



Thank you teacher: Why gift cards can be an ideal reward for teaching staff

To be bylined to Gail Cohen, director general of the [UK Gift Card and Voucher Association](#)

It's no secret that teachers often feel overworked, overstretched and – unfortunately – underappreciated. This is hardly a surprise; on top of being an incredibly emotionally and physically demanding role, teaching extends far beyond the traditional 9-5 and, for the majority of the profession, teaching is less a job than a way of life.

Considering the demands associated with being a teacher, rising pupil numbers and [as many as four in 10 teachers](#) threatening to leave the profession within the next five years, ensuring staff are properly rewarded for the wonderful work they do is crucial.

However, a recurrent headache for schools is finding the right balance between offering incentives that are substantial and tangible, while being thoughtful enough to show teachers that their school truly cares about them as a person – not just a member of staff.

Let's take a closer look at why offering gift cards can be the perfect way to strike this balance, and for schools to show their appreciation for their staff.

The power of personalisation

As the saying goes, it's the thought that counts. While receiving a reward is fantastic in its own right, taking the time to select something that feels authentic and appropriate to those receiving it will make the reward mean that much more.

The flexibility that gift cards offer mean that rewards and incentives can be closely personalised to match teachers' tastes and interests. For example, a member of staff might have recently moved into a new house, and might appreciate a gift card for their closest department store to furnish their home from a brand of their choice, or a music buff may like a gift card to purchase a new album, or tickets for a concert or festival.



This personalisation can be taken further still with a fully bespoke gift card, which more than half (58.8%) of consumers expressed a desire for when surveyed as part of our most recent [State of the Nation report](#).

These unique gift cards could contain a personal message – from colleagues, or even the pupils themselves – commemorating the work the teacher is being rewarded for, or perhaps a favourite picture of the teacher with their family or class. This can hold great sentimental value which moves beyond the transactional, with the card being remembered and treasured long after being spent.

Treat yourself

Gift cards can often work better as a reward than an equivalent cash incentive. Not only are cash bonuses subject to tax – whereas gift cards with a value of up to £50 are tax-free – they are likely to become indistinguishable from the money already in the teacher's bank account once received.

Teachers therefore may not knowingly use a cash bonus as the reward it is intended to be, but rather to purchase basic necessities for themselves – or even for their classrooms. Indeed, a recent survey from NASUWT found that [as many as one in five](#) teachers are forced to buy lesson resources with their own cash once a week.

Not only does this greatly lessen a cash bonus's value as a reward for the teacher's hard work, they are also highly unlikely to have any emotional connection or memory attached to the money or any purchases made using it.

Purchases made with a gift card, however, act as a continued reminder of the school's gesture, and also of the fantastic work the teacher put in to earn the reward in the first place. This can in turn drive engagement and motivate teachers to keep up the hard work.

Variety and versatility

Gift cards can also be extremely versatile, with a range of different choices to suit the needs of all.



Some of the most common types include:

Store-specific: These gift cards, which can only be redeemed with a specific retailer, are a great option for schools looking to offer a truly personalised reward. This naturally requires a little more work to get right – a gift card for a retailer the teacher never uses could actually have the opposite of its intended effect – but the benefits the right gift card offers teachers and their employers alike are clear.

Multi-store: These gift cards can be redeemed in a variety of stores, rather than being tied to any one retailer. While this means that the reward is slightly less personal than a store-specific card, this is offset by teachers being able to choose a reward that is truly right for them. For example, One4All offers gift cards that can be redeemed in over 55,000 stores and websites across the UK.

Experience-led: One use for gift cards, which can sometimes be overlooked, is going towards the cost of activities rather than that of material goods. Here, the gift card chosen can be closely tailored towards the recipient's extracurricular hobbies and interests, to give teachers the opportunity to leave the job behind and do something truly special to them outside of work.

For example, many travel companies will offer gift cards to go towards the cost of a trip abroad, which is perfect for encouraging teachers to make the most of the school holidays. Leisure gift cards, that can be redeemed at a range of restaurants, bars and events (such as theatres or concerts) are also a popular choice.

Digital: Our research into the gift card market earlier this year revealed a significant spike in the use of digital gift cards, which saw the highest growth in the second half of 2018 compared with paper and physical cards. This is perhaps unsurprising, given that the modern consumer is increasingly moving away from cash.

69.7% of consumers now typically make purchases on their debit card – a figure that increases to 75.2% among the tech-savvy 16-34 year old demographic – and the retail industry on the whole is taking more of a “digital-first” approach to service this need.



With digital gift cards teachers do not have to wait to receive their gift card through the post. Instead, teachers can receive their reward and spend it immediately – possibly even having their subsequent purchase delivered that same day – in line with the ongoing digitalisation of the way we prefer to shop.

This instant, on-the-spot gratification digital gift cards can offer also lends itself to more spontaneous rewards for teachers – perfect for recognising those whose quality of work has been particularly high, or those who have gone the extra mile.

An invaluable retention tool

Overall, gift cards are a fantastic way to reward hardworking staff; a fact not lost on employers if the continued growth of the market is anything to go by. Indeed, our State of the Nation report earlier this year revealed that the B2B gift card market has grown by 20.5% year-on-year.

Of course, gift cards - and, indeed, the majority of staff incentive programs – will require an initial investment that needs to be factored into school budgets. However, it must be remembered that it will be far more expensive in the long run to continually replace outgoing employees than to invest in ensuring that current teaching staff are happy, engaged and motivated. The little money spent on the right personalised, thoughtful gift card offering can go an extremely long way towards this end.

Particularly at a time when more teachers across the UK are leaving the profession than ever, and those that remain can work [almost 51 hours a week](#) on average, it has never been more crucial for schools to ensure that teachers are not just remunerated, but truly rewarded for the wonderful work they do.

For more information, visit www.ukqcva.co.uk

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Notes to Editor

***The reference to gift cards includes digital, physical and paper products.**



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About UKGCVA

The UK Gift Card & Voucher Association (www.ukgcva.co.uk) was established as a trade body in 1991 to represent the key players in what is today a £6 billion gift card and stored value solutions market. With 90 members representing key retailers, issuers and suppliers the UKGCVA provides an information and reference point for the Gift Card industry and is at the forefront of the issues affecting the sector.

Its main objective is to provide a platform and infrastructure for the industry and to raise the profile and use of gift cards within the UK, promoting the industry to consumers, businesses, government and other interested parties.