LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTING

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Local Government Pension Scheme: Accounting Assumptions - 31 March 2016

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This briefing note has been prepared by Steven Scott and Craig Alexander of Hymans Robertson's Public Sector Practice. This outlines the approach to deriving our recommended accounting assumptions as at 31 March 2016, specifically for employers participating in the LGPS. We recommend that this paper is shared with all employers in the Fund with March year ends. This will allow employers to discuss our approach with their auditors in advance of the accounting date and decide if they are appropriate to their circumstances.

For the avoidance of doubt, our approach to assumption setting outlined in this briefing note applies to all accounting disclosures (unless otherwise stated). Please note we have discussed our approach with the National Audit Office who have not raised any concerns. We also propose that the same approach be adopted for valuing any unfunded liabilities

Background to accounting assumptions

As for any actuarial calculation, the value of the liabilities for accounting purposes is heavily dependent on the assumptions underpinning the calculations.

In order to be able to provide reports to employers quickly and at a reasonable cost, our default approach is to prepare accounting reports based on our recommended assumptions.

We believe our recommended assumptions are appropriate for the majority of employers, particularly local authorities and other public sector bodies.

Employers are, however, ultimately responsible for the assumptions adopted and may adopt their own 'bespoke' assumptions for accounting purposes.

To assist employers in assessing whether they wish to accept our recommended assumptions, we have set out below the rationale for our recommendations for each of the principal assumptions.

We recommend that each employer discusses the proposed assumptions with their auditor.

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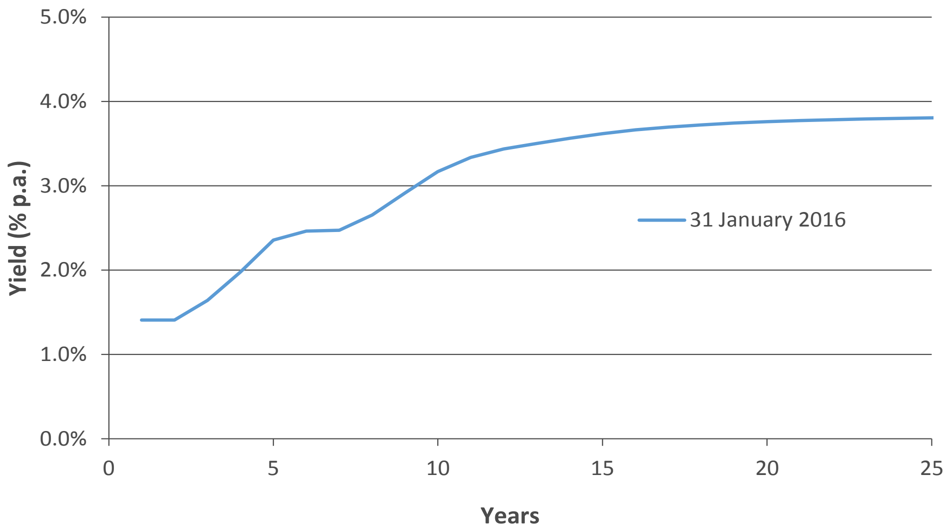
Discount Rate

IAS19 and FRS102 state that the discount rate used to place a value on the liabilities should be determined by reference to market yields on high quality corporate bonds at the reporting date. In addition, the currency and term of the high quality corporate bonds used to set the discount rate should be consistent with the currency and term of the liabilities.

Corporate bond yield curve

Government bond yield curves are updated and available on a daily basis from the Bank of England. It is therefore relatively easy to identify a spot yield on Government bonds at any duration and at any date. Unfortunately, a similarly accessible corporate bond yield curve is not so readily available.

We have adopted an approach to setting the discount rate whereby a “Hymans Robertson” corporate bond yield curve is constructed based on the constituents of the iBoxx AA corporate bond index. The chart below shows a representative yield curve as at 31 January 2016.



Weighted average duration

The discount rate should reflect the ‘term’ of the benefit obligation. We have interpreted ‘term’ to be the weighted average duration of the benefit obligation. This is broadly defined as ‘*the weighted average time until payment of all expected future discounted cashflows, determined based on membership and the financial and demographic assumptions at a particular time’*. The shorter the duration, the more ‘mature’ the employer.

With increased divergence of LGPS employers, it is now the case that the weighted average durations of individual employers are materially different. It is therefore no longer appropriate for all employers to adopt the same financial assumptions for accounting purposes. Therefore, we continue to recommend separate discount rates (and corresponding RPI/CPI inflation assumptions) for individual employers, dependent on their own weighted average duration. The first step in this is to allocate each employer to a duration category as defined below:

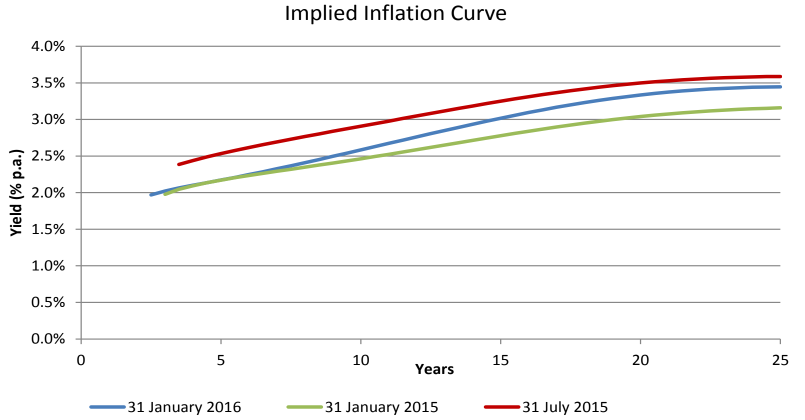
Weighted average duration	Duration category
Less than 17 years	Short
Between 17 and 23 years	Medium
More than 23 years	Long

The weighted average duration used to identify the appropriate category for each employer is determined by us at the most recent actuarial valuation.

Retail Prices Inflation (RPI)

This assumption is typically derived from yields available on fixed interest and index linked government bonds, and should be consistent with the derivation of the discount rate.

The chart below shows the Bank of England implied inflation curve over a range of maturities at 31 January 2016, 31 July 2015 and 31 January 2015. Cashflow weighted single RPI rates are derived from the Bank of England implied inflation curve that recognise the weighted average duration of each corresponding duration category defined above.



Source: Bank of England (31 January 2016)

Pension Increases (CPI)

The pension increase assumption is set in line with our Consumer Prices Index (CPI) assumption. As a market in CPI linked bonds does not exist, we need to estimate the long term gap between RPI and CPI in order to derive a CPI assumption for accounting purposes.

Based on an accumulation of evidence over the last four years from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) about RPI vs CPI, we are increasing our assumed RPI-CPI gap to 1.0 % p.a. at 31 March 2016 (compared to 0.9% p.a. at 31 March 2015).

Salary growth

Our recommended assumption will generally be consistent with the most recent actuarial valuation. An additional allowance for promotional salary increases is also made.

Indicative financial assumptions (based on market conditions as at 31 January 2016)

The following table shows the **indicative financial assumptions** based on this methodology and **market conditions as at 31 January 2016**.

Bond yields have been particularly volatile over the period since 31 March 2015 and this high volatility is expected to continue at least until 31 March 2016. It is the observed bond yields at 31 March 2016 that will be used to set our recommended assumptions as at 31 March 2016, **therefore the 2016 assumptions are subject to change.**

Duration category	Discount rate as at 31 Mar 2015	RPI (CPI) as at 31 Mar 2015	Discount rate as at 31 Jan 2016	RPI (CPI) as at 31 Jan 2016	Discount rate as at 31 Mar 2016	RPI (CPI) as at 31 Mar 2016
Short	3.1%	3.0% (2.1%)	3.6%	3.1% (2.1%)	tbc	tbc
Medium	3.2%	3.3% (2.4%)	3.7%	3.2% (2.2%)	tbc	tbc
Long	3.3%	3.4% (2.5%)	3.8%	3.3% (2.3%)	tbc	tbc

All else being equal, the financial assumptions above would lead to a reduction in the value placed on the liabilities compared to the financial assumptions typically adopted at 31 March 2015.

However, looking at the 10 month period to 31 January 2016, Funds are likely to have experienced significantly lower than expected asset returns which will partly offset any gains made on the liabilities described above. Clearly the balance sheet position at 31 March 2016 will be hugely dependent on how markets move between now and 31 March 2016.

Longevity assumptions

Our recommended longevity assumptions for the 2016 accounting exercise are in line with those adopted by funds for the most recent actuarial valuation (please refer to the valuation report for your own fund for further information).

Other demographic assumptions

These include assumptions for commutation, withdrawal, ill-health early retirements, proportions of deaths leaving a dependant, etc. The assumptions underlying the valuation should be mutually compatible and lead to the best estimate of the future cash flows that will arise under the scheme liabilities.

We gathered data on recent experience of LGPS funds in order to set appropriate demographic assumptions for the most recent formal funding valuation. For all funds, our recommendation will be to use the same demographic assumptions for accounting purposes as at the most recent valuation. Collectively, these are intended to be best estimate.

Next steps for employers

Unless otherwise advised, any accounting reports commissioned by employers through the Administering Authority will be based on our default recommended assumptions, which are intended to fully comply with IAS19, FRS102 and FRS17.

The Directors (or equivalent) of the employer should be satisfied that the combined effect of the assumptions is reasonable as a whole. **We recommend that each employer discusses the proposed assumptions with their auditor.**

We would of course be happy to tailor any of the assumptions to the needs of individual employers.

- Where an employer and its auditor decide to use a different approach to setting just the **financial assumptions** (e.g. discount rate, salary increase rate) for accounting purposes, there will be a small additional fee.

- Any different approach to **demographic assumptions** (e.g. life expectancy) is more time-consuming to adopt, and the additional fee is likely to be greater than adopting different financial assumptions.

If we are provided with a note of any 'bespoke' assumptions shortly after the year-end, we should be able to process as part of the main batch of reports in the most cost effective manner. Any delay to providing us with this information may result in the employer not benefiting from the standard batch fees and timescales.

It should also be noted that Hymans Robertson fees for LGPS employers (including the consideration and adoption of bespoke assumptions) are a fraction of the fees for sponsoring employers of stand-alone private sector schemes; this is due to the efficiencies and economies of scale which Hymans Robertson has put in place for the employers' benefit.

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