



# Employer Pensions Notice

## EPN 237

### New Employers' Communication and Support Group (ECSG)

To replace the Pension Communication Network (PCN) and Employer Support Groups (ESGs)

**Audience** This Notice will be of particular interest to:

- All HR and Policy Managers particularly those who are members of the Pension Communication Network (PCN) or have been to an Employer Support Group (ESG)

**Action**

- To consider the proposals to combine the two existing employer groups; and
- Review the attached Terms of Reference (TOR) for a new Employers' Communication and Support Group (ECSG)

**Timing** Immediate

**Issue**

You are invited to comment on the proposals to replace the current PCNs and ESGs with a single employer forum. The Terms of Reference for a new Employers' Communication and Support Group (ECSG) are attached to this EPN. The ECSG is designed to combine the core elements of both groups to support employers in fulfilling their pension roles and responsibilities in providing an effective pension service to members.



### **Background**

The Employer and Communications Branches in Civil Service Pensions Division (CSPD) run a series of support groups and networks for employers.

There are currently two separate groups which we propose to combine:

### **Pension Communication Network (PCN)**

The PCN was introduced to support CSPD's communication strategy, focussing on the role of employers in communicating pension information to scheme members. The aim being to build awareness and appreciation among scheme members of their pension provision.

### **Employer Support Groups (ESGs)**

The ESGs support employers in understanding their roles and responsibilities in administering the CSP arrangements. The ESGs have particular emphasis on the employers' role in delivering the CSP arrangement to the member.

### **Why create one group?**

CSPD recognises that whilst the groups have a different focus there is often an overlap of topics. Now that we have established the importance of pensions communications with employers, and having taken account of employers' views, we see an advantage in merging the two groups.

### **Why should I come along?**

The CSP arrangements are an important part of the benefits package for all Civil Servants and employers make a significant financial contribution to provide pension benefits for their staff. These arrangements cover a wide range of benefits across a number of schemes. The ECSGs will support your understanding of policy, processes and communication issues that are integral to the role of the employer by providing training opportunities and workshops. They will provide an opportunity to network with others in a similar role to share best practice, and discuss pensions issues with representatives from CSPD.

### **How will the groups be run?**

The proposed ECSGs will meet approximately every 6 months in spring and autumn. To support the relationship that needs to exist between 'Sponsor' departments and their Schedule 1 bodies (NDPBs), sponsors and their bodies will be invited to a meeting together. Independent and 'direct' delegation organisations will also be grouped together in a separate meeting.

The meetings will be held in London, Edinburgh and Cardiff and other regional centres where there are sufficient numbers of attendees.

### **Who should attend?**

The Terms of Reference which can be found at the end of this EPN set out the role that representatives and attendees should be able to fulfil. We will invite existing PCN and ESG representatives to attend the new groups.

If you have not previously attended a PCN or ESG or are new in your role, please let us know via the employer helpdesk as we would like all employers to participate in the new group.

### **Next steps**

We welcome your views on the TOR and name of the new proposed group. If you have any comments on or suggestions for the new group please contact us via the [employerhelpdesk@cabinet-office.x.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:employerhelpdesk@cabinet-office.x.gsi.gov.uk)

### **Other employer events**

Finally, a reminder about the next two CSP run events for employers:

#### **Accounting Officer Certificate (AOC) Workshops**

CSPD is running a series of workshops in January and February to support employers in understanding and completing the AOC and checklist. Invites have been sent for these events; if you have not yet responded and wish to attend please contact [aoc@cabinet-office.x.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:aoc@cabinet-office.x.gsi.gov.uk)

#### **Pensions Conference for Employers**

On 21 April we will be holding a Pensions Conference in central London. Invites will be sent in February to existing PCN and ESG representatives. If you have not previously attended a PCN or ESG or are new in your role and would like to attend the Pensions Conference please let us know via the employer helpdesk.

**Contacts** Enquiries about content, distribution or to receive in a different format

**employerhelpdesk@cabinet-office.x.gsi.gov.uk**

**01256 846414**

**Employer Helpdesk, Civil Service Pensions, Grosvenor House, Basing View,  
Basingstoke, RG21 4HG**

You can find electronic copies of the EPG, all current EPNs and forms on our website [www.civilservice-pensions.gov.uk](http://www.civilservice-pensions.gov.uk) in the Guidance for employers section.

If this notice is to be circulated to members, then please remove contact details as the helpdesk is for employers only. Members should be directed to your pensions administrator if they have any queries.

© Crown Copyright January 2009

# **DRAFT**

## **Employers' Communication and Support Group (ECSG)**

### **Terms of reference**

#### **Purpose**

To provide a forum for employers to engage with their responsibilities in delivering the Civil Service pension (CSP) arrangements to members.

#### **Objectives for ECSG**

To:

- increase employers' understanding of policy, processes and communication issues that are part of their pension responsibilities
- discuss, with the aim to improve, standards of pension delivery (as set out in Cabinet Office guidance) across CSP organisations.

#### **Structure of ECSG**

Groups will be organised according to 'sponsor' departments and their Schedule 1 bodies. Independent and 'direct' delegation organisations will be grouped together. Where sponsor departments have a small number of Schedule 1 bodies, they and their Schedule 1 bodies will be grouped with others.

#### **Frequency, venue and content of meetings**

Meetings will be held every 6 months in spring and autumn. Each meeting will usually last up to half a day to allow consultation and discussion.

Groups will meet in London, Edinburgh and Cardiff and other regional centres where there are sufficient numbers. Employers with sponsor responsibilities will be responsible for deciding which location they and their Schedule 1 bodies will attend.

Meetings will:

- cover various pensions topics that impact on the work of employers
- offer workshops and training sessions to improve knowledge and understanding
- provide an opportunity for employers to share best practice, network with others and discuss pensions issues with CSPD representatives
- enable CSPD to consult employer representatives on developments in pensions policy
- discuss communication strategies and delivery mechanisms
- promote the understanding of relationships and communications responsibilities between stakeholders. (See Appendix A for list of employer stakeholders.)

### **ECSG Stakeholders and their role**

**Employer representatives.** All CSP organisations will be expected to nominate a representative to attend meetings. Each representative will act as the contact for CSPD and be responsible for communicating initiatives and changes in policy to their colleagues. ECSG representatives will have or be prepared to develop:

- an understanding of their organisation and its structure and have or be willing to develop a working relationship on behalf of the ECSG with the stakeholders involved. They need to understand the relationship that must exist between departments, agencies and Schedule 1 bodies (where applicable)
- the appropriate skills and authority to negotiate with and influence internal stakeholders to achieve ECSG objectives
- the ability to investigate and respond to CSPD on issues as required, fully participate in consultation (both in and outside of meetings) and complete ad hoc tasks as requested by CSPD
- a general understanding of scheme pension provision.

Representatives will also be required to:

- respond to invitations in a timely manner so that CSPD can organise the ECSG secretariat
- inform CSPD of changes in key personnel (particularly when they move post so that a new representative can be identified).
- invite other colleagues to attend ECSG meetings, for example, where the agenda requires specialists' input or views.

**CSPD will:**

- arrange and facilitate the ECSG meetings, consultations and any ad hoc tasks
- co-ordinate meeting agendas
- provide media and material, as appropriate
- invite Cabinet Office colleagues and pensions administrators to attend and contribute, as appropriate
- feed back issues to CSPD colleagues and ensure that actions arising from group work are progressed and completed in a timely manner.

**Employer stakeholders**

Members

Pensions administrator

Schedule 1 bodies/sponsor departments (where applicable)

CSPD

Organisational staff – HR advisors, recruitment, finance and policy teams, and communications groups

External Shared Services staff (if applicable)

External payroll provider (if applicable)

Pension payroll provider (currently Capita Hartshead)

Scheme medical advisor (currently Capita Health Solutions)

Printer and distributor of CSP material (currently St Ives)

**partnership** providers (currently Scottish Widows, Standard Life, TUC Prudential)

Designated stakeholder provider (currently Standard Life)

Civil Service additional voluntary contributions providers (currently Scottish Widows and Standard Life)