Pensions UK Annual Conference 2025: Rebrand, renewal and the road to 2030

Manchester once again played host to the pensions industry's biggest gathering as the newly rebranded Pensions UK welcomed over 1,500 delegates to its Annual Conference 2025. Held at Manchester Central, the event marked the beginning of a new chapter for the organisation and the wider pensions community

A new name, a clear mission
The conference opened with energy and anticipation as chief executive, Julian Mund, unveiled the organisation's new identity: Pensions UK. The organisation's mission remains unchanged – helping people achieve better retirement outcomes – but its strategy is now firmly focused on being '2030 Ready'.

Mund set out five priorities that will guide this transformation: Enhancing capability, strengthening funding, maximising member value, influencing policy and championing better pensions for all. The tone was one of optimism and determination, signalling that the rebrand is not cosmetic, but a strategic shift designed to modernise and strengthen the sector.

Reigniting long-term thinking
The opening plenary introduced two of the commissioners of the newly formed Pensions Commission: Baroness Jeannie Drake and Nick Pearce.

Pearce reflected on earlier successes in expanding auto-enrolment and

reducing pensioner poverty but warned that today's challenges are more complex. Rising self-employment, insecure work and demographic change have reshaped the landscape. Pension freedoms have increased individual risk, and tomorrow's retirees, especially those with DC-only savings, may be worse off than today's.

Drake and Pearce made clear that tax relief and state pension age policy fall outside the commission's remit, though any Budget changes will be factored into their analysis. Their focus is on long-term reform, not short-term fixes.

As panel chair Emma Douglas noted, the sector is in good hands – this isn't Baroness Drake's 'first rodeo'.

The adequacy question
Pensions UK's latest research, launched during the event, reinforced why that long-term view is so vital. The study showed that while 44 per cent of people feel worse off than last year, the vast majority have not reduced their pension contributions. Most believe saving more should be encouraged, and 89 per cent want government to ensure pensions always rise with inflation.

The findings underpinned much of the debate that followed. Across sessions on contribution levels, investment strategies, retirement design and gender equality, delegates returned repeatedly to the same theme – adequacy. The question of whether people are saving enough, and how the system can help them do so, shaped discussions throughout the event.

Policy, reform and innovation
Momentum continued as speakers turned to the Pension Schemes Bill, currently before parliament. Chaired by Pensions UK's Katy Little, the bill's rapid

progress was welcomed with the panel agreeing the current pause before the House of Lords is a chance to reflect.

Panels also explored the implications of reforms around small pots, guided retirement products and the forthcoming value-for-money framework. While the mood was largely supportive, many urged policymakers to focus on outcomes for savers rather than speed of implementation.

Later, a lively debate between Will Hutton and Jo Cumbo explored whether defined contribution schemes should be encouraged to invest more in UK assets. Their discussion reflected the conference's ability to draw expertise from across finance, policy and journalism to tackle difficult questions from multiple perspectives.

The arrival of Pensions Minister, Torsten Bell, further raised energy levels, with only standing room available. His focus on collaboration and transparency reassured many delegates, and his relaxed style captured the tone of an event that balanced serious policy debate with openness and accessibility.

Regulators from the FCA, TPR and DWP followed, providing one of the conference's most technical and engaging sessions. They explored new approaches to innovation, risk management and governance, as well as the potential for technology and AI to improve administration and member engagement.

The road to 2030

The launch of Pensions UK's *2030 Ready: The Industry Lens* report added further insight. Surveying members across the sector, it found that nearly half expect significant change by 2035, with inadequate DC outcomes identified as the greatest concern. At the same time, most respondents expressed confidence that the industry will adapt successfully, highlighting technology, data and collaboration as key enablers of progress.

Investing in the next generation

New to this year's conference was a dedicated student initiative, Pensions UK: Future Leaders, developed in partnership with Manchester Metropolitan University. Designed to introduce university students to the pensions and investment sector, the programme brought 40 final-year finance and accountancy students into the conference for a day of tailored sessions, followed by the opportunity to join delegates at the main event.

Students attended workshops exploring the theory and practice of pensions and investments before networking with professionals, visiting the exhibition hall, and participating in discussions alongside industry leaders. Supported by Manchester Central and Marketing Manchester, the initiative forms part of Pensions UK's wider commitment to giving back to the host city and building stronger links between academia, industry and community.

The inclusion of the Future Leaders programme added a new dimension to the event, one focused on learning, inspiration and legacy. It showcased how the conference not only convenes today's experts but also begins to cultivate tomorrows.

A conference of ideas and impact

The final day combined reflection and vision. Rt Hon Lord David Blunkett delivered a passionate address urging the industry to keep

its focus on real people and tangible outcomes. The closing conversation between Emma Douglas and Louis Theroux provided a fitting end – thoughtful, curious and optimistic.

Across more than 40 sessions, the conference demonstrated the diversity and depth of the pensions world. Policy specialists shared stages with economists, technologists, behavioural scientists and communications experts. There were deep dives into DB and DC reform, sessions on member engagement and ESG, and practical workshops on innovation, compliance and data. The exhibition floor buzzed with ideas and connections, while networking areas brought together professionals from every part of the industry.

As the event ended, the sense of momentum was unmistakable. The rebrand, the research, and the launch of the Pensions Commission all underscored one truth: This is a defining moment for pensions. The sector stands at the centre of national debates about fairness, adequacy and economic growth, and the conversations that began in Manchester will help shape the direction of reform for years to come.

Sessions and interviews from the conference are available to Pensions UK members via the member hub: https://members.plsa.co.uk/home