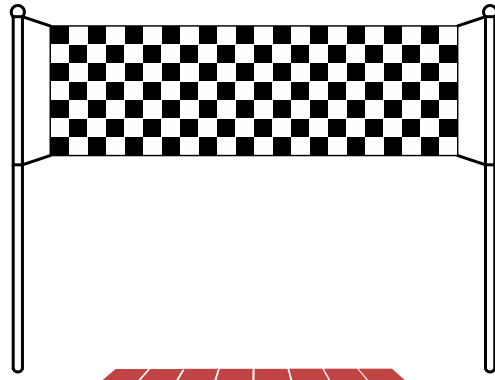




Summary

- Connecting 70 million pension records is only the beginning; success depends on accurate, clear and useful dashboard information for members.
- Once dashboards are launched to the public, schemes must strengthen data quality, security, user support, and operational capacity while monitoring queries, matching failures, complaints, and response times.

Not the finish line

As the process of connecting all eligible schemes' data nears completion, Pete Carvill looks to the next steps schemes need to take in preparation for dashboards going live

It has taken, in the words of one interviewee, a 'herculean effort' to get here: The point this month in which the data from all eligible schemes has been connected to the MoneyHelper Pensions Dashboard.

Beginning in April 2025, the road from there to here has been a long one. Fifteen months after that starting point, in July, the progress update from the Pensions Dashboards Programme (PDP) said that the connection programme had 'advanced rapidly' and that 1,500 pension providers and schemes, representing

more than 70 million workplace and private pensions records, had now all been brought into the fold. That figure, it said, represented around 85 per cent of all the records under the scope of the project.

It was also back then that the PDP wrote: "The programme is entering a critical transition: The technical ecosystem is substantially connected, while the next phase is about data quality, operational readiness, scaled consumer testing, and decisions about public launch and private-sector expansion."

Even still, after all that work, the connection of all that data does not mark the finish line. It is, for better or worse, merely the starting point.

"The real measure of success," says Hughes Price Walker administration manager, Kathryn Davies, "will be whether dashboards deliver meaningful value for members, helping them to find the right pensions and access information that is accurate, clear, intelligible, and useful."

The data difficulties

Perhaps the most-difficult aspect of the process for schemes and providers has been working with their data, making sure that it has been compatible and clean. This has perhaps been most complicated when it comes to legacy data, which is often fragmented, inconsistent, and sometimes incomplete. These records have often been built upon over decades; small errors and gaps being

created with outdated technology and undeveloped data standards that have then compounded over the years.

“Turning that data into information,” says Davies, “that can be reliably matched and presented through a dashboard has required significant investigation, cleansing, and improvement. Smaller schemes have also faced the additional challenge of limited budgets and access to specialist resources.”

Eversheds Sutherland partner, Charlotte Cartwright, says that getting this data into a form where it ticks all the legislative requirements, and doing so within a required timescale, has been a “significant undertaking”, even for those schemes with a high-quality set of data.

“They will still have needed to set and test their criteria for matching members,” she adds, “and work out how to produce the figures required by legislation within the requisite timescale, which is particularly an issue for those schemes that don’t provide annual benefit statements for deferred members; and work through associated questions such as how to coordinate data sharing for main benefits and AVCs.”

After connection

If connection is still only a starting point, future developments appear to be focused in four areas: the member experience, security, the ability to handle volume, and ongoing data management.

Looking at the member experience, Sackers partner, Ferdy Lovett, says that trustees need to think about what happens after their members come to engage with a dashboard. Many, he adds, will not have engaged with their pensions for years.

“Dashboards have the potential to change that quite quickly,” he says. “Trustees should be asking administrators now: ‘What does increased engagement look like? Are we expecting more calls? More emails? Do we have clear processes for dealing with possible matches? How quickly

can member queries be resolved?’ Ultimately, dashboards could be fantastic for member engagement, but good engagement still needs good support sitting behind it.”

Another area that trustees should be looking at, according to those *Pensions Age* spoke to, should be making sure that member-facing teams are trained to handle lost pension queries, discrepancies, and potential scams. Trustees should also receive regular, concise reporting covering outages, matches, possible matches, failures, response times, complaints, and remedial action. All this will ensure that they have a clear view of performance and areas that require attention.

“Dashboards could be fantastic for member engagement, but good engagement still needs good support sitting behind it”

But, most importantly, in terms of the member experience, those members need to be engaged with the dashboard when it goes live. A dashboard that is difficult to navigate will end up being one that is seldom explored.

“We need to make sure,” says Zedra client director, Dan Whincup, “that the experience for users when the dashboard goes live is a good one. Every operational and IT decision should be made with that lens in mind. But the range of potential users is wide, so careful thought is needed about what to prioritise in terms of user experience. The dashboard cannot be all things to all people on launch, but it should focus on being easily accessible and clearly signposting what pensions people have.”

The user experience also ties directly into the security used for the dashboard. While the dashboard has to be secure, it also needs to be accessible, particularly

for those who are unfamiliar with new technology.

Whincup says that the verification process used needs to be both simple and as straightforward as possible.

He adds: “People may simply give up if it isn’t. People often look for an excuse to delay engaging with their pension as it can be intimidating. It would be a shame if people who would genuinely benefit from the dashboard walked away in frustration before they even get in.”

Given the scale of the system, trustees and administrators should also be prepared for a marked uptick in member queries and phone calls, especially if – as Eversheds Sutherland partner, Catherine Salafia, notes – a certain high-profile personal finance commentator talks about the dashboard on his show.

WTW pensions dashboard expert, Geraldine Brassett, says that there will already be assumptions made about any increases – or not – in volumes, along with how much these may be by and for how long they could last.

“These will need to be monitored,” she says, “and refined both during live testing and post launch. Administrators and providers may well also have a contingency plan in place, for example, pre-agreed priorities if the volume of member engagement is greater than expected.”

And, of course, there will also be ongoing data management.

Lovett returns to the point that connection is not the finishing line but the starting point.

“The PDP,” he explains, “has made that point very clearly. Once a scheme is connected – and even if a third-party connection provider is dealing with much of the day-to-day technical side – trustees still need to maintain the data, keep records up to date and make sure the scheme can keep responding accurately to requests.”

 **Written by Pete Carvill, a freelance journalist**