

## The Growing Interest in Impact Investment

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[www.pensionsforpurpose.com](http://www.pensionsforpurpose.com)

This blog, by Karen Shackleton, Founder of Pensions for Purpose, looks back on 2018 and reflects on the level of interest in impact investment by pension funds.

It's been an interesting, exciting, eventful and encouraging 2018 for the Pensions for Purpose platform. A year ago, we had 15 Influencer members who had subscribed to be part of the platform and who were already posting content about impact investment, environmental, social and governance (ESG), and responsible investment (RI). We were delighted that 16 Affiliate members (pension funds, advisers, government representatives) had also signed up to receive monthly updates from us, and to access the member-only restricted material on the platform. Nearly 1,900 visits to the platform website had taken place since our launch in December 2017.

Our goals for 2018 were:

- Grow the number of Influencers to 40-50
- Run one sponsored impact seminar
- Engage a communications specialist to improve communication with journalists
- Begin to cover the costs of the platform (website, Secretariat and marketing)

As I look back over the past 12 months, I feel both exhilarated and – I confess – a little daunted by what we have managed to achieve, by working together collaboratively to raise awareness of impact investment amongst the pension fund community. With the exception of the goal to engage a communications specialist (the Oversight Committee suggested I meet journalists one to one, instead, which I have done), we are able to tick off all our goals set at the start of the year.

From our standing start in October 2017, we now have 38 Influencer members (with a handful more onboarding soon) and 61 Affiliates who have signed up to be part of this exciting initiative. Our Affiliate members include 8 LGPS pools, 9 public sector funds, 5 corporate pension funds, 8 charities/foundations, 6 government or regulatory representatives, and 18 independent advisers or trustees. Such is the level of interest in this relatively new topic for pension fund investors, we have now seen nearly 10,000 visits to our website.

Perhaps our biggest milestone was the impact seminar that we co-hosted with DG Publishing on 21<sup>st</sup> November. With around 115 signed up, around half of whom were pension funds or independent investment advisers, we invited members of the government's Implementation Taskforce on social impact investing to speak, as well as local authority pools/funds, corporate pension funds and impact managers. We had so many positive remarks afterwards: one pension fund representative, for example, claimed it was "the best conference I've attended in years". Another delegate said that it "showed that there is genuine appetite to invest with impact". There was engagement in the discussion throughout the afternoon and that discussion continued through to the evening dinner.



We also ran our first Pensions for Purpose awards for the best content on the platform posted during our first year. Congratulations to the winners: Bridges, Hermes, Nesta, Pantheon, and Resonance.

So what does 2019 hold for the platform? Continued growth, I hope. I'd like to see more pension funds signing up to the platform, and for more funds to be prepared to share their profile publicly, as a positive statement of support for impact investment. I'd like even more engagement with government officials, so that we can hold a continued dialogue with pension fund investors (both defined benefit and defined contribution schemes) to discuss barriers to entry, which in turn might facilitate further supportive changes in regulation.

I'd like to see our first investment consultancy joining the Pensions for Purpose platform. I have found it curious that, despite ongoing dialogue, no-one from the consulting world has yet signed up. Engagement with consultants is likely to be a major focus for the platform in 2019.

I have already been in discussions with DG Publishing about another Investing with Impact summit in 2019. At next year's summit, I'd like to consider separate streams on social impact and environmental impact. I also took on board the feedback from delegates, at this year's event, that they would have liked more time for roundtable discussion.

Finally, I'd like to see even more case studies shared on the platform, outlining how pension funds are going about implementing an impact investment strategy, so that other pension funds can learn from those leading the way in this space, as well as continued thought leadership on impact investment from our Influencers.

With that, I wish you all best wishes for Christmas and the New Year, and I look forward to further discussions on impact investment in January.

Karen Shackleton  
14<sup>th</sup> December 2018