



ANNUAL REVIEW 2016

March 2017

Foreword

'Pre-pack' administrations constitute a small fraction of insolvency procedures in a given year. Yet it is pre-packs that are responsible for a significant proportion of attention given to the UK's insolvency framework by the media, politicians, and creditor groups.

Although relatively few in number, pre-packs are an important part of the UK's restructuring landscape. They help rescue businesses and jobs and they are an effective means of generating the best possible return for creditors when a company becomes insolvent. But these positives are often overshadowed by concerns about the transparency of the procedure: creditors will only find out about a pre-pack after it has taken place. While the speed and discretion involved in a pre-pack are required to protect a company's value (and potential returns to creditors), creditors will understandably seek reassurance that a pre-pack represents the 'best deal', especially when a 'connected party' purchase is involved.

As a result of these concerns, pre-packs were the subject of the 2014 Graham Review (see p5-6 for more detail) which made a series of recommendations for improving trust and transparency in the pre-pack process. The Pre-pack Pool was set up in response to one of these recommendations.

The Pool is a voluntary process for connected parties purchasing a company's business or assets through a pre-pack administration. The Pool is an opportunity to assure creditors that the sale has been reviewed by independent business experts and that the case for a pre-pack has been made.

Assessing the success of the Pre-pack Pool in its first year is a difficult proposition. Just over one-in-four eligible pre-packs were referred to the Pool in its first 14 months (the period covered by this review), which, while a lower proportion than expected, is still encouraging for a new, voluntary step in a long-established insolvency procedure. Use of the Pool accelerated as the first year progressed as awareness increased among the insolvency, creditor, and business communities.

2016 key facts about the pool

- **53** referrals to the Pool (1 November 2015 – 31 December 2016)
- **34** 'case for the pre-pack is not unreasonable' opinions
- **13** 'pre-pack not unreasonable but limited evidence' opinions
- **6** 'case for the pre-pack is not made' opinions
- **28%** of eligible pre-packs submitted to the Pool for review
- The proportion of pre-packs involving a connected party purchase has fallen from previous years. In 2010, **72%** of pre-packs involved a connected party; in the Pool's first 14 months, **51%** involved a connected party.

It is worth noting that, given the figures reported by the insolvency regulators, the number of cases eligible for referral to the Pool is well below what might have been expected based on earlier pre-pack statistics. In 2010-11, over one-in-four administrations involved a pre-pack, while seven-in-ten of these involved a connected party. In the Pool's opening 14 months, just over one-in-five administrations involved a pre-pack and just one-in-two of these involved a connected party. Alongside other factors, it may be that the introduction of the Pool and the wider post-Graham reforms have deterred some connected party pre-packs from being proposed in the first place.

What is a 'pre-pack'?

A 'pre-pack' administration is where the sale of all or parts of a business is arranged before it enters administration. The sale is completed shortly after an administrator is appointed.

What is a 'connected party' pre-pack?

A 'connected party' pre-pack is where an entity connected to the insolvent company (e.g. its directors) purchases the company's business or assets.

It is important to remember that responsibility for using the Pool lies with the connected party purchaser and not with the insolvency practitioner or creditors. That said, the insolvency profession and creditors have important roles to play in ensuring connected party purchasers are informed of the option to use the Pool and putting pressure on them to do so.

The insolvency regulators have provided welcome support for the Pool and have ensured that insolvency practitioners comply with their obligations in relation to awareness of the Pool. Similarly, creditor bodies, including the British Property Federation and Chartered Institute of Credit Management, have given invaluable support for the Pool at an institutional level, although responses to the Pool from individual creditors have been more muted. In feedback sought from creditors by the Pool, creditor awareness of the Pool has been low and few have taken the time to read through administrators' reports. This is not necessarily a surprise: low creditor engagement with insolvency procedures is a perennial problem. Those connected party purchasers who have used the Pool have said it has been an important step in building credibility and trust in the 'NewCo' among creditors.

As part of the 2015 Small Business, Enterprise and Employment Act, the Government gave itself a reserve power to ban any connected party administration purchase. As the Graham Review itself says, pre-packs do benefit the UK economy. It would be a shame to lose them: fewer business rescues, more job losses, and lower returns to creditors are possible outcomes in such a scenario.

The Pool is a key part – although not the only part – of the post-Graham reforms and widespread use of the Pool may help reassure creditors about the pre-pack process and would help protect the procedure's place in the insolvency framework. Hopefully referrals to the Pool will increase in 2017 as stakeholders become more familiar with the way it works and the reassurance it provides.

About the Pre-pack Pool

The Pre-pack Pool was launched on the 1st of November 2015 following the recommendations of the Graham Review of 'pre-pack' administrations.

The aims of the pool are to increase the transparency of connected party pre-packs and to provide assurance for creditors that independent business experts have reviewed a proposed connected party pre-pack transaction before it is completed.

The Pool is a body of experienced business people who will provide an opinion on the proposed sale of a company and/or its assets to a connected party. This opinion may be made available to creditors at a later date. One member of the Pool will review any application and they will offer one of three opinions on the proposed sale:

1. The case for the pre-pack is not unreasonable;
2. The case for a pre-pack is not unreasonable but there are minor limitations in the evidence provided;
3. The case for the pre-pack is not made.

What is 'SIP16'?

The Statement of Insolvency Practice 16 is part of the insolvency regulatory framework that dictates what insolvency practitioners should do when a pre-pack has been proposed. The report to creditors following a pre-pack is known as a 'SIP16' report.

The Pool's opinion can be made available to creditors as part of a 'SIP16' report. It is the responsibility of the connected party purchaser to submit an application to the Pool. Use of the Pool is not compulsory.

When a pre-pack sale to a connected party is proposed, an insolvency practitioner should inform the purchaser of their ability to approach the Pre-pack Pool. The insolvency practitioner should then include statements in a SIP16 report to explain whether the Pre-pack Pool has been approached by the purchaser or not, and that, if there is one, a copy of the Pool's opinion has been requested from the purchaser. If a copy of the opinion is provided by the connected party, it should be included within the SIP16 statement. Ordinarily this will be provided to the insolvency practitioner directly through the on-line Pre-pack Pool portal.

Views from insolvency practitioners

"The speed with which the process was dealt with helped to enable an orderly and rapid sale of the business. Our proposals were also subsequently approved by the major creditors which included a substantial number of landlords." – Neil Bennett, Leonard Curtis

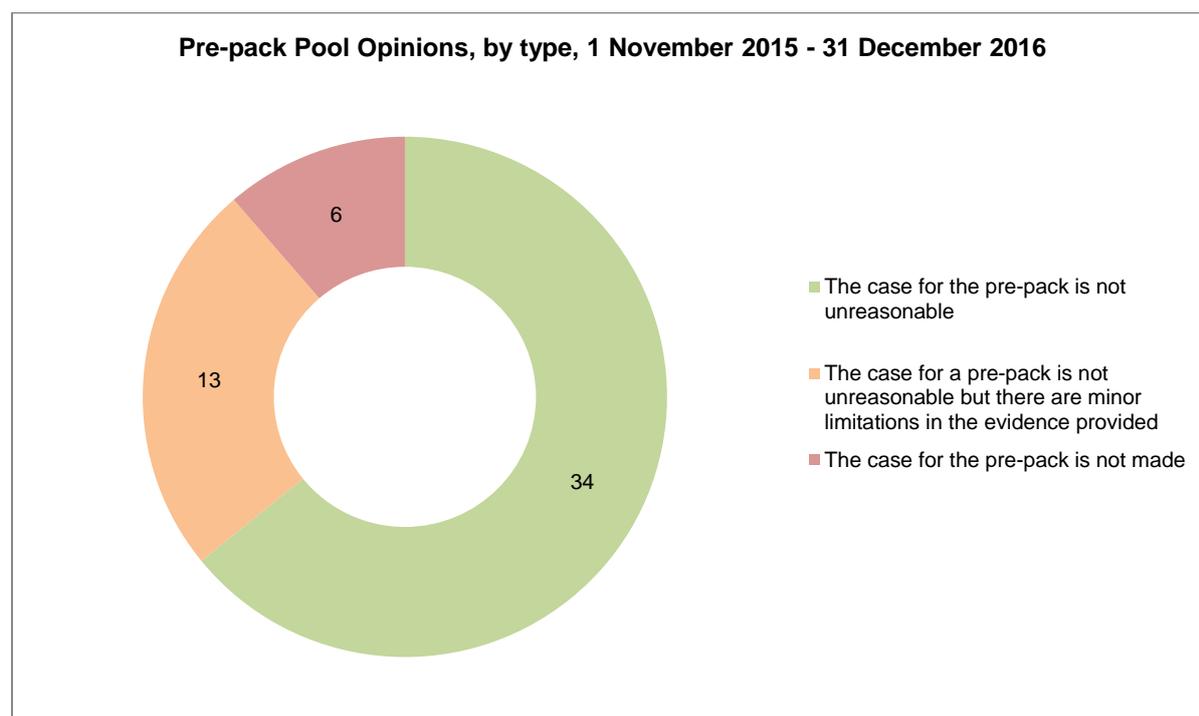
As well as going to creditors, SIP16 reports must be sent to an insolvency practitioner's Recognised Professional Body (RPB). There are five RPBs: the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA), the Chartered Accountants Regulatory Board (CARB), the Insolvency Practitioners Association (IPA), the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales (ICAEW), and the Institute of Chartered Accountants Scotland (ICAS).

The Pool is a limited company and independent of the government and insolvency and restructuring profession.

2016 Pool Statistics

Cases reviewed – responses

Between 1 November 2015 and 31 December 2016, a total of **53** proposed connected party pre-pack purchases were submitted to the Pool for review. Of these, **34** (64%) received a 'not unreasonable' opinion, **13** (25%) received a 'not unreasonable but limitations to evidence' opinion, and **6** (11%) received a 'case not made' opinion.



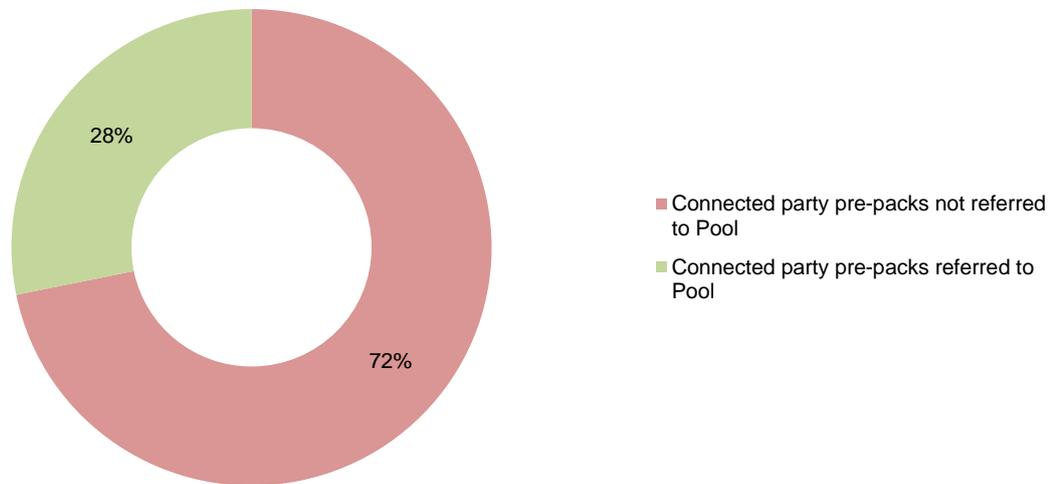
Note: 4 of the 6 'case not made responses' relate to a group of connected companies

Cases reviewed – share of all pre-packs

Following any pre-pack administration, the insolvency practitioner must send a copy of the SIP16 report to their RPB. According to the RPBs, between 1st November 2015 and 31st December 2016 **371** SIP16 reports were filed. Of these, **188** involved a purchase by a connected party (51%).

The 371 pre-packs reported in the period covered by this review represents **22%** of the **1,689** administrations that took place over a similar time period (1 October 2015 - 31 December 2016).

Connected party pre-packs by Pool referral, 1 November 2015 - 31 December 2016



Cases reviewed – ‘success’ rate of reviewed sales

Views from the creditor community

“The CICM actively supports the objectives of the Pre-Pack Pool and the increased transparency that it delivers. The progress to date has been encouraging, but the laudable aims of The Pool will only be realised if The Pool is more widely promoted.”

“All parties and stakeholders, including the CICM, business bodies, the insolvency profession, and the Government need to make a concerted effort to promote The Pool and its positive role in bringing greater confidence to the Pre-Pack process.” – Philip King, Chartered Institute of Credit Management

34 proposed sales referred to the Pool between 1 November 2015 and 31 December 2016 a ‘not unreasonable’ opinion. Of these sales, the Pool is aware of just **one** company that has later entered another insolvency procedure.

Background to the Pool

The Insolvency Landscape

The number of cases reviewed by the Pool should be seen in the context of falling insolvency numbers since the last recession. Compared to the peak in 2008 (4,808), administration appointments had fallen 72% by 2016 (1,349). Pre-packs have become much rarer over the last five years.

Data on historical pre-pack numbers is limited but some figures are available for 2010 and 2011 in the Insolvency Service's reports on the operation of SIP16 for those years. Compared to the 2010 and 2011 data, the numbers of both pre-packs and connected party pre-packs were lower than might have been expected in the Pool's first year of operation.

In 2010-11, 26-27% of administrations were pre-packs, of which over 70% involved a connected party purchase. Not only have pre-pack numbers fallen faster than the overall decline in administrations, but connected party purchases have fallen, too.

	2010*	2011*	1 November 2015 – 31 December 2016
Total administrations	2,835	2,808	1,689
Total pre-packs	769**	723	371
Pre-packs as a % of administrations	27%	26%	22%
Total pre-packs with a connected party purchase	554 (approx.)**	571 (approx.)	188
% of pre-packs with a connected party purchase	72%**	79%	51%
Total pre-packs without a connected party purchase	215 (approx.)**	152 (approx.)	183
% of pre-packs without a connected party purchase	28%**	21%	49%

**Numbers are from the Insolvency Service's reports on the operation of SIP16 for 2010 and 2011. NB. Total administration figures in these reports differ to those given in the Insolvency Service's official quarterly insolvency statistics.*

***Research carried out by the University of Wolverhampton for the Graham Review found that, based on a sample of 499 2010 pre-packs, there were 316 connected party sales (63%)*

2015 Graham Review

In July 2013, the government commissioned Teresa Graham to lead an independent review into pre-pack administrations and their economic impact.

The Graham Review noted that pre-pack numbers are relatively small but that a perceived lack of transparency around the process meant pre-packs attracted a disproportionate level of attention and criticism.

The review concluded that ‘there is a place for pre-packs in the UK’s insolvency landscape’ and that ‘the benefits that pre-packing brings to the UK’s insolvency framework mean that reform of the process is worthwhile.’ The review also stated that pre-packs can preserve jobs and that they are cheaper than other insolvency procedures. However, the review also found that pre-packs ‘lack transparency’ and that the marketing and valuation of potential pre-pack companies needed to be improved, and that more consideration should be given to the future viability of a company once it has been through a pre-pack.

The review made six recommendations for reforming pre-packs:

1. Pre-pack Pool. On a voluntary basis, connected parties approach a ‘pre-pack pool’ before the sale and disclose details of the deal, for the pool member to opine on.
2. Viability Review. On a voluntary basis, the connected party complete a ‘viability review’ on the new company.
3. SIP 16: that the Joint Insolvency Committee considers, at the earliest opportunity, the redrafted SIP16 in Annex A.
4. Marketing: that all marketing of businesses that pre-pack comply with six principles of good marketing and that any deviation from these principles be brought to creditors’ attention.
5. Valuations: SIP16 be amended to the effect that valuations must be carried out by a valuer who holds professional indemnity insurance.
6. SIP 16: that the Insolvency Service withdraws from monitoring SIP16 statements and that monitoring be picked up by the Recognised Professional Bodies.

Views from the business community

“The Pre-Pack Pool is an important step in de-stigmatising the pre-pack administration regime, which in many cases represents by far the best outcome for creditors of distressed businesses.

“Creditors of a business which has undergone a pre-pack to a formerly connected party (usually a director or directors) will be able to draw comfort from a positive opinion from the Pool.

*“The IOD has been supportive of this initiative from its original concept and is pleased to see it in action.” –
Oliver Parry, Institute of Directors*

The reforms recommended by the Graham Review, including the Pre-pack Pool, were introduced in 2015.

Appendix 1: Pool Members and stakeholder representatives

Members of The Pool (Reviewers)

Alec Sanderson BA, C Dir, FBCS, CEng
Colin Coghlan C Dir
David Abbott MSc, FCA, AMCT,
David Blair MA, FCA, MBA
David Newman C Dir, MBA
Dr Simon Chapman C Dir
Kevin Mouatt C Dir
Len Jones BA(Hons), FCA, MBA, MSc
Paddy Campbell FCA
Philip Gardner BA(Hons), FCA, CDir, DipM
Philip Long FCA
Philip Oatley FCA, BA(Hons)
Philip Walter BSc(Hons), C Dir, FCMI
Rodney Hare FCA
Simon Willis C Dir, BSc
Tim Rose C Dir, MBA
Tony Sanderson FCA, BA(Econ)
Tony Wilkinson FCMA

Oversight Group (stakeholders)

Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA)
British Printing Industries Federation (BPIF)
British Property Federation (BPF)
Chartered Institute of Credit Management (CICM)
Insolvency Practitioners Association (IPA)
Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales (ICAEW)
Institute of Chartered Accountants of Scotland (ICAS)
Institute of Directors (IOD)
R3
The Insolvency Service

Appendix 2: Pre-Pack Pool Limited.



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