

How to tell your members about GMP equalisation

GMP equalisation is complex, controversial and liberally sprinkled with unknowns. And with press interest and misinformation flying around, it's important for trustees to establish themselves as a reliable resource for members. Ever since the issue went to the High Court last year, we've been helping schemes talk to their members about it. We've developed approaches and messages that anticipate and answer members' questions.

To help you get it right for your members, here are 9 quick tips.

1. Start with the headlines

Most members want to know quickly what equalisation means for them. So, like a journalist, always start with the briefest, clearest summary you can manage. Many members won't be affected, so tell them straight away. Then they won't need to read further (or ring your admin team). For example, 'A recent court ruling means some members might be in line for a top-up to their pension, though most will not be affected...'

2. Get to the point

Don't be tempted to lead on long-winded chronicles of SERPS, contracting out or how GMPs work. Very few members care about that. They want to know if and how they're affected. So cut to the chase and save the background information for your website, along with some FAQs.

3. Keep everyone calm

Be clear that some people might get a bit extra, others will see no change, and nobody will lose out. Use short sentences and everyday words to make sure members get these points clearly. If they're neither excited nor worried, they're less likely to hassle you for more details.

4. Outline who's affected

You don't know the details, but you can broadly define those who might be in line for some extra money. That's helpful, because anyone who isn't in the magic 90-97 GMP cohort can stop reading. It's also worth saying men and women could be affected, as a lot of the press coverage has focused on women.

5. Make your words work

Choose carefully the word or phrase you use to describe the extra money. An 'adjustment' sounds like it could be up or down, so might worry people. An 'increase' sounds like it could be substantial. Perhaps talk about 'a bit extra' or 'a top-up' – it sounds positive, but not pools-win positive.

6. Give ballpark numbers

Members want to know how much they're getting and when. You don't know either. But if you set some expectations it will stop members ringing you up to ask. So ask your administrators to estimate a figure in pounds that will cover most situations. And put a date on when members might get their money. If you can't do that, put a date on when you'll get back to them (see 9).

7. Be trusted trustees

Equalisation is an opportunity to (re-)establish the trustees as the go-to source of friendly but authoritative information for members. So make the effort to use super-clear language that connects with members. And invite members to keep checking the website and suggest FAQs they'd like to see.

8. Choose your channels

Think about how your members would like to receive information about this. A presentation from a manager? A simple video of trustees talking? A postcard? It doesn't have to be a letter.

9. Keep the conversation going

Don't say nothing just because there's no news. Tell members when you'll update them, and stick to that. Give them an update of how things are going, and any new estimates of timescale or figures. If you don't talk to members, others (who might not have their best interests at heart) will.