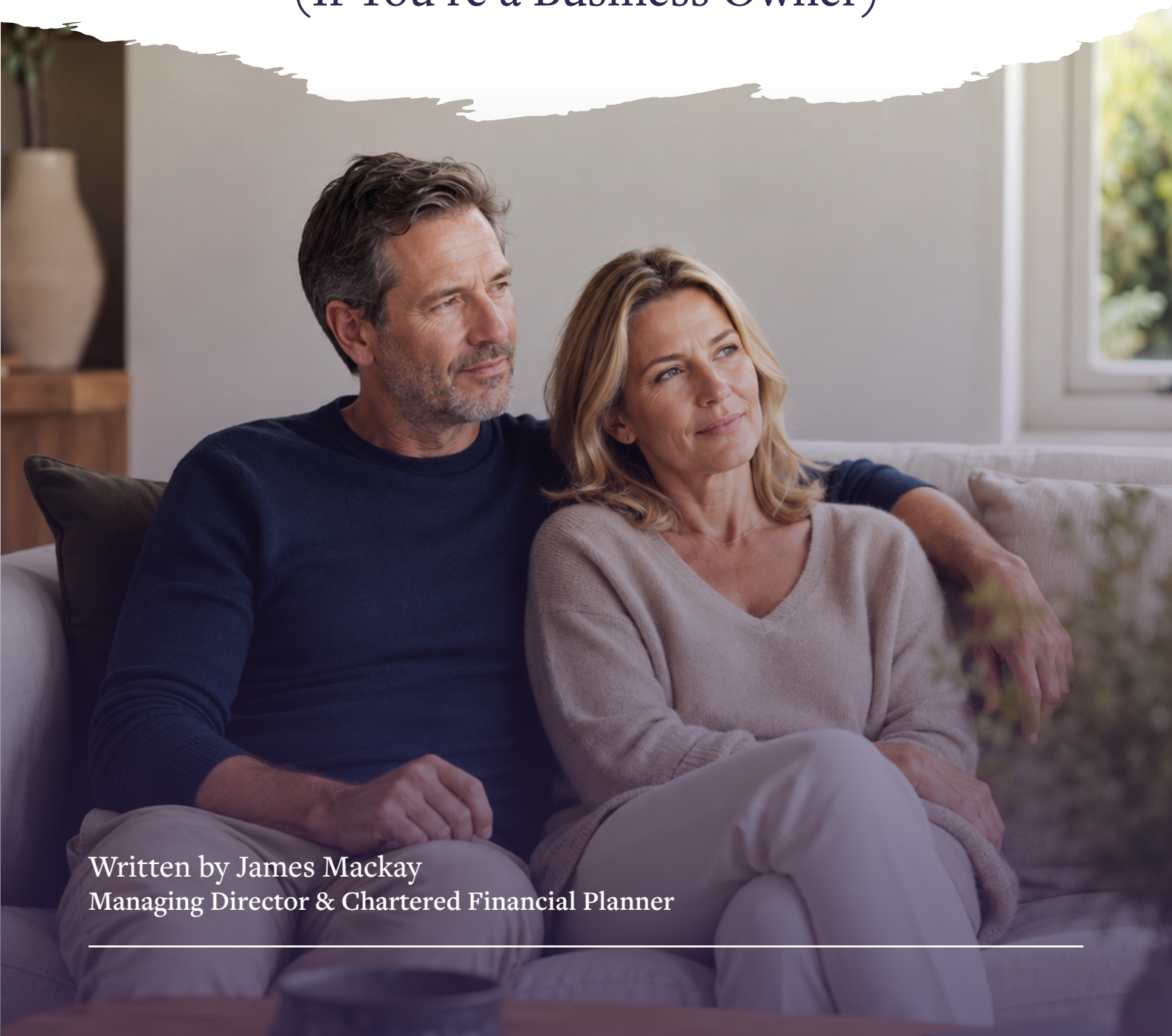




# Choosing the Right Financial Adviser

Questions To Ask a Financial Adviser  
(If You're a Business Owner)



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# Introduction

## Why You Should Read This Guide



Choosing a financial adviser is harder than it should be.

Most firms appear credible from the outside.

They have professional websites, impressive qualifications, positive reviews and broadly similar promises. They talk about personal service, financial security and long-term relationships.

The difficult part is working out who is actually right for you.

That matters even more when you own a business.

Your company and personal finances are closely connected. Decisions about retained profits, tax, pension contributions, investments and family security cannot be considered separately.

You may be earning well and saving substantial amounts each year. But you may still lack a clear strategy for turning business success into personal wealth and financial independence.

You are also likely to be time-poor.

You do not want to interview ten advisers or work through lengthy technical proposals. You want to identify two or three credible firms, ask the right questions and make a confident decision.

This guide will help you do that.

**It provides 16 practical questions to test an adviser's expertise, relevance, judgement, service and costs.**

More importantly, it explains what a strong answer should sound like and where to demand evidence.

### The objective

Find an adviser who understands your world, simplifies complex decisions and turns your ambitions into a clear financial plan.





# How To Use This Guide

This guide contains 16 questions that distil the qualities that separate average financial advisers from excellent ones.

Together, they test the areas that matter most: expertise, relevance, judgement, transparency, service and trust.

They are not designed to catch advisers out. They help you move beyond marketing claims and gather meaningful evidence.

The guide is divided into five parts:

## **Part One: The Expertise Behind The Advice**

Tests the adviser's service, qualifications and supporting team.

## **Part Two: The Principles Guiding The Advice**

Explores their investment philosophy, independence and commitment to acting in your interests.

## **Part Three: The Fit And Practicalities**

Tests accessibility, relevant client experience, regulatory structure and fees.

## **Part Four: The Firm Behind The Relationship**

Examines the firm's team, ownership, succession plans and long-term stability.

## **Part Five: The Proof And Client Experience**

Assesses adviser capacity and looks for evidence from existing clients.



Speak to two or three advisers, ideally within the same week. Ask broadly consistent questions and follow up on vague answers.

You do not need to cover all 16 questions in one meeting. Use those most relevant to your priorities.

### Focus on three things:

1. Clarity: Can they explain their answer without jargon?
2. Relevance: Does it reflect your circumstances as a business owner?
3. Evidence: Can they support it with qualifications, examples or a clear process?

### Remember

Strong answers should be clear, specific and supported by evidence.





# Part One

## The Expertise Behind The Advice





# 1. What do you do?

This sounds simple. It is one of the most revealing questions you can ask.

You are looking for a concise explanation of how the adviser improves clients' lives.

For a business owner, that could include helping you:

- ✓ Decide how much to extract from the company;
- ✓ Use employer pension contributions sensibly;
- ✓ Build wealth outside the business;
- ✓ Balance tax efficiency with commercial flexibility;
- ✓ Protect your family and income;
- ✓ Understand when work becomes optional;
- ✓ Prepare financially for a future sale.

Be cautious if the answer focuses mainly on arranging pensions or managing investments.

Those services matter. But they should sit within a joined-up financial plan.



## A strong answer

Explains the client outcome, not merely the financial products involved.





## 2. What qualifications do you hold personally?

UK financial advisers must hold an FCA-recognised qualification at Level 4. This is the minimum standard, not a mark of excellence.

The strongest advisers often continue beyond this level. Look for advisers who have either obtained Chartered Financial Planner or Certified Financial Planner status. These credentials represent some of the highest professional standards in financial planning.

Additionally, ask for a copy of their Statement of Professional Standing. This confirms that the adviser meets professional standards and maintains their knowledge through ongoing development. Advisers should renew this annually.

Qualifications do not guarantee judgement, communication or personal fit. However, advanced credentials demonstrate technical capability and commitment to the profession.



### The distinction

Level 4 shows that an adviser can practise. Chartered or Certified status suggests they have chosen to go considerably further.

Check both the adviser and firm on the **Financial Services Register**.





### 3. What role will your team play?

Good financial advice is rarely delivered by one person.

The adviser may be supported by paraplanners, administrators, investment specialists and compliance professionals.

Ask who will:

- ✓ Build your financial plan;
- ✓ Research recommendations;
- ✓ Review technical work;
- ✓ Manage implementation;
- ✓ Answer routine questions.

You are assessing the intellectual and operational strength behind the adviser.

One impressive individual cannot compensate for a weak team.



#### Business-owner test

Would you trust this team to coordinate complex decisions with your accountant and other professional advisers?



# Part Two

## The Principles Guiding The Advice





## 4. What's your investment approach?

A credible adviser should explain their investment philosophy clearly and show how it shapes their recommendations.

Ask them to describe their underlying beliefs about investing. How are portfolios constructed? What evidence informs their decisions? How do they manage diversification, risk, costs and periods of market uncertainty?

The strongest advisers often follow an evidence-based investment approach. This uses long-term academic research and market evidence, rather than forecasts, speculation or recent performance. It typically favours broad diversification, disciplined decision-making and keeping unnecessary costs under control.



### What you are looking for

A clear, consistent and evidence-based philosophy that you can understand and remain confident in during difficult markets.

Be cautious if the approach relies heavily on forecasts, recent performance or frequent changes to capture the next opportunity.

## 5. Are you independent or restricted?

An independent adviser can consider a broad and sufficiently diverse range of relevant products and providers.

A restricted adviser operates within defined limits. They may only recommend certain products, providers or investment solutions.

For most clients, particularly business owners with complex and changing needs, independent advice is preferable. It provides greater flexibility and reduces the risk of your plan being shaped by one organisation's product range.

Restricted advice is not automatically poor. However, you need to understand exactly where the restrictions apply and why they exist.

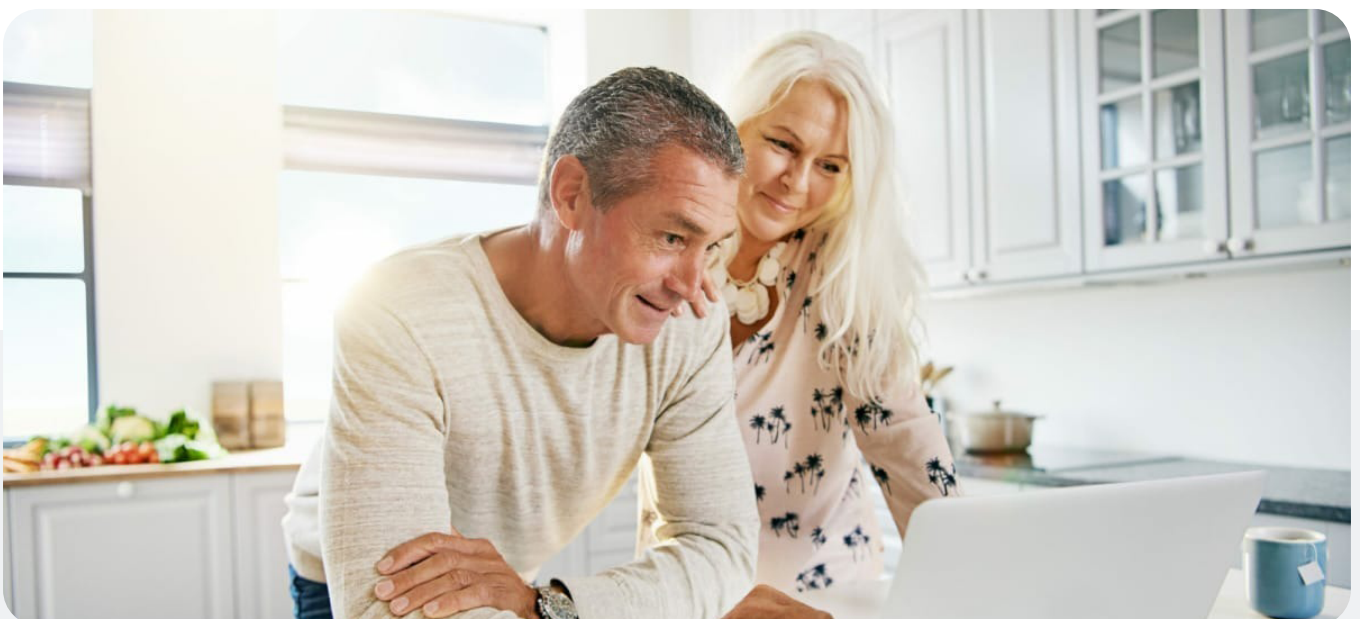
Ask the adviser to explain what they cannot recommend and how those restrictions could affect you. Look out for:

- ✓ Recommendations concentrated around in-house products;
- ✓ Commercial incentives influencing recommendations;
- ✓ Higher charges without clear additional value;



### Our view

Independence does not guarantee excellent advice. But it gives a strong adviser greater freedom to recommend what best suits your circumstances.







## 6. Will you act in a fiduciary capacity?

Although “fiduciary” is not a formal classification commonly used in UK financial advice, it describes a commitment to putting your interests ahead of the adviser’s own.

In practical terms, this means recommending what is best for you, managing conflicts openly and avoiding decisions driven by commissions or commercial incentives.

This is different from being independent.

Independent describes the range of products and providers an adviser can consider. Fiduciary describes the standard of care they commit to when advising you.



### Why it matters

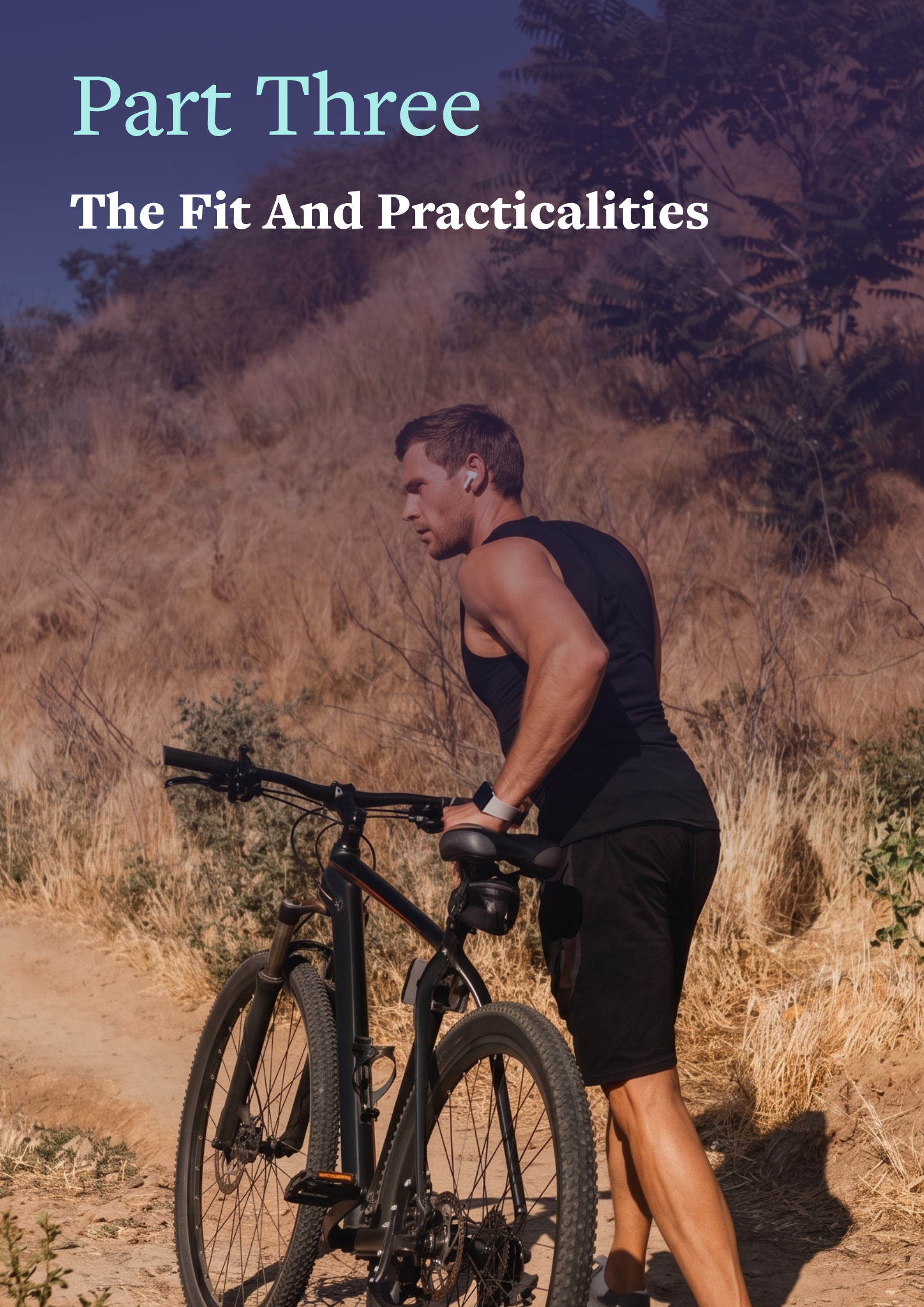
Independence provides choice. A fiduciary commitment provides greater confidence that those choices will be assessed in your interests.

A strong adviser should explain how they identify conflicts, manage incentives and ensure recommendations deliver fair value.



# Part Three

## The Fit And Practicalities





## 7. How much access will I get to you when I need you?

Time-poor business owners value speed and efficiency.

That does not mean expecting immediate responses. It means knowing that important decisions will be handled promptly by someone who understands your circumstances.

A strong firm should provide access between formal reviews, clear response standards and support when your adviser is unavailable.

Look out for:

- ✓ Access limited to scheduled reviews;
- ✓ Every request depending on one individual;
- ✓ Vague expectations around response times.



### What you are looking for

Prompt, dependable access to an adviser and wider team who can help when decisions arise.

## 8. Do you have other clients similar to me?

Relevant experience matters.

An adviser who regularly works with ambitious business owners should understand profit extraction, employer pensions, retained cash and building wealth outside the company.

They should also recognise the practical pressures: limited time, competing priorities and balancing business growth with family security.

Ask for examples of similar clients and the challenges they have helped them solve.

Look out for:

- ✓ Broad claims without relevant examples;
- ✓ Experience focused mainly on employees or retirees;
- ✓ Limited understanding of how business and personal finances connect.



### What you are looking for

An adviser whose answer makes you think: "They understand people like me."

## 9. Are you directly authorised or an appointed representative?

A directly authorised firm holds its own FCA permissions and takes responsibility for its advice, compliance and regulatory standards.

An appointed representative operates under an authorised principal firm. The principal supervises its activities and may influence the products, processes and services available.

Direct authorisation can give a firm greater freedom to build its advice and service around clients. Appointed representatives may have less flexibility because they operate within their principal firm's compliance framework.



### What you are looking for

Clear accountability and a regulatory structure that supports good advice without unnecessary constraints.





## 10. How do you charge, and what will it cost?

Ask for the total cost in both pounds and percentage terms.

As a broad guide, initial advice often costs around 1% of the money invested. Ongoing advice typically costs around 0.9% each year.

Investment and platform costs commonly add another 0.5%, bringing the typical total ongoing cost to approximately 1.4% per year.

Ask:

- ✓ What will I pay during the first year?
- ✓ What will the total ongoing cost be, including advice, investments and the platform?
- ✓ What services are included, and what would cost extra?
- ✓ Will your fee increase automatically as my investments grow?
- ✓ Are there reduced rates for larger portfolios?
- ✓ Can I leave without exit fees or lengthy notice periods?

Cost alone does not determine value. However, a higher fee should provide a demonstrably better service.



### What you are looking for

A clear total cost and a convincing explanation of what you will receive in return.



# Part Four

## The Firm Behind The Relationship





## 11. How big is your team?

The ideal firm should be big enough to cope and small enough to care.

Large advice businesses can offer considerable resources. However, centralised management and compliance processes may result in a less personal and flexible service. You may also be passed between departments rather than supported by people who know you.

A smaller specialist firm can provide more direct access, tailored advice and greater flexibility. However, it still needs sufficient depth to maintain service during holidays, illness or periods of growth.

Ask who will work on your affairs, how responsibilities are shared and what happens when your usual contacts are unavailable.



### What you are looking for

A specialist team with enough depth to provide continuity, while remaining small enough to know you personally.

## 12. Would I have a dedicated person to contact when needed?

Your adviser may spend much of their time in meetings.

A dedicated contact can resolve administration quickly and ensure requests are tracked properly.

Ask:

- ✓ Who will be my main contact?
- ✓ Will I know them personally?
- ✓ What can they deal with directly?

For a time-poor Business owner, strong administration is part of the advice experience.

## 13. Who owns the company?

Ownership can influence the firm's culture, priorities and commercial incentives.

The business may be owned by:

- ✓ Its founders;
- ✓ Employees;
- ✓ A larger advice group;
- ✓ An investment provider;
- ✓ Private equity;
- ✓ Another financial institution.

Ask whether any owner also provides products or services recommended to clients.

You are looking for transparency around incentives and potential conflicts.

The adviser should explain how the ownership structure benefits clients, not merely shareholders.

## 14. What are your plans for the business over the next five years?

Your financial plan may last for decades. The adviser and firm supporting it may not.

Financial advice businesses are regularly acquired or consolidated. A change of ownership can alter your adviser, service, fees, technology and investment approach. Ask whether any ownership changes are planned.

You should also understand the adviser's personal plans. If they are approaching retirement, establish whether they intend to remain involved or sell their client relationships.

Ask directly: "What happens to me if you retire, leave or sell the business?"



### What you are looking for

A growing firm with long-term ambitions, supported by advisers committed to building enduring client relationships.



# Part Five

## The Proof and Client Experience



## 15. How many clients do you work with at present?

Client numbers directly affect the time and attention an adviser can provide.

As a useful benchmark, one adviser can typically deliver high-quality financial planning to around 80 ongoing clients. This may be higher where they have strong paraplanning and administrative support.

Ask how many clients the adviser personally supports, who works alongside them and how the firm manages capacity as it grows.

A significantly higher number may make the service more reactive, with less time for proactive planning and personal contact.



### What you are looking for

A manageable client base supported by a strong team, allowing the adviser to know you and remain proactive.

## 16. Can you put me in touch with a couple of your clients to have a chat with?

Feedback from an existing client is one of the strongest forms of evidence.

Ideally, the adviser should arrange a conversation with someone whose circumstances are similar to yours. Ask what difference the advice has made, how proactive the firm is and what could be improved.

The client's permission will be required, and the adviser is unlikely to introduce someone dissatisfied. Treat references as valuable supporting evidence, rather than independent proof.

If a conversation cannot be arranged, review feedback on Google and Trustpilot. Also look for detailed testimonials, case studies and client videos.



### What you are looking for

Consistent evidence from several clients that the firm delivers the expertise, responsiveness and service it promises.



# Useful Resources

## Your 16-Question Checklist

This checklist gives you all 16 questions in one place.

Before each meeting, review the detailed guidance and highlight the questions most relevant to you. During the conversation, record the adviser's answers and note anything requiring further evidence.

Use one copy for each adviser. Afterwards, compare their responses while the meetings remain fresh.

The strongest adviser will not necessarily provide the most polished answers. Look for clarity, relevance .

### The Questions

**1** What do you do?

**2** What role will your team play?

**3** What's your investment approach?

**4** Are you independent or restricted?

**5** Will you act in a fiduciary capacity?

**6** How big is your team?

**7** Who owns the company?

**8** Do you have other clients similar to me?

**9** How much access will I get to you when I need you?

**10** Are you directly authorised or an appointed representative?

**11** How do you charge, and what will it cost?

**12** Would I have a dedicated person to contact when needed?

**13** What are your plans for the business over the next five years?

**14** How many clients do you work with at present?

**15** Can you put me in touch with a couple of your clients to have a chat with?

**16** What qualifications do you hold personally?



# The Five-Minute Decision Test

After each meeting, answer these questions immediately:

1 Do I want to work with them?

2 Did they challenge my thinking?

3 Were the fees and value clear?

4 Did they explain complex issues clearly?

5 Could their team support me properly?

6 Did they provide evidence for their claims?

7 Did they understand my business and personal circumstances?

8 Did they focus on planning before products?

9 Did they appear organised and responsive?

10 Would I trust them during a difficult decision?

Then complete one sentence:

“ The main reason I would choose this adviser is...”

If you cannot complete it convincingly, you probably do not have enough evidence.





## Final Word

Ambitious business owners do not need more financial information.

They need clarity.

The right adviser should help you understand your options, identify the trade-offs and decide what to do next.

They should save you time without excluding you from important decisions. They should provide enough evidence to create confidence without overwhelming you with detail.

Most importantly, your financial adviser must understand both you and your business, then connect them through one joined-up financial plan.

At Frazer James, we help ambitious business owners turn business success into personal financial freedom.

We provide joined-up financial planning for busy business owners, helping them build wealth outside of their business, protect their families, and create more choices for the future.



***Book an initial consultation with Frazer James. We will explore your priorities, answer your questions and establish whether we are the right firm to help.***