

Your questions answered...

Quarterly Meeting – March 2022

...by Ed Dymott, Managing Director – Wealth, Benchmark Capital

Your recent article in Money Marketing made interesting reading. We've been getting emails from a couple of acquirers calling Benchmark out for being vertically integrated, selling Schroders etc. What's your response to that?

We continue to support independent financial advisers, and the majority of our relationships are with firms who are independent. We don't want to follow some of our peers who have stopped supporting independent financial advisers. Whilst we do have some firms who choose to operate on a restricted basis, we believe this is the choice for the firm, not our business model. Our approach is different to a typical vertically integrated model, where that can result in clients being shoehorned into solutions, or where it relies on one part of the value chain to make profit. We ensure each of our solutions are competitive in their own right, giving advisers working with Benchmark the freedom to choose how you operate your business, independent or restricted. Our investment solutions are also open architecture. Our Model Portfolio Service (branded Schroder Investment Solutions) has successfully negotiated use of competitive share classes with many fund managers, typically achieving discounts 5-15bps below clean share classes. And investment in any one fund manager, including Schroders, is limited by the terms of the Prospectus at 20% of any given model. Currently, most models have a weighting around 5% in Schroder funds.

If I have a referral, who do I contact to 'put my name against it'?

Please get in touch with [Paul Fawcett](#), Head of Partnership Management, or your Partnership Director.

...by Jodie Hornby, Senior Talent & Inclusion Partner, Benchmark Capital

How can we show interest and apply for the Academy?

You can speak to your Partnership Director if you would like to know more about our learning pathways, or apply by filling in [this form](#).

Is there any 'role' training provided? For example, how to undertake research or write reports for paraplanners?

A paraplanning pathway will commence in September, and will include behavioural learning relating to communication skills, organisation skills, business writing etc as well as technical training. However, we are not currently offering content on research techniques.

I have an adviser who has achieved the diploma via the LIBF route, is there a pathway that could help this adviser achieve chartered status, as they do not hold the RO diploma exams first?

They could potentially still go on to achieve chartered status via the Benchmark Academy, but we would need more information about their previous learning. Please get in touch with your Partnership Director, or directly with Jodie.Hornby@benchmarkcapital.co.uk.

Can an administrator join part way through their studies?

Absolutely. They can join any of the pathways available to them - diploma, paraplanner certificate or admin certificate. We would just need to understand what learning they have already completed and what they have left to complete, so we can add them to the correct group. They can apply by [filling out this form](#).

Can existing staff tap into some of the behavioural training even if they have already sat the relevant exam?

We are planning on running a standalone behavioural module in 2023, which will be open to all.

Can you just pick one of the exams? We have a couple of people who only need one more advanced exam to become Chartered.

Absolutely. Please fill out [this form](#) and we will let you know whether we're offering your preferred module as part of the Benchmark Academy.

What sort of leeway is there in timings for the exams? If work gets really busy, is there any scope for extending timelines?

The exams themselves are flexible as each individual books them directly with the CII, however the learning journey and tutoring adheres to a set timeline.

...by Mike Barrett, Consulting Director, The Lang Cat

Do you think the FCA will look at private equity investments into advice like happened with LV and Bain?

I've seen no indication of any specific activity yet, but I'm sure this is something they are monitoring. Ultimately, this comes down to individual client suitability. Any issues here, and as always, I would expect regulatory action.

What's your view on Succession being sold to Aviva?! Are we back to the bad days of insurance companies owning distribution?

Too early to say! It's certainly possible to see how this "bad old days" scenario could play out, but it is equally possible to see how this could improve outcomes for customers, especially Aviva customers who are currently non-advised.

Are you seeing firms reviewing their platform choice due to M&A activity?

FCA good practice for platform due diligence explicitly highlights that any change of ownership should trigger a review. This won't necessarily mean advisers will change platforms, but they certainly should be updating their platform DD to reflect the changes. Our platform due diligence service at <https://www.platform-analyser.com/> will help!

How do you view the platform consolidation market? Thinking about Nucleus, Parmenion and other platforms who have worked at the quality end - is there concern that standards will drop? Are firms reviewing their choices?

Again, time will tell as to how successful these corporate changes are, but based on the conversations I've been having, the new investors into both Nucleus and Parmenion are wanting to keep on doing what made them successful in the first place. No one buys a business or invests into one to destroy value.