Hitting the milestones

⊳ **Pensions Dashboards Programme (PDP) principal, Chris Curry, sits down with Jack Gray to discuss the programme's progress on dashboards over the past year and what the next stages are**

⊳ **How has progress on pensions dashboards been this year and are you on track?**

There has been an awful lot of progress this year. It was only at the start of this year that we first had the draft regulations in place and over the summer we did the draft standards. Now, the regulations have been through both houses of parliament and we're just waiting for them to come on to the statute books. We've also now published our final version of the standards to be authorised by the Secretary of State.

We've also done an awful lot of work internally. There's the small issue of the technical build, making sure that pensions dashboards have a central digital architecture to work on. We've been working with our partners in the industry, so everyone is aware of what's happening and helping with our build.

Are we on track? Absolutely. Big milestones keep falling. The regulations are there now, the standards are there now, the central digital architecture has been built and we're now doing that testing phase.

We're on track for the next big milestone, which is the start of compulsory onboarding.

⊳ **What have the key milestones been?**

We've had so many *[milestones]* in so many different parts of the programme, but a big one is completing that technical build. It's only just over a year since we started working with Capgemini and Origo. To have completed the technical build in that time is quite an achievement. That's alongside the consultation on the standards and now publishing the final version, and that's important because that underpins the dashboards legislation.

That's also a good illustration of how we need to do things in the right order. Obviously, we can only complete the standards once the legislation is in place, but we needed to do consultations on both of those.

The work doesn't stop with doing the build. One of the big milestones has been the testing that we did initially over the summer and now bringing in over 20 early participants to work with us on testing that architecture is important.

One of the things we don't often talk about, but is important, is that the reason we are building dashboards is for the consumer. We've been doing a fair amount of consumer work, including looking at what the likelihood is that people will use dashboards and how much value they place on using dashboards. We also do the usual progress update reports as a way of making sure that people are aware of what's going on. Keeping in touch with everyone and communication is an important part of what we do.

⊳ **How has working with various sectors of the industry been and what stages are they at?**

It's really rewarding. Right from the start we've seen this as a collaborative process, and a large part of the industry has bought into that and have really helped up getting us where we need to go. The engagement is going well. It can be patchy; there are different parts of the industry that are more progressed than others. The key thing for us is the ones we need to engage with most that are going to be going through the staged onboarding next year are the ones that are most engaged and are far enough ahead. We engage with them in several different ways. We do a lot of work, especially with our early participants, to not just help them understand what they need from us to do the early engagement and connection, but what we can learn from them as well to make sure we get the processes right and make it easier for when it becomes mandatory for everyone to be able to onboard easily.

There are several reasons why we are going for the largest ones first; partly because they are more likely to be resourced and be able to work with us. Also, from a consumer point of view, getting the bigger ones on earlier helps us get that broader coverage that we think is important for dashboards. When we are

talking about some of the administrators, those organisations might end up helping other organisations by becoming integrated service providers, for example. If they have that knowledge, then that will help meet the needs of a wide range of organisations.

We are finding that being able to focus on a smaller number of organisations is going to give us the reach to make sure the knowledge we pick up from there filters through the rest of the industry. When we've done this for a few months, hopefully the problems we get coming up will be smaller and fewer and further between, because we would already have encountered some of those and the learnings will be passed out to the rest of the industry.

What were the challenges and were there things that were easier than expected?

I don't think there's anything that's been easy! But we have been incredibly lucky. For me personally, just to pay tribute to

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the team we have at PDP, they've coped with everything thrown at them. We've worked with a large number of partners that have helped us; it really has been a joint effort to get to where we are. On challenges, I think uncertainty.

There's been a lot of uncertainty this year in terms of the political environment, the economic environment, the labour market environment. It all affects us in the same way it affects others. We are particularly thankful to our early participants that

stuck with us and helped us through some challenging times. They've been flexible when we've needed to flex ourselves in order to meet those milestones.

We have to do things in a very specific order. When we are in a time where there is a high level of political uncertainty, there's always that thought in the back of your mind that 'we need this to happen now because if it doesn't, then we can't publish the standards, and if we don't publish the standards, we can't get on to the stages onboarding on time'.

It's all very linked together and one of the big challenges has been making sure we keep progressing through the year and hitting all those milestones, because the ones that come next are so dependent on the ones we've already met.

What's coming up next for the programme?

We are moving into the voluntary connection and testing phase. We've got more than 20 participants that are going to help us with that testing. We are already inter-testing with a couple of them.

We're working with the MoneyHelper dashboard and the state pension team at the DWP to bring on both the first dashboard and first data provider.

We are looking to bring the private sector early participants in early in the new year, but well in advance of that April deadline when mandatory onboarding starts.

We had the call for input for the design standards for dashboards over the summer and we're running the formal consultation at the same time as the FCA is looking at the regulations in that space.

We want to make sure people can look at both of those together so they can see the whole picture and give us their feedback on the two things next to each other.

Written by Jack Gray