

The pensions dashboard, although gathering speed, has now come to a standstill once again. On the cusp of moving into an action phase, the pensions industry's ongoing project is among a number of areas waiting in a queue behind the UK's wider political concerns.

In April, the government confirmed that the dashboard will go ahead, with the expectation that pension schemes can complete delivery within a three to four year window. It said that the platform will, at first, launch with "basic information" as schemes provide data in a phased approach.

While the majority of schemes see the benefits and are keen to get moving, clear direction is needed to outline what is required of them.

Engagement

It is a shared view that the pensions dashboard project has come to be one of the most anticipated industry initiatives. And so, with increasing support, there is an impatience to deliver the long-awaited platform.

"It is one of the most supported industry initiatives," PensionBee chief executive officer, Romi Savova, says, however, there is a "frustration around the lack of clarity and timescale".

With continued uncertainty and delays in the surrounding political landscape, including Brexit negotiations and a new prime minister, it is likely that a Queen's speech will not be delivered this year. This would be particularly detrimental to the pensions dashboard, as without the introduction of the pensions bill, compulsion to provide data cannot be implemented.

"Everyone has been really clear from the get-go that we need compulsion and I think in order to get that we were going to get it in the pensions bill. But, with Brexit, that is going to be delayed now," Savova says.

Now Pensions director of policy

Summary

- With increasing support for the pensions dashboard project, there is an impatience to deliver the long-awaited platform.
- Confusion remains around what, if anything, will be delivered this year.
- Before trustees and schemes can prepare their information, clear direction, including a data standard needs to be set.
- In the meantime, however, there are areas that trustees can begin to work on until requirements are clarified.

Waiting for the green light

▶ The pensions dashboard is yet again at a red light, with political upheaval getting in the way, but what can we expect this year?

Talya Misiri reports

Adrian Boulding notes: "With the project continuing to be increasingly delayed at each step of the way, the government's plan to have some form of dashboard up and running in 2019 is becoming unlikely."

As a result, although the industry is largely pleased that the government has given the dashboard the go-ahead, confusion remains around what, if anything, will be delivered this year.

Savova comments: "People are quite concerned that something is expected in 2019, without that something being clarified. I've heard quite a lot of providers say that not much is going to happen this year because the ship has effectively sailed."

Direction needed

For the industry to move into the action phase of the project, direction is needed. While schemes, providers and trustees are beginning to display a willingness to provide information to the dashboard, what is required from them remains unclear.

At this stage in the dashboards'

development, the key area where clarity is needed is around data. Before trustees and schemes are able to prepare their information, a data standard needs to be set.

"We need to get an early steer as possible as to what the common data standards actually are and get some certainty around that really quickly," Smart Pension director of policy Darren Philp says.

"Until that's confirmed then people aren't going to be spending lots of time, effort and money and diverting resources to work out how they can do this... why would providers spend time preparing if it is still uncertain."

PLSA policy lead for lifetime savings, George Currie, agrees that "schemes can't get their data into the right shape", until standards are clarified.

Once established, providers will then be able to correct, reformat and ensure that their information is dashboard compatible, Philp explains.

Having passed through the hands of the Association of British Insurers (ABI) and the Department for Work



and Pensions, and it is now under the oversight of the Money and Pensions Service (Maps).

PPI director Chris Curry has just been appointed by Maps as principal of its Pensions Dashboard Industry Delivery Group, which will be responsible for setting this standard and clarifying what the 'basic information' on the dashboard at launch will be.

Additionally, there are concerns around legal breaches where schemes will be required to provide data. Since GDPR, Boulding highlights that: "If we don't have legislation, then it's difficult for schemes to be confident that we're sending the correct data and that we've got the consent to send that data."

"So, signing up voluntarily to a dashboard that hasn't got any legislative backing might well result in you breaching those consent conditions."

Boulding and Savova agree that voluntary participation will only work until a certain point. Nonetheless, there are areas that trustees can begin to work on until standards are set.

Preparation

"There are things that providers and schemes can be doing now to make sure that their data is of a sufficient quality," Currie states.

While the basic information that is due to be initially shown on the dashboard has not been clarified, schemes can infer that member information such as each individual's personal details, as well as fund value and employee and employer contributions for DC schemes will be required.

"Schemes and providers can cleanse their data and make sure they've got all the relevant information prepared," Currie says.

Philp suggests schemes should prepare data with members in mind. "You need to coordinate data for matching and think about what will be useful for members. Once data is in a fit state and the dashboard connection has been made, then everything else should be straightforward."

When it comes to the phasing of data to the dashboard, Boulding notes that

"large, single employer DC schemes" should aim to give their data first. This is because "they're in good shape" in terms of cleansed data and "haven't got the distraction of authorisation that we have in the master trust market space", he says.

Additionally, there has been considerable commentary around whether costs and charges should be included on the dashboard. "We should move ahead with the presumption and the expectation that they will be on there from the start," Philp highlights. In this case, schemes should also look to have this information clarified to save time later on.

Nonetheless, some schemes may find it particularly challenging to present this information. There may be difficulty in converting charges into a pounds and pence format due to schemes' internal systems and the way charges are calculated.

To debate areas like these, however, there are also working groups being set up, Savova says. Until some clarity is reached, these groups are working with providers and consumers to gauge the finer details as to what the dashboards could include.

Ultimately, however, until the steering group and principal have been appointed, data standards have been set and compulsion has been legalised, it is unlikely that the industry will make significant efforts to engage further.

It is clear that while the majority are supportive of what the dashboard will bring, the industry is now waiting for the green light from the government to act.

Philp concludes: "I think there's a will and an appetite to get on with it and move into an action phase. With the continued delays, it seems like not a lot is moving on quite quickly. So, the dashboard really needs that new injection of adrenaline to get it going."

Impact on savers

With the dashboard unlikely to be fully comprehensive when launched, the impact of an incomplete platform on members can come into question. Concerns surround the impact of a minimal dashboard putting members off and resulting in a lack of repeat visits.

ABI policy adviser, Matt Burrell, highlights that consumer testing has shown that "people will be ok with partial coverage as long as members know that it is a temporary thing".

In the meantime, some form of signposting for dashboard consumers is supported. Currie says: "Signposting that more information will be added will be sensible. If the phased approach is adopted it would be a good idea to make savers aware that there will be further developments in the dashboard that will make more information available."

"Members need to be aware that more is coming no matter what," Savova comments. As compulsion will be staged, it is likely that it will take three to four years for all schemes to submit their data. So, "consumers need to know that this is not a definitive answer, and if they log in the following year it is likely to look different," she says.

Philp adds: "Importantly, if there was a signpost saying 'to find more about this, go here,' that could be incredibly useful."

While "absolutely everything" doesn't need to be on the platform, Philp says, "you probably want to avoid people making decisions on the pure basis of figures on the dashboard".

Written by Talya Misiri, a freelance journalist