Pensions dashboards: get yourself connected

It’s time for pension scheme trustees to think seriously about connecting to pensions dashboards to meet the government’s deadlines.

Pensions dashboards will enable scheme members and policyholders to see all their pensions online in one place so that they can make better plans for retirement and reconnect with lost pension pots.

Dashboards is one of the biggest IT projects undertaken by the UK government. And the job of giving more than 16 million people secure online access to their pensions has been beset by cost and timing overruns.

In March 2024 the government published a staged timetable for schemes to be connection ready. The final legal deadline for all schemes to connect is more than two years away, but the process starts in April 2025 for the biggest schemes.

Getting ready for connection is a demanding task that will consume lots of resources and time for pension schemes. And getting it wrong can have serious consequences.

What does ‘connection ready’ mean?

Connection is how schemes join the dashboards ecosystem, under construction by the Pensions Dashboard Programme (PDP). Trustees of schemes with at least 100 members need to know how and when they will connect.

Schemes will join the ecosystem by their “connect by” date, depending on size and type (see table). By law, all schemes and providers in scope must connect by 31 October 2026.

Scheme type	Relevant member at reference date	Connect by
Master trust schemes that provide money purchase benefits only	20,000 or more	30 April 2025
Defined benefit schemes (other than public service pension schemes)	20,000 or more	31 May 2025
Public service pension schemes	All sizes	31 October 2025
All other relevant occupational pension schemes	100-999	Monthly rolling 'connect by' dates 31 January 2026 and 31 September 2026

Being connection ready requires you to:

1. Have things in place to go through the brief process of hooking up to the PDP ecosystem – this is the easy part
2. Be confident that your scheme will be able to meet its duties after connection under a barrage of requests from members looking for information

This second requirement is where the hard work comes in. These are the five pillars that schemes need to achieve to be ready for connection:

- Governance – you need a project plan and the involvement of all relevant stakeholders
- Matching – facing large volumes of requests, you must be able to supply members with the information they need
- Pensions values – you need to have the correct data readily available
- Technology – the scheme is tested and running properly
- Administration – you have business processes to deal with queries and further changes caused by dashboards connection

It could take you up to 18 months to get connection ready. And for small schemes, surveys show that scheme governance and data quality are not as good as for larger schemes.

The journey for all schemes will require, as a minimum:

- Planning
    - Scope definition and staging date
    - Legal and compliance requirements
- Data readiness
    - Data review
    - Data cleanse
- Estimated retirement income calculations
    - Calculation review
    - Calculation build
- Connection
    - Confirmation dashboard is live

Not being ready is a risky business

These requirements leave plenty of scope for things to go wrong. And there are considerable risks involved if your scheme isn't ready to connect. Here are three:

- If a scheme fails to meet the Money and Pension Service's standards and requests, the scheme could be automatically disconnected from the dashboard
- The Pensions Regulator has the power to fine individual trustees up to £5,000 for each breach of dashboards requirements and as much as £50,000 for corporate trustees
- If your scheme isn't prepared, your members will be justifiably unhappy and your reputation will be damaged

Why is it urgent to plan now?

The connection deadline may seem a long time away, but there is no room for delay. Here are three further considerations:

First, the job of reviewing and cleaning up data is a major project on its own and includes data from additional voluntary contribution (AVC) providers. How will the scheme gather AVC data to present alongside scheme benefits? As trustees, you are responsible.

Second, although the timetable for defined benefit schemes to connect next year isn't mandatory, schemes and providers must pay attention to the connection guidance (and timetable). Also, sticking to the guidance will reduce the risk of not connecting by the deadline.

Last but by no means least, there is a lot of legislative change on the horizon in addition to compliance with dashboards. Industry capacity is a real concern, so it's crucial that you plan and agree resource and budgets with your suppliers.

How to connect

When it comes to the mechanics, there are two ways to connect to the dashboards ecosystem:

- Build your own connection to connect directly, using an in-house technical solution
- Buy a connection solution, which could be provided by your existing third-party administrator or an integrated service provider (ISP)

At Aptia, we have been working with the PDP and have built an infrastructure that makes sure schemes comply with the Pensions Dashboards Regulations. This enables us to manage and monitor the links with dashboards and complete tests as one of the agreed PDP testers. The facility will be available to all our administration clients that must join pensions dashboards.

Importantly, even though the administrator is doing the work to connect to the dashboards ecosystem, trustees must still follow the connection guidance and meet their responsibilities outlined in the regulator's checklist.

Dashboards promise better member outcomes

Pensions dashboards present near-term challenges for pension schemes but the programme has the potential to improve engagement and outcomes for your members. Now is the time to start your connection journey and check in with your administration provider if you have one.

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Insights dashboard



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