

PRESS RELEASE
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Pension websites... does your scheme have one?

Awareness of pension scheme websites is considerably higher among employees than the self-employed, reports research funded by the ESRC (Economic and Social Research Council) e-Society programme.

In a survey of 1,337 individuals, Dr Tina Harrison and Kathryn Waite have found that less than a quarter of self-employed individuals know that their pension scheme has a website, and around half of these have actually used it.

Findings show that pension scheme members who have used their scheme website are benefiting from an increased understanding of pensions and, in some cases, an enhanced decision-making capacity.

Many large occupational pension schemes now provide scheme members with a website. Around three-quarters of the occupational scheme members surveyed were aware of their pension website and similarly high proportions had used it. Facilities and features range from purely informational sites, such as web-based scheme booklets, to fully functional integrated sites that allow scheme members to switch funds, change contribution levels and update personal details online. Most popular features are the modellers or calculators that allow members to obtain projections of their benefits and to model 'what if' scenarios.

Many scheme members value their pension website and are benefiting from its use. The greatest benefit is in information provision and education. The vast majority of all pension website users report increased access to pension information, and half of these say they are better informed about pensions as a result. Similar proportions report experiencing greater confidence in making pension enquiries and decisions as a result of using their pension scheme website.

There is an indication that use of pension websites leads to an increased tendency towards pension saving for some people. More than half of all pension website users surveyed say they are taking more of an interest in their pension as a result of using the website, and around a third say they have saved more towards their retirement.

"The need for better communication and information provision via the web is important within the broader context of the general move from DB (Defined Benefit/Final Salary) to DC (Defined Contribution) pensions," comments Tina Harrison. "DC pensions transfer the investment risk from the employer to the individual. This means there is a greater need for communication, education and ideally consumer involvement in the progress of an individual's pension pot. If the individual can become more engaged in the process, through using a pension website, they will have more heightened awareness of financial issues."

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Notes to editor

The research reported above is part of the “Pensions Online?” research project. The study draws on 4 surveys from a total of 1337 individuals. A 4 page e-society briefing .pdf on the “Pensions Online?” project can be downloaded from the e-society website <http://www.york.ac.uk/res/e-society/projects/28.htm> or emailed to you on request.

The ESRC E-Society Programme is the largest-ever academic research programme to investigate the impact of digital technologies, particularly the internet on society: <http://www.york.ac.uk/res/e-society/>

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