Salary Negotiation Toolkit

Prepare, ask, and get it in writing. Worksheets, scripts and a clear look at what a pay rise is really worth after tax in 2026/27.

Step 1: Prepare before you ask

- **Pick the moment.** After a clear win, at an annual review, or when your responsibilities have grown. Book a dedicated meeting rather than raising it in passing.
- **Know your market value.** Check at least five similar job adverts, recruiter salary guides and, if you can, what people in your network earn. Note the range, not one figure.
- **Collect your evidence.** Results you delivered, work beyond your job description, new skills, positive feedback and anything you saved or earned the business.
- **Decide your numbers.** Your target, your realistic minimum, and what you would accept instead of salary (see Step 3).
- **Check the basics.** The National Living Wage for ages 21 and over is £12.71 an hour from April 2026. Your pay must never fall below the minimum for your age.

Your numbers worksheet

Item	Your figure	Notes / source
Market range for my role (low to high)		Job adverts, salary guides, contacts
My target salary		Aim at the upper half of the range
My realistic minimum		Below this I would look elsewhere
My current total package		Use the worksheet on page 2
Evidence I will bring (3 items)		Specific results, with numbers

Step 2: Compare the whole package

Salary is only one line. Fill in your current package, an offer you are weighing up, and your target to see the real difference.

Item	Current	Offer or target	Difference
Base salary (a year)			
Bonus or commission (realistic, a year)			
Employer pension contribution (%)			
Paid holiday (days, including bank holidays)			
Other benefits (health, car, phone, gym)			
Home or hybrid working days			
Training and study budget			
Notice period			
Commute cost (a year)			

Good to know: under auto-enrolment the minimum total pension contribution is 8% of qualifying earnings, of which the employer must pay at least 3%. Full-time workers are entitled to at least 28 days paid holiday a year (5.6 weeks), which can include bank holidays.

What a £1,000 pay rise is really worth

Tax and National Insurance take a bigger share as you earn more. These figures show the take-home value of a £1,000 gross rise in England, Wales and Northern Ireland for 2026/27.

Your situation	Tax and NI taken	You keep
Basic-rate taxpayer (20% tax + 8% NI)	28%	£720
Basic rate with a Plan 2 student loan (+9%)	37%	£630
Higher-rate taxpayer (40% tax + 2% NI)	42%	£580
Higher rate with a Plan 2 student loan	51%	£490
Income between £100,000 and £125,140 (60% tax + 2% NI)	62%	£380

Tip: asking for part of a rise as an employer pension contribution through salary sacrifice can be worth more than the same amount as pay, because it can save both Income Tax and National Insurance. Check your employer’s scheme rules, and that your pay still stays above the minimum wage.

Step 3: If the answer is no to salary, ask for something else

- A formal pay review in 3 or 6 months, with agreed targets in writing.
- A higher employer pension contribution, or salary sacrifice for pension or cycle-to-work.
- Extra paid holiday, a flexible start time or more home-working days.
- A training or qualification budget, or paid study time.
- A title change that reflects what you already do.
- A one-off bonus, if the base salary band is genuinely fixed.

Scripts you can adapt

Opening the conversation

> “Thank you for making time. I would like to talk about my pay. Over the last year I have [result 1], [result 2] and taken on [extra responsibility]. Based on the market for this role, I am looking for a salary of £[target]. How does that fit with your thinking?”

If they say the budget is fixed

> “I understand there are limits. Can we look at other ways to recognise this, such as a review in three months with clear targets, extra pension contribution or more flexibility? What would you be able to agree to?”

If the offer is lower than your minimum

> “Thank you for the offer. I want this to work, but £[offer] is below what I need given the scope of the role. Is there room to reach £[figure], or to agree a pay review at six months?”

Email to request a meeting

> Subject: Request to discuss my pay
> Hi [name], I would like to book 30 minutes to discuss my role and pay. I will bring a short summary of my work over the last year. Could we find a time in the next two weeks? Thanks, [your name]

Step 4: After the conversation

- **Get it in writing.** Ask for the agreed salary, start date and any other terms in an email or a contract variation letter before you treat it as settled.
- **Say thank you** and confirm any next steps and review dates in your own calendar.
- **Check your payslip** after the change shows the new pay and any pension change.
- **If it is a no,** ask what you would need to achieve to get a yes, and by when.
- **Do not bluff** about competing offers. Only mention one if it is real and you would be willing to take it.

Do and do not

Do	Do not
Anchor with the top of your realistic range.	Open with a number you would be unhappy to accept.
Talk about value you deliver, with numbers.	Rely on personal costs such as rent as your main argument.
Stay calm and pause before replying.	Accept or reject on the spot if you need time. Ask for a day.
Ask what is needed to reach your target.	Threaten to resign unless you are ready to go.

Useful tools

Work out what a new salary leaves after tax with our Take-Home Pay Calculator at paytoolkit.co.uk/take-home-pay-calculator/, and check what a bonus is worth with the Bonus Tax Calculator on the same site. For free advice on pay and rights at work, see Acas (acas.org.uk) and GOV.UK.