

# Stephen Jones and the Adviser Competency Training (ACT)

Stephen Jones, Chartered Financial Planner and MD of Clear Solutions Tax and Wealth Management, successfully passed the Adviser Competency Training (ACT) for social investment.

ACT offers advisers the opportunity to learn about all key elements of social investment that they need to advise their clients successfully in this area.

## THE OPPORTUNITY

For a number of years, Stephen has been advising clients who were seeking 'green' investments which employ ethical screening as well as delivering commercial returns. More recently, he began to notice a growing demand from his clients for investments that actively pursue a positive social or environmental impact as well as a risk-aligned rate of return.

Stephen recognised the need to develop his knowledge in order to advise investors on the various vehicles that would enable them to achieve their impact objectives alongside the realisation of their financial goals.

Having lost a potential client, he realised it was time to act: *"They felt I wasn't able to help them [with social investments]. When it came down to specifics about how I was going to invest in the space, I was at a loss."*

## THE RESULTS

1. **Stephen is now more confident** integrating value-based investing into his recommendations.
2. His **clients have been very receptive**: *"I've had a really good reaction when talking about social impact investment... It has helped enormously in terms of talking to clients and engaging them and helping them achieve exactly what they want."*
3. The training has **enabled him to better serve his clients** by *"providing useful, practical information around social impact opportunities within the framework of a systematic, evidence-based investment approach."*
4. Social investment considerations are now **a core part of Clear Solutions' client process**:
  - The client engagement programme has been modified to enquire about clients' specific motivations
  - Sustainability and social impact discussions have been added into discovery meeting scripts
  - Social impact is now an ongoing theme in the narrative of Clear Solutions' newsletter.
5. When competing for clients the **ACT accreditation is an effective differentiator**: *"I can comfortably say I'm well ahead of the game."*

When asked what guidance he would give to other advisers interested in offering social impact investing to their clients, Stephen comments, **"You won't understand social impact investing without doing this course, it is as simple as that."**

## THE CHALLENGE

Stephen faced two main barriers: not knowing **what to ask**, and not knowing **where to look**.

*"Not being able to ask my clients the right questions meant I wasn't engaging them [with the area of social investment] so I was getting a no."*

His second challenge was that *"[he] didn't know how to access or research and analyse investment opportunities in the social investment space. [He] was completely unaware of what was out there and how to do it."*

## THE PROCESS

With a view to increasing both his knowledge and confidence, Stephen purchased ACT.

He enjoyed working his way through the manual, which he found *"very readable and very approachable"*.

Comparing it to other resources he had come across, Stephen notes that *"the information out there is much more piecemeal and doesn't give you the structure and analytical ability that the ACT manual gives you."*

Acknowledging that *"what is particularly important is that you can talk confidently to clients about what is available to them to meet their specific wishes, desires and motivations"*, Stephen found the discovery process to understand client motivations really valuable.

The manual provided a toolkit which helped him develop his questioning ability.