

PLUS 10-Year anniversary of Professional Paraplanner

Professional Paraplanner Awards 2024

Headline Sponsor

SCOTTISH WIDOWS



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EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

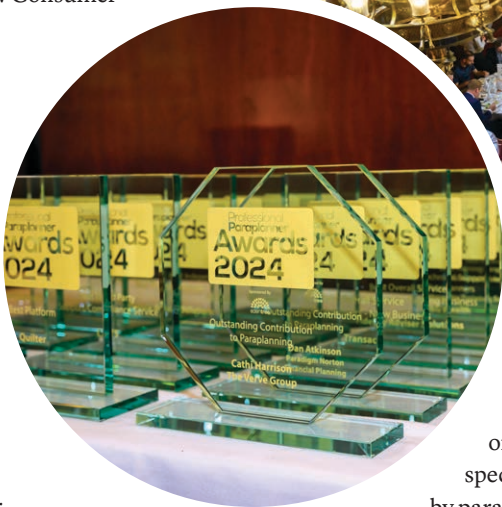


The development of the paraplanning role over the past 10 years has been remarkable to witness. Once considered part of the administration function, paraplanning is now at the technical heart of so many financial planning firms, providing the expertise that is essential in order to deliver the best service and outcomes for clients, especially under the new Consumer Duty regime.

Our annual awards were established to help paraplanners and administrators gain the recognition they deserve in an ever changing market. Launched in 2017 we have gradually increased the number of awards from three to this year's eight, including a new award for Best Investment Paraplanner.

To mark our 10th anniversary, we also introduced a one-off award for 2024 for Outstanding Contribution to Paraplanning.

Our provider awards continue to be



sought after by providers because in order to win one, they have to be specifically nominated by paraplanners around the country, in recognition for the level and quality of their service and/or products as delivered over the past year. And paraplanners set a high bar.

Finally, I would like to thank our lead sponsor Scottish Widows and our nine Partner sponsors of the awards – all companies who recognise the influence of paraplanning in the financial advice market and the importance of paraplanners in achieving the best outcomes for clients.

Rob Kingsbury
Editor,
Professional Paraplanner

Judging panel

A big thank you to our judging panel, who took time out of their busy schedules to participate in the interviews with our shortlisted candidates. The judges this year were:



William Andrew
Head of London & Home Counties, Advisory Sales
Schroders



Kim Bendall
Director
Go Paraplanning



Les Cameron
Head of Technical
M&G Wealth



Siân Davis Cole
Director
Plan Works



Richard Cooper
Business Development Manager
LIBF



Laura Cowling
Learning and Development
Consultant (Paraplanning)
Ascot Lloyd



Alan Gow
Director
Argonaut Paraplanning



Rob Kingsbury
Editor
Professional Paraplanner



Martin Rooks
Head of Advisory and Partnership
Marketing, Fidelity International



Juliet Schooling Latter
Research Director, FundCalibre /
Chelsea Financial Services



Caroline Stuart
Director
Sparrow Paraplanning



Alexis Ward
Strategic Partnership Lead
Scottish Widows

THANK YOU TO ALL OUR SPONSORS

Headline Sponsor



Scottish Widows is delighted to once again be the headline sponsor of the Professional Paraplanner Awards. In the intricate world of financial planning, the role of paraplanners has become an integral element of the advice process.

The level of technical expertise and diligence brought to the process enhances the accuracy and quality of advice given

and delivers an elevated client experience. Through its increasing involvement in the advice process, the paraplanner role has become truly transformative in the industry, helping to foster trust and confidence in financial services.

At the same time, in the ever-evolving regulatory landscape, including Consumer Duty, these individuals are key to maintaining standards of quality and professionalism,

which are so important for our industry. The Professional Paraplanner Awards both recognise and celebrate the excellence and dedication that paraplanners bring to financial services every day.

Congratulations to the winners and everyone short-listed for the awards.

Ranila Ravi-Burslem
Intermediary Distribution Director,
Scottish Widows

Partner Sponsors



PROFESSIONAL PARAPLANNER'S 10-YEAR ANNIVERSARY



This year's Professional Paraplanner Awards presented the perfect opportunity to celebrate and showcase the magazine's first decade serving the paraplanner community. *Professional Paraplanner* arose from research into the paraplanning market conducted by Research in Finance, the publishers of the magazine and a recognition that here was an important group of people within the financial planning profession who were largely being ignored and needed a publication of their own.

We started work on the first issue in February 2014, interviewing our first cover star John Redmond, and in the May, *Professional*

Paraplanner was launched at the then IFP Paraplanner conference.

We took with us 100 copies of the magazine and the iconic 'Don't panic get yourself a professional paraplanner' mousemats and coasters. We went home with all the magazines and coasters gone and a lot of fantastic comments that gave us the confidence that this was a magazine that was going to quickly gain traction.

In 2015 we launched our first Technical Insight Seminar event, a half-day event at the Grange St Paul's hotel in London, and this year we are taking the seminars to 17 locations around the country from Aberdeen to Exeter.

In 2017 we launched the Professional

Paraplanner Awards - now in their 8th year. We published 90 issues of the magazine before reluctantly having to shift to digital only.

Over the 10 years we have seen paraplanning move from being perceived as a useful admin function to becoming the engine rooms of so many financial planning and advice firms around the country. We've also watched the careers of paraplanners we interviewed in our early days go from strength to strength, as they have taken their skills and technical knowledge into a range of different roles, both within and without of paraplanning.

On these pages we celebrate some of our cover stars and the first 10 years of *Professional Paraplanner*.

Professional Paraplanner Awards 2024



One of this year's 17 Technical Insight Seminars around the country



Our first Paraplanner of the Year winner - Kat Mock, Unity Paraplanning



Aleksandra Sasin receives the first Outsourced Paraplanner award



Our 2023 Awards winners

PROFESSIONAL PARAPLANNER 2024 AWARDS – IN PICTURES



For the combined celebration of our 8th Annual awards and 10th Anniversary of *Professional Paraplanner*, we went bigger and better. Our 160 guests were wined, dined and entertained in the marvellous Merchant Taylor's Hall, the home of the Guild for that trade, before learning the names of this year's winners. The event itself wouldn't have been the same without the generosity of our sponsors and the hard work and organisation of the *Professional Paraplanner* events team.



THIS YEAR'S PARAPLANNER AWARDS

Over the eight years we have been hosting the Paraplanner Awards, the number of categories has been gradually growing, reflecting the development of paraplanning as a profession. In 2017 when we started the awards we had just three awards, Paraplanner of the Year, Paraplanner Team of the Year and Paraplanner Personality of the Year. We added Outsourced Paraplanner to include the burgeoning outsourced market, Administrator, to bring in this important and complementary role, New Paraplanner to give recruits to the profession an award to aim for, the Team Leader award as teams grew and paraplanners took on the role of unit head, and this year we have introduced Investment Paraplanner of the Year, to reflect the increasing influence paraplanners have in portfolio construction and recommendations and in Investment Committees.

This has also meant increasing the number of judges, to 12 this year, and expanding the time it takes to conduct the many interviews needed to come to a decision on the winners of the awards.

Our thanks to the judges for their time and commitment. We had plenty of robust discussions as decisions were not always easy to reach. Every year paraplanners come with a passion for and commitment to the paraplanner profession, which bodes so well for paraplanning's future.

Our final award this year was one created to help celebrate *Professional Paraplanner's* 10th anniversary. Many paraplanners have caught our eye over the years but with this award we wanted to recognise two who we have had continued interaction with and who have contributed to the growth of paraplanning as a profession but in very different ways.

Methodology

The Paraplanner Awards are entered through self-nomination. Candidates had first to write a 500-word essay on a topic set by the judges. They then were called to interview where they answered a number of questions, for three or four judges. All interviews were conducted online.



The Accelerate Adviser Solutions team stormed the awards with three wins



Paraplanner Team Leader of the Year - Hannah Wynick



Investment Paraplanner of the Year - Alasdair Wilson

Professional Paraplanner Awards 2024

Paraplanner of the Year (in-house)

Winner: Luke Sparkes - In Partnership Financial Advisers

Highly Commended: Lynn Larkin - Quilter Cheviot Financial Planning

Also shortlisted:

Chris Brown - Succession Wealth

Outsourced Paraplanner of the Year

Winner: Matt Baird - Accelerate Adviser Solutions

Highly Commended: Benjamin Fabi - Principled Paraplanning

Also shortlisted:

Beth Messenger - BAM Paraplanning

Investment Paraplanner of the Year

Winner: Alasdair Wilson - The Verve Group

Highly Commended: Reece Edwards - Hampshire Hill Group

Also shortlisted:

Rob Barnett - Crowe Financial Planning UK

Steven McBurnie -

Wright, Jonhston & Mackenzie LLP

Paraplanner Team of the Year

Winner: Crowe Financial Planning UK

Highly Commended: Navigatus

Highly Commended: eParaplan Connect

Also shortlisted:

The Verve Group

Paraplanner Team Leader of the Year

Winner: Hannah Wynick -

Core Financial Paraplanning

Highly Commended: Ashleigh Harrison -

Succession Wealth

Also shortlisted:

Kellie Ellis - eParaplan Connect

Administrator of the Year

Winner: Deb Watts -

Accelerate Adviser Solutions

Highly Commended: Micheala Hawkins -

Navigatus

Also shortlisted:

Martina Cravotta - eParaplan Connect

New Paraplanner of the Year

Winner: Stephanie Tennant -

Accelerate Adviser Solutions

Highly Commended: Sam Slack -

Holden & Partners

Also shortlisted:

Eszter Forrest - Succession Wealth

Personality of the Year

Benjamin Fabi - Principled Paraplanning

10 YEAR ANNIVERSARY AWARD

Outstanding Contribution to Paraplanning Award

Winner: Cathi Harrison - The Verve Group

Winner: Dan Atkinson - Paradigm Norton



Outstanding Contribution to Paraplanning - Dan Atkinson (right)

OUTSOURCED PARAPLANNER OF THE YEAR/ NEW PARAPLANNER OF THE YEAR/ ADMINISTRATOR OF THE YEAR

Accelerate Adviser Solutions

Outsourced Paraplanner of the Year – Matt Baird
New Paraplanner of the Year – Stephanie Tennant
Administrator of the Year – Deb Watts

The Accelerate Adviser Solutions team scooped three of the eight annual Paraplanner Awards this year, a first in the awards history. While they each won individual awards, their ability to innovate and constantly look to improve as a collective team, clearly imbues what they offer on an individual basis.

The team came together to start their own business in September 2022, after being made redundant from a local advice firm in Oakham, Rutland.

With six months' notice of redundancy, the three got their heads together and came up with a plan. "It was a case of do we just take redundancy and go our separate ways or do we take the opportunity to build something ourselves," says Matt Baird. "We jumped at the chance of continuing to work on something of our own."

As well as their history of working together, it's clear the team gels well – "we all like each other and get on really well, and we know each other's quirks, so that helps," Deb Watts says – and are

Administrator of the Year, Deb Watts is presented with the award by Alex Langhorn, head of Business Support, BTS



Outsourced Paraplanner of the Year, Matt Baird accepts the award from David Fox, director of Sales and Marketing, Dentons Pensions



Neil MacLeod, senior technical manager, M&G Wealth, presents the award for New Paraplanner of the Year to Stephanie Tennant

all on the same page when it comes to ensuring of the quality and level of service they offer.

"We all agreed from the outset that we wouldn't compromise on the quality of the work we offer," Matt says. "At times that has meant we haven't been able to grow as quickly as we could have, given the level of demand we are seeing, but quality of service is fundamental for us. It's how we have grown our reputation. The feedback we get from our clients is phenomenal and tells us we are doing the right thing."

Part of the team's USP, is their willingness and ability to help advice firms improve their processes. "Because we started from scratch, we could look at how to set up our processes in the way we wanted, taking what we knew worked and innovating and improving our systems, so we could offer something very efficient and very different for our clients," Matt says.

Each of the individuals in the team brings something different to the table. Matt is first point of contact for advice firms wanting to be clients. "When enquiries come I will talk to the client about Accelerate, how we work and what makes us different from other outsourced companies," Matt says. "We can look at where we can help not just in providing a great paraplanning and admin service but helping firms to review their internal processes and become more efficient themselves."

Stephanie delivers the paraplanning and technical knowledge, and Deb the administration. For both, innovating,

improving the service and increasing efficiencies is something they are constantly discussing and addressing. "We all work together on the business but we all have very defined roles in the business as well," Deb says. "We never have any conflict because we all know where we want to get to and we all want to get the best possible outcomes for everyone."

A major factor in the success of the business, they say, is their in-house pipeline tracking system. "We have developed this so we know exactly where we are, what's scheduled and what we are doing and for whom. And the client can see where their work is in the pipeline, so they never have to chase to find out," says Stephanie. "It's streamlined and efficient, simple but very effective," Deb adds. "It's good for the client and it's good for us as well."

As might be expected, the team has plans to grow the business. "We have a 3-5 year plan. We brought on another administrator, Emily, in October 2023 and we are about ready to take on another member of staff, which will allow us to open the doors and take on more clients," Matt says.

In the meantime, they are celebrating their win at the awards. "We never expected to win all three awards, so to get that confirmation from the judges that we are doing the right thing is amazing," Stephanie says.

PARAPLANNER OF THE YEAR

In association with



Luke Sparkes, In Partnership Financial Advisers

Luke Sparkes stepped into financial services “while making up my mind about university,” he says. He liked the technical aspects of dealing with pensions and stayed. He worked for a building society, an assurer and Dentons Pensions, before trying his hand at advising.

“I quickly came to realise that it was using my technical knowledge and skills in a productive way that I liked most, and so I looked around for a paraplaning role.” He joined In Partnership in 2021, having already gained his Level 4 diploma and attained Level 6 in 2022, becoming a fellow of the PFS. Since then, he has used his own exam experiences to help develop training

programmes for new joiners to the firm. Luke sees paraplaning as the technical hub and help desk for the firm, assisting with details about charges/products through to wider legislative queries. “It’s not always easy for advisers to keep up to date with the technical elements of advice,” he says, “which is where we can help.”

It also means paraplaners should challenge advisers when they think there may be a better way of doing things, he says. His tips for this are “not to be afraid of what the reply might be. Be crystal clear on your reasons and believe in what you are saying.

“And don’t be afraid to pick up the phone and ask questions to get clear on things. We are all working towards the same goal, doing the best for the client. Also lean in on your colleagues and team leader to sense check your thoughts. That way you can have a constructive conversation.”



Scottish Widows' Ranila Ravi Burslem presents the award to Luke

Crucial to delivering good outcomes, he says, “is to get myself into the clients’ shoes. It is only when we understand what the client is trying to achieve, that we can formulate a bespoke financial plan to help meet their needs and objectives.”

On his award win, he says: “I see it as a combination of all my experience to date and working with my advisers. No two days are the same and it has to be a collaborative effort if we are to do a good job for the client.”

PARAPLANNER TEAM OF THE YEAR

In association with



Crowe Financial Planning UK

The Crowe Financial Planning paraplaning team consists of 14 individuals, including five senior paraplaners, four associate paraplaners and a recently created paraplaner support role, tasked with elements such as file compliance checks and letter of authority chasing. They are complemented by the client support team, undertaking admin duties.

A fundamental element of the team’s success, says paraplaning manager Zoe Hitchcock, is the closeness, inclusion and support amongst the team. The extent of this is impressive given the team is dotted across the country, from Manchester to Kent. Explaining this, Zoe says: “Although we are all at different levels there is no hierarchy in that everybody is encouraged to think of ways we can improve and put their ideas across, and they know they will be appreciated



The Crowe Financial Planning team accept the award from the AIC's Nick Britton.

and considered. There’s a lot of trust in the team too. We all help each other out and people know they can ask questions if they need to. When we have new members join, it never takes long for them to feel at ease.”

Senior paraplaner, Katie Burgess, who joined the team a year ago, adds: “From day one, everyone was so supportive. Other members of the team would regularly ring me up to see if I was okay and had everything I needed or had any questions. In our team meetings we

share work and personal wins and we have a WhatsApp group, which we have to support one another. When one of our team was doing a marathon on a Saturday, everyone was on the WhatsApp group keeping each other up to date on where he was and on his time. I thought that was really nice. We have a close and friendly relationship with each other.”

The team is particularly proud of its report writing record. Zoe says: “All our cases go to an external compliance company for random checking where 1 is excellent. We are consistently receiving ones and are above the industry average. And in our recent client survey, clients gave us a score of 9.57 out of 10 for the ease of understanding of the recommendations given.”

Paraplaning team days also get the team together to generate new ideas and work on improving processes. On the team’s award win, Zoe says: “It was an honour to be shortlisted and incredible to win. We are all still buzzing about it.”

PARAPLANNER TEAM LEADER OF THE YEAR

In association with



Hannah Wynick, Core Financial Planning

Hannah Wynick established Core Financial Paraplanning in 2011 as a freelance business and, she says, it has only been in the past couple of years that she has set about growing the firm.

Like many paraplanning team leaders, Hannah hasn't had any formal team leader training, she has learned on the job. She did have one advantage though, she says, as her mother, father and grandmother, all ran their own separate businesses. "So I was subjected to being a business owner from an early age." The way she approaches leading her team, she says, she derives from those early influences.

While she wants to grow the business, it would



Hannah is presented with the award by Martin Rooks of Fidelity Adviser Solutions

not be at the price of devaluing the culture that she has built up, she says. "It's important to me that we keep the values, service levels and the quality of the work we do and that we stay integral to the firms that we work with, so I would not want to grow the business to the size where we would risk losing any of that."

In terms of the culture of the business and the team, she says, "Integrity, collaboration and

challenge are a large part of the way we work. We are honest and open and we are respectful of the firms we work for. And I want my team to feel they are empowered to put forward ideas and challenge things, whether that's with me, the business or with advisers."

The business operates with both employed and outsourced paraplanners. "Combining the two did present challenges at the beginning but we're lucky in that our outsourced paraplanners have been working with us for a long time now and we've ironed out any of the kinks in the process."

As to her style of management, Hannah says she steers away from being seen as 'the boss'.

"For me it's important that I'm approachable. If I have a management style I would say I'm inclusive. At the end of the day, we all need each other to do the job that we do."

INVESTMENT PARAPLANNER OF THE YEAR

In association with



Alasdair Wilson, The Verve Group

An ex A-Level geology teacher, The Verve Group's Alasdair Wilson switched to financial services seeking a role which was more about analysis. Which is how he became a paraplanner.

He joined the Verve Group's graduate scheme and from a financial services knowledge base which, he admits, was very basic, worked first in admin and then paraplanning before, in 2020, moving into the group's new DNA service. This is a business development service for financial advice firms, helping them with PROD client segmentation, platform due diligence and their Central Investment and Central Retirement propositions.

Alasdair took on the role of investment specialist, making investment decisions every day on behalf of the group's clients – a range of

advice firms across the UK. "I'd always had a passion for learning how things work and as a paraplanner, I was finding I was more and more interested in how funds and portfolios worked," Alasdair says. "I wanted to get into the nitty gritty and know how investment managers manage portfolios to certain objectives, what instruments are available and why one portfolio works better than others in that area."

"And then how that links into end client objectives, like whether that's generating income or creating downside protection or smoothing mechanisms, etc."

Part of Alasdair's role is also to keep the Verve team updated on the investment trends and markets. "SDR and sustainability labelling is the next thing on our agenda. There's an education piece around that and I'm working with Grant Callaghan, our head of paraplanning, on making sure we have everything in place."

Would he recommend paraplanners consider becoming investment specialists? "If you loved



Alasdair receives the award from John Carter, Head of South East, Advisory Sales, Schroders

doing RO2, then yes. If people are interested in the markets, if they're interested in the why and the how of investments, and they like learning and sharing knowledge, then there are lots of great conversations to be had."

On winning the award, Alasdair says: "It was genuinely an unexpected win and lovely to get the recognition. I've had lots of people reach out to me since to have conversations around investments. It was definitely worth entering the awards."

PARAPLANNER PERSONALITY OF THE YEAR

In association with



Benjamin Fabi, Principled Paraplanning

Benjamin set up his outsourced firm, Principled Paraplanning, in January 2018 with a view to working with financial planning firms who, he says, “were aligned to the values and the ethics and the morals that I have, who were firmly focussed on the client relationship not the money relationship.

“With the regulatory creep we’ve seen over the past decade, our roles have becoming more complex and technical and compliance heavy. What I do is use my knowledge and experience built up over many years in financial services now, to help the firms I work with to deliver the best advice at a commercially viable price.”

Benjamin has also built a reputation for helping



out his fellow paraplanners with their questions, often around difficult or more complex technical issues – which is reflected in his winning this award for the second time in four years. “It’s like a vocational aspect for me,” he explains. “I just want us as a profession to be as good as we can be. It’s as simple as that. And if I can help move people towards being better through a small investment of my time, to help elevate their

technical capability, for example, then I’ll do it.

“We have many well qualified people in the profession but they may be good on investments and not so much on pensions. So, if they then ask a question on pensions and we can help them out, why wouldn’t we? Ultimately there’s way more demand than there is supply for paraplanning, and if it helps paraplanners deliver better outcomes that is good for us all.

“And it can be personally rewarding to share knowledge with people. When you know that you’re giving them a different outlook or you’re providing technical assistance that is going to make a difference to someone down the line.”

On winning the award, Benjamin says: “This is a really nice award to win because I’ve received it for being who I want to be and become memorable in the minds of people for that. Thank you to everyone who nominated me.”

Technical Insight Seminars

Don't miss our 9 Autumn events - coming to a location near you

Paraplanner only events

Join the 800+ paraplanners who have already signed to attend one of our 17 events this year. You'll hear from our expert speakers on tax, tax planning, trusts, pensions, investment, protection and soft skills, among other topics.

**What paraplanners are saying about this year's events:*

“Excellent speakers and range of topics”
“I found this year was even better than last year”
“Your events are the best, full of very useful knowledge, so well organised”

Professional
Paraplanner

Aberdeen: 10 Sept
Edinburgh: 11 Sept
Glasgow: 12 Sept
Nottingham: 25 Sept
Leeds: 9 Oct
Manchester: 23 Oct
(FULL and on waiting list)
Bristol: 6 Nov
Reading: 20 Nov
Newcastle: 27 Nov

**YOU CAN REGISTER UNDER THE
EVENTS TAB ON OUR WEBSITE**

OUTSTANDING CONTRIBUTION TO PARAPLANNING

In association with



For *Professional Paraplanner's* 10th Anniversary we created a special award for Outstanding Contribution to Paraplanning. There have been many paraplanners over our 10 years that have caught our eye but we wanted to recognise two with whom we have had continued interaction and who have both contributed to the growth of paraplanning as a profession but in very different ways.

Cathi Harrison, CEO, The Verve Group

No-one encapsulates the entrepreneurial spirit of outsourced paraplanners probably more than Cathi. Having set up as a solo outsourced paraplanner in 2009, having to sell her car in the early days to keep going, she has since built what is arguably one of the highest profile and most influential companies in the financial planning market – The Verve Group – aided and abetted by her dynamic senior management team.

At the same time, Cathi has championed paraplanning in the industry by becoming the first paraplanner board member of the PFS, helping to show that paraplanning was, as she says, “far from an expensive administration role.”

Commenting on how paraplanning has changed in the past 10 years, Cathi says: “The benefits of the paraplanner role to a firm, the advisers and the clients now appears to be well understood by firms large and small across the UK. The role has shaped to be the central hub of so many successful firms in our industry, benefiting the firms and the end clients.”

While she laments that legacy providers and their plans are areas that continue to frustrate paraplanners daily, the outstanding pillar of paraplanning is the community, she says. “Paraplanner spirit, support and friendliness have always been the shining stars in the industry and this has never wavered in the last decade. It makes me proud to be a paraplanner.”

On receiving the award, she adds: “I really am a paraplanner at my core; my title now is CEO but my occupational identity is and always will



be a paraplanner. That’s why I was so delighted to receive the award. I hope that in a small way my team, my businesses and my own love and passion for paraplanning have helped to contribute to the evolution of the role (and of financial services more broadly). There’s still more to do, but I’m extremely proud of what we’ve achieved so far. Thank you so much to Professional Paraplanner for the accolade.”

Dan Atkinson, Technical Manager, Paradigm Norton Financial Planning

Professional Paraplanner first interviewed Dan in September 2014 after he won the IFP Paraplanner of the Year Award. Since then, Dan has been awarded Personality of the Year by Professional Paraplanner readers and has always focussed on how paraplanning could best present itself as a profession and improve its service to the end client.

“If there has been a noticeable change over the past 10 years,” he says, “for me, it is that paraplanners now work more in partnership with financial planners on getting the right outcome for clients. Paraplanners are also being recognised as key people of influence



Dan is presented with the award by Adam Kelly, Head of Adviser Distribution (UK), EdenTree

when it comes to whether a company’s products or services are recommended to clients or not. Paraplanners are heavily involved in the research and selection process, and whether a company is easy to work with and helps in achieving good outcomes for clients, matters.”

There are also far more paraplanner-only events than 10 years ago, he adds. “Professional

Paraplanner has set the bar on these. The quality of paraplanner events is being recognised by financial planners and business owners also, who are far more willing for paraplanners to attend, because they recognise the value that is being delivered and how they will benefit from more rounded paraplanners as a result.”

Looking ahead, Dan says he can see paraplanners using their knowledge, skills and experience to branch out more and more into other areas of financial planning/advice. “We’re already seeing paraplanners move into areas like compliance but there are so many more areas where having been a paraplanner can bring value to a role.”

On being recognised by the award, Dan says: “It was a lovely surprise. I’m lucky that this is a super profession to be encouraging and helping to grow.”

PROVIDER AWARDS WINNERS 2024

Our eighth Annual Awards saw a number of familiar names scoop the accolades as well as some new ones come into the frame. The M&G Wealth (formerly Prudential) technical team picked up the award for Best Technical Support to Paraplanners for the eighth year running.

Likewise, FE Analytics (Best Research Software), Vanguard (Best Passive Investment Solution Provider) and Octopus Investments (Best Alternative Investment Provider) romped home with eight successive wins, while intelligflo's intelligent office picked up its seventh award for Best Back-Office System.

Other categories were not so consistent. But Bespoke Training Solutions proved resilient in winning Best Training Resource for Paraplanners for the fifth time in a row,

while Fidelity Adviser Solutions and Tatton Investment Management recorded four wins in a row, as did CATS for Best Third Party Support/Compliance Service, the latter proving that smaller companies that put in the passion, effort and provide a first class service can make their mark.

A new name this year was Fundment, who won Best Independent Service Provider.

Paraplanners are increasingly being given the responsibility for researching and recommending which products, services and platforms, their advice firms use. More often than not, it is the companies that have recognised this and put in the effort with the paraplanning community that are seeing the rewards. Dentons Pensions are a case in point. They have been touring the country with our Technical Insight Seminars for a number of

years, building a higher profile and presence in the paraplanning community, which has seen them win the Best full SIPP/SSAS provider for the second year running.

Congratulations to all the winners of this year's awards for being recognised for your service and products by the paraplanning community.



Methodology

We operate a system where we ask paraplanners to nominate the provider they feel has given them the best service or product in each award category and the provider with the most nominations in the category wins. The company with the next highest score is highly commended.

Best Overall Service to Paraplanners - New Business

Winner: Transact
Highly commended: AJ Bell

Best Overall Service to Paraplanners - Existing Business

Winner: Fidelity Adviser Solutions
Highly commended: Transact

Best Technical Support to Paraplanners

Winner: M&G Wealth
Highly commended: Quilter

Best Training Resource for Paraplanners

Winner: Bespoke Training Solutions
Highly commended: Brand Financial Training

Best Research Software

Winner: FE Analytics
Highly commended: Timeline

Best Back-Office System

Winner: intelligflo
Highly commended: Xplan

Best Platform

Winner: Quilter
Highly commended: Transact

Best Third Party Support/Compliance Service

Winner: CATS
Highly commended: threesixty services

Best Provider Website

Winner: Fidelity Adviser Solutions
Highly commended: Royal London

Best Independent Service Provider

Winner: Fundment
Highly commended: Selectapension

Best Active Investment Solution Provider

Winner: Schroders
Highly commended: Fidelity International

Best Passive Investment Solution Provider

Winner: Vanguard
Highly commended: ishares

Best ESG Investment Solution Provider

Winner: RLAM
Highly commended: Liontrust

Best Alternative Investment Provider

Winner: Octopus Investments
Highly commended: TIME Investments

Best Outsourced Investment Provider

Winner: Tatton Investment Management
Highly commended: Waverton

Best Offshore Product Provider

Winner: Utmost Wealth Solutions
Highly commended: Canada Life

Best Retirement Solution Provider

Winner: Royal London
Highly commended: Scottish Widows

Best Full SIPP Provider

Winner: Dentons Pensions
Highly commended: AJ Bell

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Supporting paraplanners in a world of constant change



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Adviser Solutions



BEST OVERALL SERVICE TO PARAPLANNERS - EXISTING BUSINESS & BEST PROVIDER WEBSITE

Fidelity Adviser Solutions

Fidelity Adviser Solutions has won Best Provider Website at the Professional Paraplanner Awards four years out of the past five and this year scooped the Best Overall Service to Paraplanners - Existing Business trophy as well.

“Our website has been designed with ease of use in mind,” says Paul Richards, Head of Distribution. “When I see the customer journey demonstrated, I’m always impressed by how very intuitive and very client friendly it is.

“But we are dealing with complex matters, we’re dealing with clients’ money – so, new business journeys, rebalancing journeys, income journeys, and so on – which means it can’t all be done online and we need human support too.

“I think what we’ve done very well is ensure that we train up the users of the platform through our people. We complement the excellent web capabilities we have with really good people on the front line. This will include the sales team, a team of regional platform consultants, a team of account managers for

“We’ve found that by delivering really good quality management information to businesses, it’s really helping them when tackling things like Consumer Duty”

our larger accounts, and a very large team of customer services representatives, who can all help our clients to get the best out of the service. They make sure our clients know how to use the platform to the best of its capabilities and where to go if they need further support.”

A key development for the service over the past year, Richards says, has been in the decumulation space. In particular, improvements to the ease with which clients can draw down income from pensions. “We’ve enhanced the income drawdown journey. Before it was a bit of a clumsy journey. We’ve improved that immeasurably and had some great feedback from clients as a result. The timing of that has

been fortuitous as well, given the way the market has changed and the focus on retirement income advice and achieving the best client outcomes.”

Another significant development has been the partnering with Standard Life to offer a new retirement and savings option through the Standard Life Smoothed Return Pension Fund, launched in February 2024.

The fund is available exclusively through the Fidelity Adviser Solutions platform and is designed to help grow pension investments while providing some reassurance from the daily uncertainty of investing.

“This is significant and innovative for a platform like ours,” says Richards. “There are very few other ways in which advisers can gain access to this sort of solution for their clients – which is particularly appropriate to retirement – on platform.

“Traditionally, advisers using these sorts of products will have done so off platform. We’re making it much easier for them to put together the right investment solution for their clients in one place. If you can value all your assets in one place, irrespective of whether they are smoothed or conventional type structures and take the income from that same place, that’s really, really positive and it has gone down well with our advisers.”

Another of the attractions of Fidelity to the advice community, Richards says, “is the quality of the reporting services that we produce. We’ve found that by delivering really good quality management information to businesses, it’s really helping them when tackling things like Consumer Duty.



Martin Rooks, Head of Advisory and Partner Services Marketing, receives the first of Fidelity Adviser Solutions two awards of the day from editor Rob Kingsbury

Professional Paraplanner Awards 2024



Fidelity Adviser Solutions team members celebrate their two wins

“A great example is our Pension Summary Report. This is designed to give the user everything they need to know about their clients, what contributions they made, what balance of allowance they’ve got left for the year, whether they’ve exceeded the lifetime allowance, what they’ve crystallised and so on. It also tells you whether the client has a death benefit nomination setup and who it’s for. We’ve found that a surprisingly high percentage of cases do not have a nomination on file. Where we see this we can flag it to the advice business, because within Consumer Duty, if the client dies without the form being completed, then it is foreseeable harm. So, in flagging this information it helps the advice business and, of course, it’s a much better outcome for the client.”

As well as in-depth client information, Fidelity has been building its bank of technical information available for advisers and paraplanners to access. This includes a dedicated Paraplanner Technical Hub, providing regulatory and legislative updates as well as access to other technical material.

“We’re making content to help paraplanners learn about practitioner issues and some of the complexities around areas like pensions. Our two most recent insights have been on the LTA replacement regime and transitional tax-free amount certificates, both of which have been at the forefront for paraplanners in recent months. We also have a wealth of training videos on pensions and tax planning, as well as a series of guides which can be downloaded, for example on retirement strategies. We also host webinars and Paul Squirrell, who paraplanners will know from the *Professional Paraplanner* Technical Insight Seminars, hosts a Pensions Forum, where he answers questions posed via the forum.

“We have a wealth of material available through the website and I think sometimes people don’t realise we do have so much.”

The same applies to the data available through the platform, Richards says. “We have enormous amounts of data on our advisers, their businesses and their clients, which can help them understand their business better. And of course, that’s what the regulator wants them to

be able to demonstrate.”

Support for the market is another area that Richards highlights where changes have been made to better deliver to the advice market. “We’ve gradually reduced the number of telesales people and instead, we have put those resources into having more people out in face-to-face roles,” he explains. “The reason for that is because we think it’s really important to be in advisers’ offices talking to the people doing the financial planning with clients, listening to what they want and helping them with technical issues.

“The market is changing and we know we are not going to build relationships over the phone. We have to build those relationships on a face-to-face basis. This is a people business.”

There is also the technology element, with the introduction of APIs to help with processes. This includes when moving a book of business to a new platform. “It has to be done in an efficient way,” says Richards. “So we’ve built APIs, which enable the advisers to populate applications in bulk, to take the data from the back office and complete the right forms. This takes cost and time out of the business for the advice firms and makes their lives easier.”

Looking ahead, Richards says, integration will be one of the key challenges, aimed again at making advice firms’ lives easier. “We are already taking large strides with this and helping advice firms become more efficient when they use us. We’ll also be listening to what our clients want and seeing how we can use technology to help them achieve that, by staying ahead of the technology curve.

“We have long understood the importance of paraplanning within the financial planning profession, and much of our support has been focussed on paraplanners. As well as the Paraplanner Technical Hub, we have sponsored surveys into the profession, since 2015 Paul Squirrell, our pensions technical expert, and other members of the team have been travelling the country with *Professional Paraplanner*’s Technical Insight Seminars, providing in-depth technical knowledge to help paraplanners in their day-to-day roles. And for the past few years we have also been hosting the Paraplanner Team Leader Seminars at our Cannon Street office in London. We see paraplanning as a growing area of the market which needs this level of attention and focus, if we are all to help clients get the best outcomes from their financial planning journey.”

“We have long understood the importance of paraplanning within the financial planning profession, and much of our support has been focussed on paraplanners”



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BEST ACTIVE INVESTMENT SOLUTION PROVIDER

Schroders

“**W**hat makes winning this award so thrilling,” says Olivia Geldenhuys, Investment Director, Schroder Investment Solutions, “is that you know that the people who use you and who are your clients, have gone out of their way to nominate for you. I just think that’s such a good recognition.”

The asset manager’s first win at the Professional Paraplanner Awards has been coming for a while and comes on the back of concerted strategies within the company, as Olivia explains. “There are three elements I think make Schroders stand out in the market and have helped us achieve this win,” she says.

“The first one is our client focus. We’ve broken down our client base into specific segments because different areas of the market require different approaches. This way we can talk directly to the specific needs of that segment. That client focus enables us to identify the things that are going to be difficult for our clients and the services they need as a result.”

To help with client understanding, Schroders

has launched a ring-fenced AI tool, aptly called Genie, which, Olivia explains, they are using to help with ensuring their literature and other material is client-focused. “Genie can sense and fact-check content and make suggestions for any rewording or additional material needed. It helps in writing in a clear and not misleading way and therefore aligns with Consumer Duty.

“Our second differentiator is our thought leadership. We’re not just focused on what’s happening in the markets and how our portfolios have performed, we’re also thinking forward, on how the investment world could look in a few years’ time. For example, we’ve recently written about tokenisation and how financial markets might evolve.”

The third differentiator, Olivia says, is Schroders’ approach to sustainability. “We are always looking at sustainability and how can we progress in a more sustainable world, such as the effect of climate change and how we incorporate it into our investment process. When clients know that we’re thinking about these things, it means they don’t necessarily need to. They can trust in our process.”

Availability and accessibility of data is another focus of the company, Olivia says. “We make sure our performance data is freely available.

We provide all of our model portfolio data to the Morningstar database. Other MPS providers are also on there, so paraplanners can fairly compare offerings. We are also on FE Fundinfo and even if a paraplanner is not signed up to Fundinfo, we can let them have access to our data. We also have information and data on our website, with options on how to view the information and to drill down into the asset allocation.”

From a servicing aspect, she adds, “we have one team out on the road and one who are more deskbound, taking any enquiries that come through so that advisers or paraplanners or administrators, or literally any member of the advice firm team, can get the information that they need.”

One recent development has been the launch of a whole-of-market fund of funds Alternative Portfolio for the MPS range. The fund of funds structure invests in 13 different underlying funds but is a single fund on platform. “We provide full transparency of the underlying holdings,” Olivia explains, “and its advantage is that it eliminates CGT triggers when buying and selling within the structure, as well as making it a lot easier from a rebalancing perspective, in that it is the same across all platforms.”

Government bonds pose a challenge when investing sustainability, she says, “especially for low risk clients, as there just aren’t a lot of options available. For those lower risk clients, if they’ve 60% in fixed income, they’re not going to be able to achieve their sustainability focus. So, we have teamed up with another asset manager to launch a sustainable government bond fund at a global level. We will then look to include that in our sustainable MPS. This will address the lower risk portion of the portfolios and means we can use the sustainability focus SDR label.”

If there is an overarching reason for paraplanners to use Schroders in investment performance, Olivia says, it is the focus on consistency of performance and being “good custodians of capital. We want paraplanners selecting our portfolios to have the comfort of knowing what they can expect from them, which will give them the greatest chance of achieving their client’s financial goals.”



John Carter, head of South East, Advisory Sales, Schroders accepts the trophy

Quilter

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BEST PLATFORM

Quilter

Ease of use is top of the list of attributes on which the Quilter platform has set its sights and it seems to have hit the mark if paraplanner comments this year are any indication. These included, 'easy to use', 'great value and great technical support', 'highly functional and efficient'.

"We built the platform with a 'one and done' process in mind," says Matthew Elson, Platform Development Executive at Quilter. "And we brought in people with experience of running platforms to help make it logical and intuitive to use. It's nice to see that has paid off for paraplanners."

Quilter has been appearing in the Professional Paraplanner awards listings of late, with a win for Best Overall Service to Paraplanners - New Business and highly commended for Best Platform in 2023 and twice receiving highly commended for Best Technical Support. Elson puts this down to the change to the platform's technology and also the level of technical and user support the platform offers.

"We introduced a lot of online functionality when we upgraded the platform three years ago, which will have made paraplanners lives easier. In particular, we've implemented an automated MPS offering, with a greater range of discretionary offerings, which has been important as that part of the market has increased significantly in recent years."

Another key factor, Elson says, is that Quilter

"The importance of service cannot be underestimated and we think our presence in the field and the level of support we provide marks us out in the market"

has maintained its field support to the adviser market, where other providers haven't. "We have a dedicated technical team to help advice firms with complex financial planning situations. Therefore, paraplanners and administrators can quickly get to the right person to help them.

"We have a team of four regional field-based technical support specialists who will go out around the country to advice firm team meetings and conduct regional face-to-face sessions, supporting our advisers and paraplanners as they navigate the complex and evolving tax and pensions landscape.

"Firms will also have access to a desk based consultant, field based consultant, a platform specialist and sales support and customer support teams, depending on their needs."

In particular, he says, "our team are out there helping paraplanners and administrators to better understand the platform and make it as efficient as possible for them to use - because we know it is paraplanners and administrators that are going to be using us the most. We also host webinars and have a range of guides, articles and videos on our website that people can access, providing insights and technical information, as well as helpful platform training, with technical

guides on every process on the platform. This is all part of our Support Hub and our Technical Knowledge Centre. The importance of service cannot be underestimated and we think our presence in the field and the level of support we provide marks us out in the market."

In addition, the platform is constantly updating and improving its functionality and service, Elson says, with regular platform developments, some internally and some externally focussed.

Developments over the past year have included, the introduction of Faster Payments, replacing and speeding up the payments process from the previously used BACS system," Elson says. "We've launched our Cash Hub, a cash savings account, which is integrated into the platform, offering competitive interest rates. The big benefit is that it's linked to the total holdings on the platform, which means there's no charge for the cash product and the money in it can go towards reducing the overall platform charge.

"On top of this, we've improved our Bed and ISA proposition. It used to be that money could only be moved from an individual's collectives to an ISA but now it can be made across accounts, such as from a husband's collectives to a wife's ISA, or a joint account to the ISA. There's a lot more flexibility. We've also improved advice firms' brand visibility through white labelling correspondence from the platform. We've had a lot of take up of this service."

Finally, the platform has built its intergenerational wealth transfer service. This includes a full suite of trusts and family linking of accounts, for grandparents, parents, parents-in-law, brothers, sisters and children. "We think it's the deepest family linking available in the platform space," Elson says.

Of this year's win for Quilter, Elson says: "We understand the importance of paraplanners, and administrators to our business, so winning another award really tells us we are doing the right things for them."



Collecting the award is Stewart McAlpine, Wealth Sales Consultant, Quilter

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 M&G wealth

BEST TECHNICAL SUPPORT TO PARAPLANNERS

M&G Wealth

Asked why he thinks the M&G Wealth technical team have been recognised by paraplanners for providing the best technical support for the eighth year in a row, Les Cameron, Head of Technical says: “I’d say it’s because when we read and talk about regulation and legislation, we do it from the point of view of financial planners and paraplanners, rather than as a provider.

“We predominantly think about the law and how it impacts planning and then what I think we’re quite good at is translating that so it is easy to understand. We strive to tell people what it all means for their clients, not what the rules say. This helps planners and paraplanners better understand it and see how it might change outcomes for customers.”

Over the past year that has really been highlighted with the ongoing situation around the Lifetime Allowance. “If we were to sum up this past year in terms of questions asked and top search items on the website, it has been LTA, LTA, LTA,” Les says. “I think we gave some of the best support in the market around the abolition that came in from this April. We’ve presented five webinars on the changes, with up to 1,800 people on each one, and we built a new tool to help planners and paraplanners with the changes and whether they needed a transitional tax-free amount certificate. The tool does the number crunching and has been very popular – around 7,000 people used it in the first few weeks after launch.

“We strive to tell people what it all means for their clients, not what the rules say. This helps planners and paraplanners better understand it and see how it might change outcomes for customers”



“When we’ve been out on the road with the Professional Paraplanner Technical Insight Seminars, paraplanners have been giving us some great feedback on how we have helped them better understand what has been going on with the LTA.”

So far this year, the M&G Wealth technical team – which consists of six technical consultants, five external facing and one doing back office work – have presented at 189 seminars across the industry, reaching over 15,000 people. They have made 333 joint calls to advisers and paraplanners with their M&G account managers, and average around 900 attendees at their regular Tech Thursday webinars.

Outside of LTA questions, the most common ones asked this year have been around types of trusts and using trusts for IHT planning. In the past few weeks, the team has also launched another new tool. They’ve reengineered their LTA modeller into the LSA/LSDBA modeller. “Basically, it’s a benefit modeller. It will model out when a client is going to run out of the new allowances. So, for example, calculating that if they start taking drawdown of £x then their tax free allowance will run out when the client is Y yrs, or if the client is retiring at 60 and wants a fund that will fully utilise their available tax free allowance they need to save £x,” Les explains.

M&G Wealth re-launched its technical hub on the website on 10 February, it’s called Tech Matters. To date the hub has had 221,000 visits. The 12 tax tools hosted have been downloaded over 50,000 times in the year, the three most popular being the Annual Allowance calculator (12,888), the Bond Gain Tool (11,310) and the Transitional Tax Free Certificate Tool (10,117).

“We’d always been told that our content was great but the usability was lacking – we’ve fixed that now,” Les says. “The new hub is clearly laid out and far easier to navigate, all the technical content is in the same place and it has a far better search engine than our previous version. We are seeing far more use of the website now.”

Under Tech Matters, advisers and paraplanners can access the Ask the Expert button to put their questions to the team. “The queries route to their account managers who can usually answer their questions. If they can’t, they can call in the cavalry – us!”

Les has also launched a LinkedIn group, M&G Wealth Tech Matters, where he will post, “any technical information that I think will be of interest to people”. That now has over 1,000 members.

Another development at M&G Wealth has been a change to the leadership team. “They have articulated a new aim for us which is to champion financial advice and support the advice process. Clearly, the technical team is very aligned with that as it is what we are here for.”



Thank you Paraplanners for supporting Dentons

We are delighted to have won Professional Paraplanner's 'Best Full SIPP/SSAS Provider' Award for the second consecutive year.

This award recognises the high quality and attentive service we provide to paraplanners through our dedicated sales and administration teams, extensive technical expertise and training support and use of technology to streamline administration processes.

Visit dentonspensions.co.uk to find out more about our SIPP & SSAS.



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BEST FULL SIPP AND/OR SSAS PROVIDER

Dentons Pensions

If there are two key qualities that help Dentons Pensions stand out in the market, says Stephen McPhillips, Technical Sales Director, they are a complete focus on delivering SIPP and SSAS to the advised market and a high level of personalised service to clients. “SIPP and SSAS is all that we do; we are not distracted from this by trying to build our own investment proposition, by continually trying to reinvent our own proposition - or by anything else for that matter,” Stephen says.

“And we genuinely put the client at the heart of everything we do. We exist to provide industry-leading levels of personalised service to advice firms and their clients.”

Each client has a named and dedicated Pensions Administrator (overseen by a Pension Consultant), Stephen explains, “for when paraplanners, advisers and clients call us. Our service credentials seem to strike a chord that a lot of our competitors don’t appear to achieve.”

To ensure paraplanners can easily access information on the SIPPs and SSAS products as well as company information, he says, Dentons provides “ready-made and easily available due diligence packs on our website.

“These include detailed information on our separate SIPP and SSAS products, how Dentons is structured and owned, how we operate, how we deliver our industry-leading levels of service and much more.”

“We exist to provide industry-leading levels of personalised service to advice firms and their clients”

A dedicated Sales Support Team will assist paraplanners with SIPP new business illustrations, “checking SIPP and SSAS application paperwork, dealing with anti-money laundering formalities and so on,” he says. “Sales Support work closely with the field-based business development professionals to make it as easy as possible to do business with us.

“Once an adviser firm begins to use Dentons, we try to ensure that all future clients who are introduced to us from that adviser firm are dealt with by the same administration team. In practice, this means that paraplanners will deal with a very small number of people within Dentons and that has helped us to build strong, long-lasting relationships with advice firms.”

The firm provides a secure portal for its SIPP clients, “and we are making more and more client documents available electronically so that paraplanners and clients have the choice of calling us for information or accessing it in digital form. In addition, we continue to make use of electronic signatures wherever possible in the application process and on data-gathering forms,” Stephen says.

“We also feel it is important to be out meeting our existing and potential clients, which is why we have participated in the Professional Paraplanner Technical Insights Seminars for a number of years, and enjoy doing so! These help us to interact with paraplanners who may not have come across us before. At each seminar, we introduce Dentons look to provide useful insight into SIPP/SSAS, and offer to follow-up with individual paraplanners via our national team of business development professionals, who can meet paraplanners in person anywhere in the country.”

From a due diligence, governance point of view, Stephen points to “our track record of profitability and a healthy balance sheet. This places us in a strong position to continue to grow the business – both organically and by selected acquisitions. Our robust due diligence processes over the years (both on scheme investments and on books we have acquired) have also stood us in good stead in comparison to a number of our competitors – some of whom have, sadly, fallen into Administration, with the attendant consequences for adviser firms and clients.”

The firm recently appointed David Holloway as Managing Director, a veteran of the market with some 21 years of experience across the financial services sector, predominately in SIPP and SSAS pensions, eleven of which have been with Dentons. “We think that speaks to the continuity and longevity of our approach,” Stephen says.

Commenting on the firm’s second award win in a row, Stephen says: “We’re delighted to have won for the second consecutive year and we’re very grateful to those paraplanners who nominated us. I think it’s in recognition of the overall service we offer to paraplanners and the advisers they support – from the day-to-day SIPP and SSAS work undertaken by our dedicated team, to the new business support we provide and our activity providing educational material via Professional Paraplanner online and at the ever popular Technical Insights events around the country.”



David Fox, Director of Sales and Marketing, receives the award from Editor Rob Kingsbury

Professional
Paraplanner
**Awards
2024**

Winner

Best Third Party
Support/Compliance
Service

Professional
Paraplanner
**Awards
2023**

Winner

Best Third Party
Support/Compliance
Service

Professional
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**Awards
2022**

Winner

Best Third Party
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**Awards
2021**

Winner

Best Third Party
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“The staff all speak so highly of him, CRM’s, Paraplanners and Advisers. He is so helpful, understanding, and diligent, but really treats us like he is one of OUR staff members which makes a huge difference.”

“I feel like he is working with and for us, instead of against us which is what a lot of other IFA’s say about their compliance team.”

BEST THIRD PARTY SUPPORT / COMPLIANCE SERVICE

Compliance and Training Solutions (CATS)

Despite having served the financial advice market with compliance services for some 19 years, CATS directors Mel and Martyn Holman say they are always looking at how they can improve their service, offer more to their clients and get out to the wider advice community.

The past year has been a case in point. “We’ve really built up our webinars and conferences as regular items on the CATS agenda. Recently, we held our first paraplanner conference, which was one of our best attended. It’s all about delivering more value to our clients and showing who we are as a business.

“Earlier this year we took over The Coffee Lounge from Carla Langley, who is now no longer in financial services. Carla approached us and said she wanted to leave the Lounge in a safe pair of hands. Every second and fourth Friday of the month at 9am, we host what we’d describe as a meeting of minds to talk about compliance. Every other meeting is focussed on pension transfers. It’s free to attend, and we are seeing 100-200 advisers and paraplanners at these CPD-accredited events. It’s a very open forum for discussion, with guest speakers. We’re loving doing it.”

This year the team has been expanding their client online workshops as well as offering workshops out to non-clients, undertaking a first away-day with Kim Bendall of Go Paraplanning for their mutual clients, and in November, CATS will be running their first in-person CATS conference for clients.

“We’re never going to be an online business because we are passionate about being bespoke, getting out and seeing clients and being hands-on, which is why we’re also doing our in-person



CATS operations director Charlotte Andrews (right) and compliance apprentice Gosia Razniak accept the award

events. All these initiatives allow us to deliver more for our clients and to get out to a wider audience. Hopefully, some of them will become clients of CATS as well.”

This past year, Mel has collaborated with Caroline Stuart and Melissa Kidd, in running a suitability report writing masterclass. “We’re looking at doing more of them later in the year,” Mel says. She also volunteers as a mentor for The Paraplanner Club.

As well as the new ventures, CATS has been making further investment into the CATS Hub, the online resource and training location for clients and expanding the business with a new chartered consultant, who will bring the team up to 18. “And our apprentice Gosia, who we took on in 2023, is going from strength to strength as part of the team. She has sailed through her first two CII exams and is about to finish her apprenticeship,” Martyn says.

The next item on their agenda is Artificial Intelligence. “We hear there is some really

interesting technology out there, and we’ll be looking at how we can embrace it and bring it into the business. We see it is a useful tool to help increase efficiency but with human oversight. It won’t change CATS’ overall proposition, which at heart is a hands-on, personal, people friendly service, but it may change the way we work, bringing greater focus on strategy, reflection and reviewing data as part of a compliant advice process. We’ll be reviewing the AI products on offer and seeing which best fits.”

And if you think the CATS team have enough on their plate, the initiatives don’t end there. “This autumn we are launching our ‘Disturbing the Perception of Compliance’ campaign,” Martyn says. “We’re aiming to bring the view of compliance companies up-to-date. We’re not stuffy old men in grey suits, we’re highly professional and qualified compliance consultants but we have fun as well. We want to make compliance accessible and for everyone to look at us and say, ‘we can work with them.’”

Commenting on why CATS has had the fourth award win in as many years, Mel surmises: “We’ve long had a respect for paraplanners and appreciated the importance of the paraplanning role within financial planning. More often than not, we are working closely with the paraplanners.

“And we like the vibe of working with paraplanners. It’s professional but relaxed. We find that is a good way of working.”

“We want to make compliance accessible and for everyone to look at us and say, ‘we can work with them’”

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BEST TRAINING RESOURCE FOR PARAPLANNERS

Bespoke Training Solutions (BTS)

“**T**his might be our fourth win in a row but every year we know we have to earn it,” says Alex Langhorn, Head of Business Support at BTS. “We always hope that we’ve done enough to make it happen again, but you never know. We are really grateful to everyone who nominated us.”

The BTS team have been putting themselves out there and finding new and innovative ways to help paraplanners and others in the industry achieve success in their exams for some 20 years. “I think what makes BTS stand out is that we are really flexible. We’re very much about choice and supporting individual journeys,” Alex says. “We always say it comes down to personal preference because everybody learns differently and everybody needs different support. It’s about what works for the individual.”

The same applies for the firms that BTS works with, she says. “Every single one of our company clients has a very different set of needs and we work with those needs.”

The team has a reputation for being very approachable. “We’re a very real organisation. We always want to help where we can. People don’t hesitate to pick up the phone to talk to us.

“Even our study materials are down to earth. We try to cut through all of the nonsense that makes it really hard to learn. Obviously, there’s loads of technical stuff that we cover, but we try to make it accessible for people at different stages in their learning journey, from beginner to advanced, and with different learning styles. I think it’s this accessibility and the flexibility that that really makes BTS different in the market.”

Each year, individual members of the BTS

“I think what makes BTS stand out is that we are really flexible. We’re very much about choice and supporting individual journeys”



team take some of the exams the firm is training on. They do this, Alex says, to make sure they are up to date on what’s being asked, and any changes to the exams, so they can advise from a position of having recently gone through the same process as the candidates.

“This is something Luiza Todd and Jeff Scholes, the founders, have been doing for years,” Alex explains. “It helps ground us in the exam process. In fact, recently Luiza had just written a new RO1 study guide, which was ready to go to press, and then she did the exam again, and thought of a new way to help candidates – so she went back and added it into the Guide. It’s about always looking at where we can improve what we do to better help candidates achieve their success.”

The team also are regular presenters at the Technical Insight Seminars, conveying their message in person and meeting paraplanners where they are at around the country. The firm has also moved into helping with careers and development of skills outside of the exam route,

through the BTS Career Zone. “We find that as we help people progress through their exams, we become invested in their career journey. That got us thinking about what we could do to support those journeys because we were having the same conversations on the phone over and over again about what it means to be a paraplanner, and the different roles and different pathways people can follow. So we launched the Career Zone, which started out as resource support but it very quickly grew and now we host podcasts, webinars and interviews with people in the profession about their career paths and it’s very much embedded now in all of our study materials.

“We are working with the new Talent Alliance, which came off the back of the Consumer Duty Alliance. We hope that it will be a really key resource for the profession.”

In addition, BTS has developed an in-house training platform. This enables people to log in and track their progress through the study units. Likewise, adviser firms can have the resources they need to help monitor the progress of their learners through things like time spent, average exam scores, as well as flag any candidates that may need some more support.

Alex says: “We think an important part of what we do is to champion and raise the profile of paraplanning and help share it as a career choice, as well as to show where people can go on to from a paraplanning role.”

Thank you!



Best Outsourced Investment Firm 2024

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BEST OUTSOURCED INVESTMENT FIRM

Tatton Investment Management

Tatton Investment Management has scooped the Best Outsourced Investment Firm award for the fourth time in 2024, rewarding the DFM for its focus not just on consistent performance across its investment range, as noted by paraplanners when nominating the company for the award, but also a dedication to serving advice firms in the way that best suits them. “We are a company entirely dedicated to IFAs,” says Justine Randall, Chief Commercial Officer. “And when we talk to firms, we don’t want it to be the financial adviser talking to a ‘sales guy’ from Tatton. We’ve tried really hard to embed our relationship at every layer of the firm, from business owner through advisers, paraplanners and administrators.”

A key aspect Justine believes makes the firm stand out in a crowded market, is its reputation for quality of service. “For us the investment excellence is a given. The real differentiation takes place in the margins around service, support and accessibility.

“We see paraplanners and administrators as the unsung heroes of advice firms, those doing the work in the background. And we have our own unsung heroes, who are our support teams – our telephone account managers, our investment specialist teams, our marketing teams, they’re the guys that are delivering the true nuts and bolts of the Tatton service.”

“We see paraplanners and administrators as the unsung heroes of advice firms, those doing the work in the background”

In terms of the investment performance, Justine says, Tatton’s aim is “to be delivering robust, repeatable and reliable returns, year in year out, across our range of portfolios. We have an 11-year track record across the majority of our models and risk profiles. We are represented across all the tools like Dynamic Planner, FE Analytics and Finometrica. And we are very transparent. Our price is the same – 15bps – for everyone; there’s never a special deal for using Tatton. That’s something we are incredibly passionate about – the fact that everyone gets the same service at the same price.”

Tatton is a “conservative investment house”, she says. “We don’t take big bets. Nor do we change our strategy to chase trends. Our CEO/CIO, Lothar Mentel, is very passionate about that. If we’ve signed a client for a 15-year investment journey, our job, within the constraints of their risk profile, is to get them there. And making sure we deliver within that risk profile is something we are most proud of.

“We have a chart going back across our history that shows all our portfolios and their risk profiles. It tells the perfect story, that you

will be rewarded for taking an element of risk as long as your horizon is long term.”

As well as the support teams, Tatton’s investment specialists out on the road presenting to advice firms, are all qualified investment professionals, Justine points out. “This means they can answer questions at a nitty gritty level on the spot. They are fully conversant in terms of how the portfolio decisions are made and the allocations and they have the ability to translate our technical information into understandable language, to help financial planners convey that to their clients.

“It’s all about the quality and level of service we provide, which is why we care so deeply about what our most common touch points in firms, planners, paraplanners and administrators, are thinking.”

Having that embedded relationship, she adds, has seen advice firms help to shape Tatton’s journey as a business. “We started out with a very clear idea of giving easy access to model portfolios and making them accessible at 15 basis points. Since then, the market has evolved our service and our stable of portfolios. We have pretty much the whole range that any advice firm could want – active, passive, hybrid, income, ethical, classic, global money market – and we are on over 20 platforms, which means paraplanners can find us on their platforms of choice.

“We’d love to be a one-stop-shop for paraplanners but we know that isn’t necessarily going to be the right outcome for clients. Our message, therefore, is ‘we want to have the opportunity to work with you, when you and your research tells us it’s right’.”

Commenting on the award win, Justine says: “The awards that stand out for us in the market and that we care deeply about are *Professional Paraplanner* and *Moneyfacts*, because they are voted for by our users. That sets those awards apart in terms of how much we value them.”



Marketing Manager Shelise Onye (right) and Marketing Executive Veronica Egidi receive the award



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BEST OFFSHORE PRODUCT PROVIDER

Utmost Wealth Solutions

Utmost Wealth Solutions were awarded the Best Offshore Product Provider trophy for the fifth year at the 2024 Professional Paraplanner Awards, for which, says David Matthews, Head of Sales UK and Expatriate Europe, the company is “very grateful”.

The Utmost Group has grown significantly over the past decade, having completed 14 acquisitions. It has recently announced the proposed acquisition of Lombard International which, when completed, is expected to bring total assets under administration to over £10obn. In addition, Utmost International was recently awarded an A (Superior) rating by AKG in the offshore sector. This latest rating news follows a rating upgrade to A+ from Fitch Ratings announced earlier this year.

The company’s financial strength, underlined by its international status, is one reason Matthews believes Utmost stands out in the market. “When talking longevity in the market, financial strength is important,” he says.

Utmost Wealth Solutions in the UK is solely focused on the offshore bond market and delivering a high-quality specialist service to help adviser firms use the products to achieve best outcomes for their clients.

This begins with the support, Matthews explains. “We talk to paraplanners every

“We want to work alongside the paraplanners to help position the value of offshore bonds in the holistic financial planning process”

day and understand what they need from us. As key contacts, we have a specialist and experienced team of offshore sales professionals covering seven regions in the UK, and we also have a technical support team and a specialist sales support team, as well as head office legal team. Our UK technical team write our technical bulletins and present our well-attended Technical Insights webinars on key industry topics.

“We also have something that paraplanners particularly like, which is our trust analysis service. This is where one of our experts will look at a trust put forward by a paraplanner or adviser and provide them with a view of the type of trust, how that trust is taxed, and what the planning options might be if the client wanted to amend that trust, or to perhaps make further investment.

“We also have a welcome team, based in the Isle of Man, who can provide illustrations and help with the completion of applications forms.”

Also available to paraplanners and advisers are the online calculators. These cover areas

such as bond gains, comparative options on withdrawals across policies or for individual segment surrenders. “We can show the best method for withdrawing money from a bond, making sure that they minimise the amount of tax due for the client. Our chargeable event calculations can find the best ways to make withdrawals tax efficiently.”

Utmost also offers trust decision trees, to help paraplanners consider the most appropriate trust for their clients, and Trust Company solutions.

Where the Utmost team can also help, Matthews says, “is in what we call the future-proofing of financial advice. This is where we can set up an offshore bond and assign that to a discounted gift trust in the future. The client can retain access to the income stream but then, without having to encash the bond, pass it on to the next generation. This avoids triggering a taxable charge event. It’s effectively planning for inheritance tax or inter-generational wealth transfer at a later date.”

Utmost Wealth Solution’s ambition, Matthews says, is to be the leading offshore bond player in the UK market. “To do that, we want to work alongside paraplanners to help position the value of offshore bonds in the holistic financial planning process.”

He says the company expects that demand for offshore bonds will ramp up in the next few years, as around £1.2 trillion is passed on by the baby boomer generation to their beneficiaries. “They are the first generation to have been able to build up significant wealth over their lifetime and they will be looking to manage their wealth transfer in an efficient way.

“Offshore bonds could particularly come into their own,” he says, “if the current Government align capital gains tax with income tax as well as moving to remove schemes which exploit the IHT exemption from Business Property relief, such as AIM stock schemes.”



Lauren Hughes, Regional Sales Manager, accepts the award from editor Rob Kingsbury

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