**Plan Issuer Roundtable, ProShare, London**

**28 September 2016**

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**Report**

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The roundtable, which was hosted by ProShare (UK) and chaired by Gabbi Stopp, heard presentations on ten employee share ownership plans, split evenly between large UK-based multi-national enterprises and similar large companies based in other EU Member States. This was the second such event organised by SNPI (NL), ProShare and AGP (Germany), member organisations of IAFP/AIPF and followed the AGM of the Association, also hosted by ProShare.

This roundtable followed on from the event held in Utrecht, NL, in September 2015. There were twenty participants.

The companies that presented their share plans came from a range of business sectors, such as:

* Financial services (insurance)
* Engineering
* Healthcare
* Mobile communications
* Oil exploration, refining and distribution
* Retail
* Steel technology.

A common theme running through all the case studies was the importance of having an effective communications strategy to get information to employees participating in share schemes and the challenges for these strategies in reaching global workforces, with a very diverse range of linguistic and cultural differences.

Various ways of communicating with share plan participants were outlined, from the extensive communications approach which include a mix of communications tools, such as paper (brochures, posters, leaflets, etc.), digital (through company intranets, TV presentations and e-mails) and oral (face-to-face annual briefing meetings, reporting back, etc.). In contrast, other companies rely solely on ‘paperless’ digital communications.

All the presentations addressed the challenges of providing share plans globally and, in particular, there was some discussion and sharing of experiences on the challenges of rolling out plans in China. Some companies found this too difficult. Consequently, they do not offer a share plan to their Chinese employees. Other presenters said they have had better experiences in extended their plans to China, while other companies are currently proposing to expand their plans into China, but expressed concerns about the legal risks.

Two other interesting aspect of the presentations was the substantial level of employee share ownership in some of the companies, ranging from 13% to 17%, and, second, the level of ‘take-up’ by eligible employees, which differed across global regions and was dependent, in many companies, on local share plan champions, senior manager endorsement and promoters.

After each presentation, there was an opportunity for a detailed ‘question and answer’ session and exchange of views and experiences between the roundtable participants. In summing up, Pascale Nieuwland-Jansen, Director, SNPI, noted some differences between the approach of the UK-based and EU-based companies. In particular, the importance placed on employee share ownership, with a couple of UK presentations questioning the value, in terms of costs, of such plans, while there was more of an emphasis on employee engagement, commitment and building ‘ownership’ of the enterprises in the other companies. As all participants found these exchanges very useful it was agreed to hold a third roundtable in 2017 in conjunction with the next AIPF/IAFP AGM.

Kevin P O’Kelly

October 2016