

**Hampshire Pension Services**  
**Employer Focus Group – 23 November 2022**

**Attendees:**

Employer representatives: Yvonne Young, Sian Holmes, Ruth Street, Alison Ells, Sheila Hodgson, Graeme Miles, Lynne Guvis, Vally Fish, Bryan Ledwood, Patricia Dibbs, Georgina Emsley, Joanne Mogg

Hampshire Pension Services: Amanda Baulcomb, Luke Dennison, Marian Kerr

West Sussex Pension Fund: David Atkinson

Introduction

Amanda gave a brief background to the purpose of this focus group and highlighted areas for discussion and feedback:

- The annual return template review
- The annual return process review
- Annual return workshops
- Employer performance benchmarking
- The data validation exercise
- Future focus groups

The Annual return template review

Luke reminded employers of the current annual return template and invited feedback.

Employers felt this worked fine and had gotten used to this over the years. Alison advised that the reports they use pull out the information, but in a different format and they need to move this over.

Yvonne advised that she was ok now she understood what opt outs needed to be included on the annual return. Amanda advised that we would still look to make sure this was emphasised to all employers within next years employer workshops to ensure all employers understood this.

Patricia asked whether they need to include members who had a start date before 31 March, but not paid until April. Amanda advised we do, the CARE should be £0, however FTE should be provided.

Annual return process

Luke gave an overview of the annual return process and invited feedback on this or the annual return queries template.

Feedback given that query spreadsheet was easy to follow – no changes suggested. Ruth fed back that they would often be chased for query responses, however they had responded. They would then send a response, and no acknowledgement. Luke and Amanda confirmed that emails are dealt with through a group shared inbox and generally the same person dealing with the return would deal with queries (with the exception of someone being absent), however the purpose of the group inbox, was to ensure nothing gets lost or not picked up. HPS advised we would look into this.

Ruth also fed back that they had issues with starters and leavers that had been put on the Hub, however did not appear to have been gone through and/or got lost. This was reported at the time. Ruth gave a more specific example, Amanda advised she would ask someone to investigate further and get in touch to understand the issues further as overall this did not appear to be something being reported generally from others. Amanda advised that starters added to the Hub, are ultimately forms and need to be set up by the team, which should be done within the SLA of 20 working days.

Yvonne advised that it would be useful to have a report on starters, leavers, changes submitted as currently once submitted don't have anything to show for a starter or change for own audit. Amanda advised that this was on our radar and she would continue to feedback.

Patricia advised that she is frustrated at times when receiving the annual returns queries as these are like 'secret squirrel' and struggle to access the encrypted email, cannot understand why other emails from the team do not require any further access needs – e.g. the recent annual allowance. Patricia also advised that sometimes queries come in the annual return spreadsheet and others come just via an email. Amanda advised that for annual return queries these will come via the spreadsheet, however if there is just 1 or 2 members which require further investigation, these may just be set out in an email – this will be the same for BAU queries coming from the team. Amanda advised she would arrange to look into the encryption differences of annual returns and annual allowance, and that the encryption was a data protection requirement to ensure emails don't get intercepted. Patricia advised that when responding to an encrypted email you cannot see the history reply.

Annual return workshops

Luke gave an overview of what was covered at the annual return workshops and also touched on some feedback given after the sessions.

A number of employers asked whether workshops could be run a bit earlier in February, due to resourcing needs and other year end work. HPS have said this is something we will take away.

Ruth fed back that generally the break out rooms were good, however due to the level of knowledge of different attendees, can spend time going through more basic aspects and teaching other employers. Alison asked whether it would be possible to have a facilitator in each breakout room or someone from HPS popping into each group – Luke fed back that someone should have popped in to the session for each group, so can't comment if that wasn't the experience, however we will take this feedback away and see how we could improve this further. Overall, the feedback was that breakout rooms were useful.

#### Employer Benchmarking

Luke gave an overview of the employer benchmarking that is undertaken as part of the annual returns process.

Yvonne asked when the letters were sent. Amanda advised that letters were sent in September to high level contacts to employers who were rated red in one or more area, or who had been red in the previous year, but had since seen an improvement. Yvonne has asked that we consider in the future writing to all employers, even if its to say that they were not red in any one area.

Graeme from Eastbrook advised that they have been caught between HPS and their payroll provider who were not delivering what they should be, and is a poor reflection on the school. Graeme suggested it would be useful if there was opportunity for the rating to be changed. Amanda advised that the ratings were based on the position of the annual return being received and uploaded, and that actions to improve the position since for the purpose of benchmarking are not taken in to account in the current year – Amanda advised this would be reflected in the following years rating, however Amanda did advise that HPS would be happy to look into writing an additional letter with WSPF once concerns have been addressed to provide reassurance where needed.

Amanda highlighted the recent comments in Pensions Matters on the general quality of WSPFs data from the Fund Actuary following the work on valuation. Across all employers the data that is held is excellent, with less queries being raised each year – Amanda acknowledged that this is due to the work and commitment of Employers.

Amanda did acknowledge that we are looking to highlight the process of benchmarking more prominently in future annual return workshops, which we would hope would help raise further awareness.

There was no feedback on needing to change the criteria for the ratings and generally employers seemed happy with these.

#### Employer Data Validation

Luke gave an overview of the purpose and process of the data validation.

Jo advised that they had currently been asked to undertake this exercise and were working with the payroll team on this and think this will be really useful. Jo will feedback their experience.

Bryan fed back that he felt this was easy enough to do and was a useful exercise.

Amanda shared that we would be looking to get a report on the Employer Hub in the future which employers can run themselves on active members between 2 dates. The general feedback was that this would be very welcome.

No other feedback on changes or suggested improvements.

#### Future Employer Focus Groups

Amanda gave a high-level summary on the purpose of Employer Focus Groups:

- Employer feedback to help improve member and employer communication
- Review of processes
- Review of documents for members and employers
- Opportunity for Pension Services to understand employer issues
- Help improve customer journey for member

It was fed back that it was useful to get a bit of an update of what is going on, but generally employers are happy with the format and purpose of the group and would like these to continue.

Alison asked whether we could have a session on Pensions Dashboard in the future, which Amanda acknowledged. Alison also asked whether the dashboard would mean data would need to be updated monthly, Amanda confirmed that the dashboard would show a value from the most recent ABS. Yvonne asked whether we could have something on future member portal and employer hub developments – Amanda advised

that this is a subject we have covered in the past, however more recently there hasn't been too many changes to engage on, however we would look to have this as an area of discussion in the future as this changes.

Ruth, Alison, Bryan and Yvonne all extended thanks to HPS for the service and support provided. Ruth fed back that she finds the group useful to share experiences with others which may have the same challenges.

AOB

Yvonne asked whether hour changes would still be needed after McCloud, Amanda advised that Hampshire Pension Services had initially thought this would be the case, however we have recently decided that there could be conflict to GDPR for collecting data that is not needed, nor do we have the facility to do this – so hour changes in the future do not need to be reported.

Ruth asked what the report on the hub 'list of waiting' members was – Amanda advised that this was members who have initially registered for the Member Portal, but not fully activated their account.

Ruth asked about leavers under 3 months and why when a leaver form is submitted do they need to provide contribution details as these are refunded by payroll. Amanda clarified that opt outs under 3 months should be refunded through payroll, and notification to Hampshire Pension Services (either through a copy of the opt out form, marking refunded through payroll or completion of the bulk opt out form) should be sent. For members leaving the scheme (whether before 3 months or after), a leaver form should be sent and contribution details for members with less than 2 years membership should be provided in all cases. Where a refund is due to a leaver, Hampshire Pension services must process this.

Bryan asked about an ill-health case, and whether once a retirement/decision was made, whether it was possible to be reviewed if the member subsequently was re-employed. Amanda advised that the employer may need to take its own legal advice and is not something Hampshire Pensions could advise on.

Amanda confirmed she would organise from someone from the team to call Sheila to answer any general questions she has, as well as direct to other resources and training we offer.

Next employer focus group: June/July 2023