher is always used first) then it will have the amount that will expire in the future. For example, it might look like this: "(£39.40 will expire on 05/01/2025)".
5. If you need to look further back at your transaction history click on the "Transactional History" button. The list will be displayed with the oldest data first in ascending order. Use the date picker or page selector to see more data.

Q7: I temporarily opted out of the scheme due to being on maternity leave / career break etc – can I re-join?

A7: You can re-join the CCV scheme if you are within 12 months of stopping your deductions.

If your last deduction was over 12 months ago or you left the business for a period of time, then unfortunately you cannot re-join our scheme. You would then need to join the government's tax-free childcare scheme for childcare support.

Q8: Can I get a refund on my existing Sodexo childcare vouchers?

A8: Refunds are generally not permitted under the salary sacrifice arrangements. In very exceptional circumstances, refunds may be considered but will be made via payroll and be subject to normal tax and NI deductions.

Q9: Who do I contact if I have queries about the childcare vouchers in my Sodexo account?

A9: You can call the customer care helpline on 0800 328 7411 or send an email to customercare.engage.uk@sodexo.com

Other Useful Information About Childcare Vouchers

Remember! Childcare vouchers can be used to pay for more than just nursery fees. You can use them for registered childcare for older children, such as:

- Out of hours school clubs.
- Sport, music, and drama lessons.
- Holiday clubs or schemes.
- Activity holidays.

- Certain elements of independent school fees.

Childcare vouchers can be used for children under the age of 16 (vouchers can be used until September 1st following their 15th birthday, or September 1st following their 16th birthday if they are registered disabled). Childcare vouchers are valid for 30 months so you don't have to spend them immediately. You can save them for when you need them most, such as school holidays.

New Employee Benefits Portal - Cycle To Work FAQs

The following FAQs (Q10-Q15) will be of assistance to existing and new members of the **Cycle To Work** scheme:

Q10: Can I still apply for the Cycle To Work scheme?

A10: Applications for the Cycle To Work scheme closed on October 23rd, 2023. The application window re-opened with Vivup on November 1st.

Q11: I received a letter of collection via Sodexo / Halfords on October 20th – what do I do now?

A11: The previous scheme with Cycle2Work (Halfords) operated until October 23rd. Once your application was approved, an email will have been sent to you with your letter of collection (LOC) attached. You take this to the shop and collect your cycle. The payments will be spread over 18 months and the first payment will be taken from the next available pay subject to when your application is approved.

Q12: I have an existing salary sacrifice arrangement in place with Halfords – is this impacted by the change?

A12: Your scheme agreement and your payroll deductions will continue as normal with Cycle2Work (Halfords) for the duration of your agreement.

Q13: I am nearing the end of my salary sacrifice arrangement with Halfords – what happens next?

A13: Once your hire period has ended, Cycle2Work (Halfords) will get in touch with you directly to discuss your options.

Q14: Who do I contact if I have any queries or problems with the bike I have hired via Halfords?

A14: Please contact the Customer Care Team who will be able to advise and support you. Call 01908 303498 or send an email to employeebenefits@sodexoengage.com

Q15: What do I do at the end of my bike hire period with Halfords?

A15: Once your hire period has come to an end, Cycle2Work (Halfords) will get in touch with you directly to discuss your options. This will include the opportunity to extend the hire of the cycle at no additional cost until HMRC deem the value to be negligible. This is typically 4 or 5 years, and once this agreement has finished you will become the rightful owner.

New Employee Benefits Portal - Retail Discounts / E-Vouchers FAQs

The following FAQs (Q16-Q23) will be of assistance to existing users of Sodexo retail discounts and e-vouchers:

Q16: I have un-used vouchers in my Discounts by Sodexo e-wallet – what will happen to these?

A16: Your e-vouchers are still eligible as per the retailer's terms. If you don't have a record of the e-voucher number and you require one, you should contact Sodexo (see Q23 for contact information).

Q17: Can I still purchase or top up vouchers in my Sodexo account after 31st October?

A17: No, you will need to do this through the new provider.

Q18: I am waiting for a cashback claim to be confirmed on my account – what will happen to this?

A18: If this is in relation to your Spreecard, this benefit is still available to you until the card expires. You can view your Spree account at www.spree-card.com/LFESPR and should direct any card queries to the customer care team on 01908 303488.

Q19: How can I check if I have any unspent vouchers in my account?

A19: If you don't have a record of your unspent vouchers and you require one, you should contact Sodexo (see Q23 for contact information).

Q20: I have a reloadable card – what will happen to the balance on this? Can I continue to use this card? Can I continue to top-up this card?

A20: From July 31st, 2023, Sodexo stopped offering reloadable cards as part of their portfolio. This included top ups of existing reloadable cards. If you have an existing reloadable card, you can continue to use the card after this date until the balance is £0 or it expires.

Q21: What happened to the Sodexo Discounts app after October 31st?

A21: The Sodexo Discounts App became unavailable to view from November 1st, 2023.

Q22: What happened to the Sodexo Discounts website after October 31st?

A22: The Sodexo Discounts portal closed and became unavailable to view from November 1st, 2023. All discounts can be obtained through our new provider Vivup.

Q23: What if I still need assistance with my account after October 31st?

A23: Sodexo can be contacted as follows:

Tel: 01908 303 531

Mon to Fri | 9.00am* to 5.30pm

Weekends and Public/Bank Holidays | CLOSED

*The Travel phone lines open at 10:30am on Thursdays

Relay UK welcomed : Text Phone: 18001 01908 303531

West Sussex Choices – Health Cash Plan From BHSF



Health cash plans mean employees can manage the cost of everyday healthcare. This insurance provides cover that meets the demands and needs of someone who wishes to have help towards covering everyday healthcare costs such as dental check-ups and treatment, eye tests and glasses or therapy fees.

All you need to do is pay a monthly premium and then you can claim cash back on the above healthcare services (plus much more!).

The great news is there is no need for a medical and we typically authorise over 90% of eligible claims within 2 working days of receipt.

The full list of the benefits of this plan can be found in the policy details.

Things you need to know:

- You need to be aged 16 or over and be a resident in the United Kingdom to apply*.
- Your policy may have qualifying periods, exclusions and / or limitation. Please check the policy terms and conditions to ensure you understand what these are prior to applying and when you can start to claim.
- Premiums for this policy are paid by convenient monthly instalments.
- Insurance Premium Tax is included at the applicable rate.
- No advice will be given by BHSF in relation to the purchase of this product.

So, what do you need to do now?

- **Step 1** - decide which level of cover you want and complete your details. If you choose an applicable policy remember to include the details of your partner and any children you wish to cover. There may be age restrictions for your dependent children. This information will be contained within the policy.
- **Step 2** - read and accept the declaration and important information - we'll need this before your sign up can be completed.
- **Step 3** - once sign up is completed, we'll send you a link so you can create your own online account. Here you'll find all your account details. You can also use this link to claim for some benefits online.

Remember if you are not completely satisfied with the policy, simply tell us in writing within 14 days of the date you receive your welcome pack and we will cancel it. And provided a claim has not been paid, we will refund any premium we have collected.

Have any questions regarding the set-up of your health cash plan? No problem, give us a call on 0121 454 3601 and we'll be happy to help.

Click on [BHSF Health Cash Plan](#) for information and details on how to apply.

Note: the following application code may be required - **WW0569**.

* BHSF cannot accept applications from addresses outside of the United Kingdom. The United Kingdom does not include the Isle of Man or the Channel Islands.

END OF HR BULLETIN 03/01/2024

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