

EXPLANATORY MEMORANDUM TO
THE PENSIONS ACT 2004 AND THE EQUALITY ACT 2010 (AMENDMENT)
(EQUAL TREATMENT BY OCCUPATIONAL PENSION SCHEMES)
REGULATIONS 2023

2023 No. [XXXX]

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This explanatory memorandum has been prepared by the Department for Work and Pensions and is laid before Parliament by Command of His Majesty.

2. Purpose of the instrument

- 2.1 This instrument restates law that was initially preserved to ensure legislative continuity after the UK left the EU - commonly known as retained EU law. It restates the right to equal pay between men and women where sex discrimination has arisen in an occupational pension scheme because of legislation on Guaranteed Minimum Pensions. It also restates retained EU law on non-discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation (as expressed in the Framework Directive¹) in relation to benefits payable to the surviving spouses and civil partners of members of occupational pension schemes. In doing so, it restates the law as explained in two court cases concerning retained European Union (EU) law, which have until now not been reflected in legislation.
- 2.2 To support the equalisation of pensions between men and women, the instrument removes the requirement for there to be an opposite sex comparator in an occupational pension scheme in order for a member to show that there is sex discrimination because of legislation about Guaranteed Minimum Pensions. The instrument also amends legislation that permits occupational pension schemes to restrict survivor benefits for survivors of same sex civil partnerships and marriages.
- 2.3 This legislation is being made because, under the Retained EU Law (Revocation and Reform) (REUL) Act², after 31st December 2023 retained EU law rights that had a direct effect in the UK will cease to apply.

3. Matters of special interest to Parliament

Matters of special interest to the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments

- 3.1 None.

4. Extent and Territorial Application

- 4.1 The extent of this instrument (that is, the jurisdiction(s) which the instrument forms part of the law of) is Great Britain.
- 4.2 The territorial application of this instrument (that is, where the instrument produces a practical effect) is Great Britain.

¹ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A32000L0078>

² [Retained EU Law \(Revocation and Reform\) Act 2023 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#)

5. European Convention on Human Rights

- 5.1 The Minister for Pensions, Laura Trott MP, has made the following statement regarding Human Rights:

“In my view the provisions of the Pensions Act 2004 and Equality Act 2010 (Amendment) (Equal Treatment by Occupational Pension Schemes) Regulations 2023 are compatible with the Convention rights.”

6. Legislative Context

- 6.1 At present the Equality Act 2010³ requires an opposite sex comparator to be identified in an occupational pension scheme for the sex equality rule to apply in relation to the effects of Guaranteed Minimum Pensions legislation. The Pensions Act 2004⁴ makes the same provision in relation to the Pension Protection Fund (PPF).
- 6.2 The Court of Justice of the European Union judgment in the Allonby⁵ case determined, on the basis of the directly effective right to equal pay, that it was not necessary to identify a real-life comparator to be able to demonstrate discrimination between men and women where that discrimination was caused by legislation. Instead, a notional or statistical comparator can be used.
- 6.3 The Equality Act 2010 also permits occupational pension schemes to restrict survivor benefits for survivors of same sex civil partnerships or marriages so that only the member’s pensionable service from 5th December 2005 onwards counts towards the survivor benefits.
- 6.4 The UK Supreme Court found, on the basis of EU equality law, in the Walker⁶ case, that legislation could not allow occupational pension schemes to restrict the survivor benefits in this way. The Supreme Court disapplied the permitted restriction in the Equality Act 2010 to the extent it conflicted with the Framework Directive.

European Union Withdrawal Act 2018

- 6.5 Section 4 of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018⁷ (“EUWA”) preserved the directly effective right to equal pay and directly effective rights in the Framework Directive in UK law.

Retained EU Law (Revocation and Reform) Act 2023

- 6.6 Under section 2 of the Retained EU Law (Revocation and Reform) Act 2023 (“the REUL Act”) retained EU law rights preserved by section 4 of EUWA will sunset at the end of 2023. The Retained EU Law (Revocation and Reform) Act contains powers that allow the effect of this retained EU law to be reflected in UK legislation.
- 6.7 These Regulations are made using the restatement powers at sections 11 and 13 of the Retained EU Law (Revocation and Reform) Act 2023 to make changes to the Equality Act 2010 and the Pensions Act 2004 to bring them in line with retained EU law rights, as explained by these two court judgments.

³ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents>

⁴ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2004/35/contents>

⁵ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/ALL/?uri=CELEX:62001CJ0256> C-256/01 Allonby v Accrington and Rossendale College and others [2004] ICR 1328

⁶ <https://www.supremecourt.uk/cases/docs/uksc-2016-0090-judgment.pdf> Walker v Innospec Ltd and others [2017] UKSC 47

⁷ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2018/16/contents/enacted>

The Pensions Act 2004 and Equality Act 2010 (Amendment) (Equal Treatment by Occupational Pension Schemes) Regulations 2023

- 6.8 The Regulations amend, in relation to occupational pension schemes, provisions in Chapter 3 of Part 5 of the Equality Act 2010 on equality in terms of sex and the exception to the non-discrimination rule in Part 5 of the Equality Act 2010 for benefits dependent on marital status. The Regulations also amend provisions in Chapter 3 of Part 2 of the Pensions Act 2004 on sex equality for members of occupational pension schemes who are entitled to payments from the PPF.

Sex equality changes

- 6.9 The Regulations restate retained EU law on the right to equal pay between men and women where discrimination arises from the legislation on Guaranteed Minimum Pensions. They do this by:
- a) amending sections 64, 66 and 67 of the Equality Act 2010 to introduce an alternative sex equality rule and clause where a person is treated less favourably in relation to their occupational pension than if they were of the opposite sex. No real-life opposite sex comparator is required to demonstrate unequal treatment under these alternative provisions. Instead, it is enough to show that a person would have been treated more favourably if they were the opposite sex; and
 - b) amending section 171 of the Pensions Act 2004 to introduce the same test for unequal treatment where members are entitled to payments from the PPF.
- 6.10 These amendments apply where the discrimination itself arose as a result of the effects of the Guaranteed Minimum Pensions legislation, and have the effect of removing the requirement for there to be an opposite sex comparator in these circumstances.

Sexual orientation equality changes

- 6.11 The Regulations restate retained EU law rights to non-discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation, as expressed in the Framework Directive and recognised by the Supreme Court in the Walker case. In particular, they address the provision of survivor benefits where the Equality Act 2010 otherwise permits an exception to the prohibition on sexual orientation discrimination in occupational pension schemes based on when the member accrued rights or was in pensionable service. The Regulations do this by amending paragraph 18 of Schedule 9 of the Equality Act 2010 so that it reflects the Framework Directive rights with which the legislation is incompatible. This applies to benefits payable to survivors who were in a same sex marriage or civil partnership (a “same sex legal relationship”) or opposite sex civil partnership⁸.

7. Policy background

What is being done and why?

- 7.1 A change to domestic legislation needs to be made before 31st December 2023, because, as a result of the Retained EU Law (Revocation and Reform) Act 2023, after this date retained EU law rights preserved by section 4 of EUWA, including as explained in decisions made by the European Court of Justice and the UK Supreme Court, will be lost.

⁸ Civil partnership was extended to opposite sex couples by the Civil Partnership (Opposite-sex Couples) Regulations 2019 and the Civil Partnership (Scotland) Act 2020.

- 7.2 The Retained EU Law (Revocation and Reform) Act 2023 provides the Government with powers in relation to retained EU law, including allowing laws to be revoked, replaced, restated or updated. It allows the Government to restate secondary retained EU law in two areas of equality policy. These are the right to equal pay between men and women as decided in the judgment of the European Court of Justice in *Allonby* and non-discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation as decided in the judgment of the UK Supreme Court in *Walker*. Commitments have been made to reflect both judgments in legislation, which is currently read in light of the *Allonby* and *Walker* judgments.

Allonby court case

- 7.3 The European Court of Justice's *Allonby* judgment in 2004 established that the directly effective right to equal pay requires that an opposite sex comparator is not necessary to demonstrate sex inequality, where sex discrimination arises as a result of provisions in legislation. This judgment therefore nullified the requirements for an opposite sex comparator in order for the requirement to equalise pensions for the unequal effect of Guaranteed Minimum Pensions legislation, as set out in sections 64 and 66 to 68 of the Equality Act 2010, to apply (and in equivalent provisions on pension compensation provided by the Pension Protection Fund (PPF) in section 171 of the Pensions Act 2004).

Walker court case

- 7.4 The UK Supreme Court's *Walker* judgment in 2017 established that the Framework Directive requires that survivors of same sex legal relationships have the same rights as survivors of opposite sex legal relationships to survivor benefits from the member's occupational pension scheme, regardless of when the member was in pensionable service in the scheme. This judgment therefore disapplied provisions in the Equality Act 2010 which permit occupational pension schemes to restrict survivor benefits for survivors of a same sex legal relationship to benefits based on pensionable service since same sex legal relationships became possible in the UK following the introduction of civil partnerships.

Changes required to the Equality Act 2010 and the Pensions Act 2004

- 7.5 Whilst the Government has accepted the position in both *Allonby* on equalising pensions between men and women and *Walker* on survivor benefit rights in same sex legal relationships, they are not yet reflected in domestic legislation. The rights which they addressed formed part of UK law while the UK was a member of the EU, and their effect in UK law was retained by the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018. However, this will change on 1st January 2024 under the Retained EU Law (Revocation and Reform) Act 2023 unless the necessary amendments are made to the relevant legislation to preserve the effect of this law. This instrument restates the law from 1st January 2024, which will provide certainty to pension schemes and their members.

Sex equality

Current position

- 7.6 Members of defined benefit occupational pension schemes who were contracted out of the additional State Pension between 1978 and 1997 accrued Guaranteed Minimum Pension (GMP) rights in place of the additional State Pension. The additional State

Pension was the element of the old State Pension that was earnings related, and schemes took the responsibility for paying members a GMP which was of broadly similar value to the State Pension foregone. Because GMPs are linked to the old State Pension system, which had different retirement ages for men and women, GMPs are subject to different rules depending on a scheme member's sex. For example, women can receive their GMP at age 60 while men can receive their GMP at age 65.

- 7.7 The European Court of Justice's Barber⁹ judgment in 1990 established that pensions were a form of deferred pay and subject to the requirements of what is now Article 157 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union on equal pay, and, as such, it is unlawful to discriminate between men and women in relation to occupational pensions. The requirement to equalise occupational pensions for the unequal effect of the GMP legislation was confirmed by the High Court's Lloyds¹⁰ judgment in October 2018. Affected occupational pension schemes are therefore required to equalise members' overall pensions, including for the effect of the unequal sex-based GMP rules. The GMP equalisation obligation only applies to service on and after the date of the Barber judgment, 17th May 1990, which means that in practice the obligation applies to pension rights accrued between 17th May 1990 and 5th April 1997.
- 7.8 Sections 64 and 66 to 68 of the Equality Act 2010 require schemes to equalise in respect of pensionable service on and after 17th May 1990 where an opposite sex comparator can be used to demonstrate sex-based inequality. Section 171 of the Pensions Act 2004 makes the same requirement of the PPF, which pays compensation based on accrued pension rights where it has taken on responsibility for paying compensation to members of a scheme. The Allonby judgment was not itself concerned with GMPs, but established that, in relation to the judgment in Barber, an opposite sex comparator is not required to demonstrate sex inequality where sex discrimination arises as a result of provisions in legislation. The Government therefore made a Written Ministerial Statement in January 2010¹¹ clarifying that section 171 of the Pensions Act 2004 and, what are now, sections 64 and 66 to 68 of the Equality Act 2010 were nullified in as far as they required an opposite sex-comparator in order for pensions to be equalised for the unequal impact of the GMP legislation, and stating that it intended to bring forward amending legislation to reflect this. The Government, and all subsequent Governments, stated that pension schemes and the PPF needed to proceed accordingly. However, the amendments were not made due to time pressures. It was not considered to be a pressing requirement to amend the legislation, because the Allonby judgment's explanation of the directly effective right to equal pay was itself considered to be sufficient because of the supremacy of EU law over domestic legislation.

Changes being made

- 7.9 The Retained EU Law (Revocation and Reform) Act 2023 has changed this position. This aspect of retained EU law on the directly effective right to equal pay in the context of sex inequalities arising from the GMP legislation now needs to be incorporated into domestic legislation to ensure that the requirement for pension schemes to equalise pensions for the period 17th May 1990 to 5th April 1997, without the need for an opposite sex comparator, is put beyond doubt. Similarly, changes are

⁹ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A61988CJ0262>

¹⁰ <https://www.bailii.org/ew/cases/EWHC/Ch/2018/2839.html>

¹¹ <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2010-01-28/debates/10012850000017/PensionSchemesAndEquality>

required to put beyond doubt that the PPF is required to equalise compensation without the need for an opposite sex comparator, where the discrimination arose in relation to pensionable service between 17th May 1990 and 5th April 1997 as a result of the effects of the GMP legislation.

Survivor benefits for same sex couples

- 7.10 The Regulations amend the Equality Act 2010 in relation to survivor benefits payable to survivors of same sex legal relationships by occupational pension schemes. The Regulations give effect to the UK Supreme Court decision in the Walker case in legislation.

Current position

- 7.11 In 2017 the Supreme Court ruled that, on Mr Walker’s death, his husband would be entitled to a spouse’s pension calculated on all the years of his service in his employer’s pension scheme, not just his pensionable service from 5th December 2005 (when the UK created a form of legal recognition for same sex partnerships comparable to marriage). This was because the limitation was incompatible with the Framework Directive.
- 7.12 At present the legislation permits schemes to restrict survivor benefits for survivors of same sex civil partnerships and marriages. The Walker judgment disapplied this limitation in relation to periods of service before December 2005.
- 7.13 The Government currently relies on the judgment to disapply the sexual orientation exception to Part 5 of the Equality Act 2010 (work) to the extent which it otherwise permits a limit on the pensionable service that is used to determine survivor benefits for surviving same sex spouses and civil partners by reference to the introduction of civil partnerships in 2005.

Changes being made

- 7.14 The Regulations will restate the rights addressed in the Walker judgment by amending this exception to reflect the judgment. This means that when the REUL Act comes into force schemes will continue to be required to calculate benefits for survivors of same sex legal relationships based on pension rights in the same way as survivors of opposite sex marriages. This also applies to opposite sex civil partners.
- 7.15 Whilst the judgment in the Walker case was a UK judgment it concerns EU law on sexual orientation discrimination contained in the Framework Directive. Framework Directive rights preserved by section 4 of EUWA will cease to form part of UK law as a result of the REUL Act 2023.
- 7.16 The amendment will mean that occupational pension schemes will continue not to be able to restrict survivor benefits by reference to the introduction of civil partnerships in December 2005. This restatement should also give certainty to pension schemes and members.

8. European Union Withdrawal and Future Relationship

- 8.1 This instrument does not relate to withdrawal from the European Union and does not trigger the statement requirements under the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018¹².

¹² <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2018/16/contents>

- 8.2 These regulations are made using the restatement powers at sections 11 and 13 of the Retained EU Law (Revocation and Reform) Act 2023 to make changes to the Equality Act 2010 and the Pensions Act 2004 to bring them in line with retained EU law rights, as explained by two court judgments.

9. Consolidation

- 9.1 This Regulation does not amend another statutory instrument, consolidation is therefore not necessary.

10. Consultation outcome

- 10.1 There is no statutory duty on the Secretary of State to consult on these Regulations. A formal consultation¹³ had been conducted in 2012 on the changes proposed on removing the requirement for an opposite sex comparator in a pension scheme to achieve sex equality, where that sex discrimination arises because of Guaranteed Minimum Pensions (GMPs). Some consultation respondents did not agree with the Department's interpretation of the Allonby judgment and suggested that the judgement only concerned access to schemes, not the level of benefits provided by schemes. However, the Government's position remained unchanged and these regulations reflect the proposals as set out in 2012 - that the judgment in Allonby means that where legislation is the single source for the discrimination in question, only a notional comparator is required, and that the requirement for an opposite sex comparator was therefore nullified.

11. Guidance

- 11.1 Trustees and scheme administrators of pension schemes are aware of the obligation to equalise pensions for the effect of unequal GMPs and the requirement on survivor benefits for same sex couples, and there is no change to the overall effect of the law from these Regulations. No guidance is therefore necessary.

12. Impact

- 12.1 There is no, or no significant, impact on business, charities or voluntary bodies.
- 12.2 There is no, or no significant, impact on the public sector.
- 12.3 A full Impact Assessment has not been prepared for this instrument because there is no new impact on pension schemes in the private sector, as schemes have already been required to comply with the outcome of the two court cases for several years. A review¹⁴ of survivor benefits was conducted in 2014. This review costed various changes that schemes might make to survivor benefits. It found that the capitalised cost of removing differences in survivor benefits between opposite sex surviving spouses, same sex surviving spouses and same sex surviving civil partners in private sector schemes was around £0.4 billion. The review found that only 27 per cent of schemes that provided survivor benefits to those scheme members in a same sex civil

¹³https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/220480/draft-ops-and-pfea-regs-2012.pdf

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/188342/draft-ops-and-pfea-regs-2012-interim-response.pdf

¹⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/occupational-pension-schemes-review-of-survivor-benefits>

partnership relied on the provisions in the Equality Act 2010 by having a difference in treatment to those in an opposite sex marriage. The cost of any changes to survivor benefits for same sex couples is relatively low because any changes affect a relatively small proportion of the population, and therefore of scheme membership. Around 3.2% of the population in England and Wales identified with an LGB+ orientation (“Gay or Lesbian”, “Bisexual” or “Other sexual orientation”) in the 2021 census¹⁵.

13. Regulating small business

- 13.1 The legislation applies to activities that are undertaken by small businesses.
- 13.2 No specific action is proposed to minimise regulatory burdens on small businesses (employing up to 50 people).
- 13.3 Removing small businesses (i.e. small schemes) from this requirement would adversely affect scheme members, as it could mean that men or women could be discriminated against in schemes and could result in discrimination against couples in same sex legal relationships.

14. Monitoring & review

- 14.1 As this instrument is made under the Retained EU Law (Revocation and Reform) Act 2023, no review clause is required.

15. Contact

- 15.1 Gabrielle Park at the Department for Work and Pensions email: Gabrielle.E.Park@dwp.gov.uk can be contacted with any queries regarding the instrument.
- 15.2 Fiona Frobisher, Deputy Director for Defined Benefit Pension Policy, at the Department for Work and Pensions can confirm that this Explanatory Memorandum meets the required standard.
- 15.3 Laura Trott MBE, the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the Department for Work and Pensions, can confirm that this Explanatory Memorandum meets the required standard.

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[https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/sexuality/bulletins/sexualorientationenglandandwales/census2021#:~:text=Source%3A%20Office%20for%20National%20Statistics%20%E2%80%93%20Census%202021&text=43.4%20million%20people%20\(89.4%25%20of,%25\)%20selected%20%E2%80%93%20Other%20sexual%20orientation%E2%80%9D](https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/sexuality/bulletins/sexualorientationenglandandwales/census2021#:~:text=Source%3A%20Office%20for%20National%20Statistics%20%E2%80%93%20Census%202021&text=43.4%20million%20people%20(89.4%25%20of,%25)%20selected%20%E2%80%93%20Other%20sexual%20orientation%E2%80%9D)