



Real Life Advice 2025

A St. James's Place insight report

Chapter 3: Purposeful Advice

Goals that shape our
ability to save and invest





Understanding the research

What do we mean by financial advice and financial guidance?

We have looked at the impact of all forms of financial advice and guidance. From professional advice received through a financial advice firm or individual including a wealth manager, an independent financial adviser (IFA), a qualified financial planner, and advice received through a bank and building society. We have also looked more broadly at understanding the impact of the help people receive through organisations such as Citizen's Advice, Pension Wise, and others.

Research methodology

Wherever 'research' is mentioned throughout this chapter, please note that this refers to the research carried out by Opinium on behalf of St. James's Place. Opinium surveyed 8,000 UK adults nationwide between 22nd July and 5th August 2025. Quantitative data¹ referenced in this report is taken from this survey. Quotas² and post-weighting³ were applied to the sample to make the dataset representative of the UK adult population. Within this poll, the relevant sub-samples were (post-weighting):

- ◆ Those in receipt of some form of advice or guidance, n=3,324
- ◆ Those currently in receipt of ongoing financial advice through a financial advice firm or individual, n=778
- ◆ Those not in receipt of some form of advice or guidance, n=4,029
- ◆ Those with a full financial plan in place, n=3,341
- ◆ Those without a financial plan, n=2,547

- ◆ Those aged 18–34, n=2,211
- ◆ Those aged 35–54, n=2,654
- ◆ Those aged 55 and over, n=3,135
- ◆ Men, n=3,856
- ◆ Women, n=4,116
- ◆ Those with over £250,000, n=459
- ◆ Those with £100,000–£249,999 n=691
- ◆ Those with £50,000–£99,999 n=879
- ◆ Those with £10,000–£49,999, n=1,981
- ◆ Those with £10,999 and under, n=2,042
- ◆ Parents n=4348
- ◆ Parents of children under the age of 18 years n=4,348
- ◆ Parents of children over the age of 18 years n=2,492
- ◆ Those in Scotland n=424
- ◆ Those in Northern Ireland n= 147
- ◆ Those in North East n=172
- ◆ North West n=500
- ◆ Those in Yorkshire and Humberside n=339
- ◆ Those in East Midlands n=324
- ◆ Those in West Midlands n=387
- ◆ Those in Wales n=196
- ◆ Those in East of England n=356
- ◆ Those in London n=561
- ◆ Those in South East n=576
- ◆ Those in South West n=368

¹ Quantitative data are data represented by numbers, including anything that can be counted, measured, or given a numerical value.

² Quota sampling is a method in which researchers create a sample based on individuals representing a population. Researchers choose these individuals according to specific traits or qualities.

³ Weighting is the process of manipulating data through calculations in order to bring them in line with the population being studied.



Claire Trott
Head of Advice

Across the UK, people save and invest for many reasons – to buy a home, prepare for retirement or build a sense of financial security. But our latest Real Life Advice Report shows that purpose is what truly makes the difference. Those who save or invest with clear goals feel more motivated, more confident, and more in control of their finances, with each goal giving a reason to keep moving forward.

What's clear is that motivation is rarely just financial – it's deeply personal and emotional. Behind every goal is something that matters: the feeling of creating a home, providing stability for loved ones, or securing independence later in life. When goals are rooted in emotion and meaning, we find that people stay more committed to achieving them. It's not simply about the numbers; it's about what those numbers make possible.

Our research proves that this clarity of purpose pays off. People with defined financial goals, timelines and life objectives are almost twice as likely to be on track – or even ahead – of their savings and investment targets compared with those without a plan.

But one of the most striking findings in this year's report is how much more motivated people feel when a savings goal is shared. This is especially true for younger generations, with two in three (64%) 18–34 year olds saying that saving as a team helps them stay on track. It is clear working together with a partner, family member or friend significantly strengthens financial resolve.

Ultimately, that sense of partnership is what sits at the heart of purposeful advice. A financial adviser helps people balance their priorities, gain clarity on their targets and stay on course for the future. Indeed, almost everyone (95%) receiving ongoing financial advice says it helps them reach and stay on track with their goals, and more than eight in ten (85%) report being on track or ahead of where they currently expected to be in terms of their savings and investments.

Looking ahead, the findings highlight how we need to do more to break down the barriers to professional advice and, more widely, to accessing some form of financial planning support. That's why the government's Targeted Support proposals are so important. They're about creating something in between general guidance and full regulated advice, so more people can get support when they need it most. As we all have to take greater responsibility for our financial futures, setting clear goals and building a financial plan will be critical in helping people achieve what truly matters to them.

Chapter 3

Purpose brings progress

How goals drive saving behaviour

Across the UK, clear goals are a defining factor in how people save and invest. They are also the cornerstone of financial confidence. People who turn purpose into a plan – setting defined timelines and life objectives – are much more likely to stay on track with their savings and investments than those who don't. Yet for many, emotional and practical barriers still stand in the way of planning with purpose.

Nearly nine in ten (87%) savers working towards a specific goal say it acts as a major motivator, while two in three (63%) believe it has helped them build stronger saving and investing habits. But the research shows it's when goals become structured plans that the real benefits emerge.

Only four in ten (42%) people say they have an overall financial plan – one that sets clear goals with timelines and life objectives. Yet those who do are almost twice as likely to be on track, or even ahead, of their savings and investment targets. Nearly eight in ten (78%) people with a structured plan say they are either on track (65%) or ahead (13%) of where they expected to be. In contrast, fewer than half (45%) of those without a defined plan can say the same, with just 38% on track and 7% ahead.

The difference is equally stark among those falling behind. More than a third (35%) of people without a plan admit they're behind their expectations, compared to just one in five (19%) of those with a plan and fewer than one in ten (9%) of those receiving ongoing financial advice.

And while purpose-led planners have a clear sense of progress, one in five (20%) of those without a plan simply don't know whether they're on track – five times the uncertainty seen among planners (4%).



78%

of people with a structured plan say they are either on track (65%) or ahead (13%) of where they expected to be.

Planning gaps across generations and genders

Men remain slightly more likely than women to have a financial plan – a reflection, perhaps, of the continuing gender gap in financial confidence and access to advice. Younger adults are also more proactive planners than older generations: nearly half of 18–34 year olds (48%) have a defined plan, compared with fewer than four in ten (39%) over-55s.

These findings highlight a simple truth: financial clarity breeds confidence. Those who take the time to define what they're working toward, and when, make greater progress and feel more in control of their financial future.



What holds people back from planning for their future

Despite the benefits, one in three (32%) people say they don't have a financial plan with clear goals or timelines, and only one in five (22%) are saving or investing towards something specific.

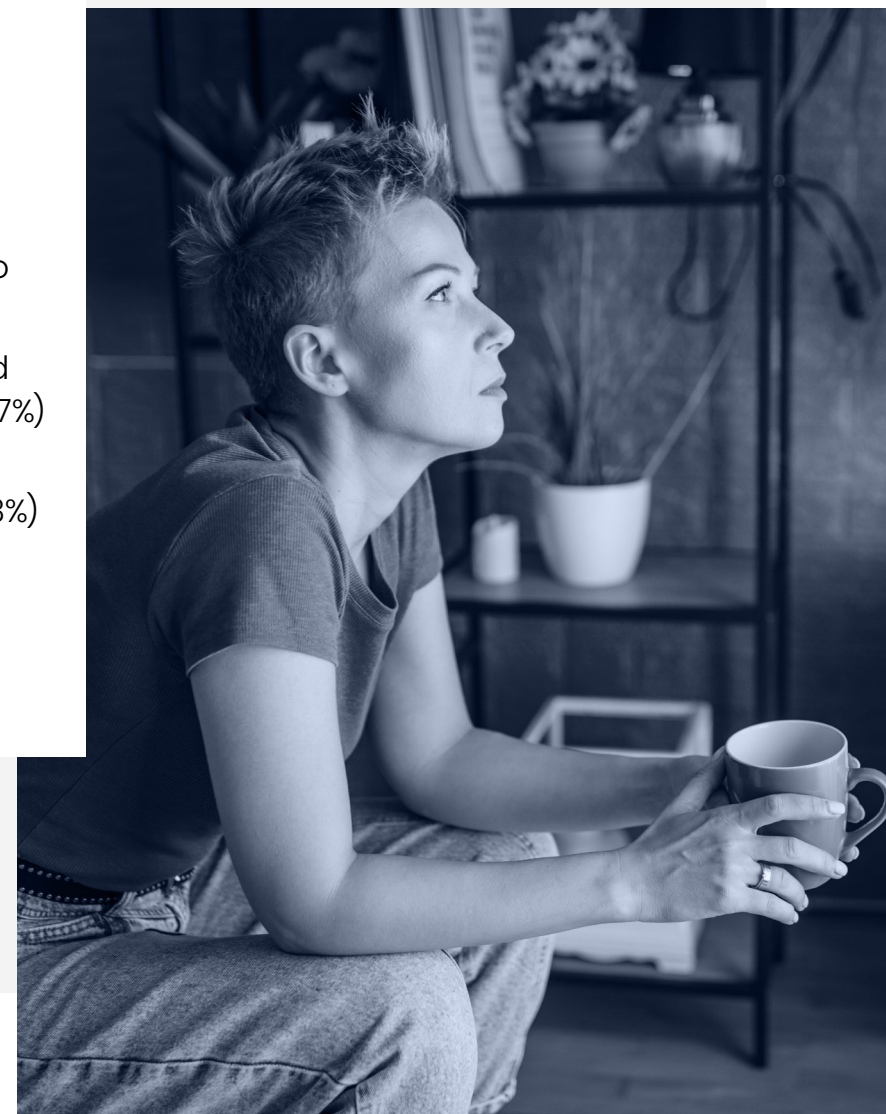
For some, the obstacle is financial – with a third (32%) of those who don't have a financial plan saying they don't earn enough to warrant one, highlighting a key part of the advice gap. Many of those who believe advice isn't "for them" are often the people who could benefit most from support in building structure and confidence around their finances. Meanwhile for almost two fifths (37%), the barriers are psychological or practical:

- ♦ **15%** say the idea feels too complicated or overwhelming
- ♦ **12%** don't believe they need one at their current stage of life
- ♦ **10%** simply don't like thinking about money
- ♦ **12%** feel that having a plan would add pressure or stress

These insights underline the need to make financial planning feel more approachable, more personal and more purposeful – helping people see it not as a burden, but as a route to progress and peace of mind.

Why goals matter

- ♦ People who set clear financial goals are almost twice as likely to be on track or ahead of their savings and investment targets (78%) compared with those who don't (45%)
- ♦ Nearly nine in ten saving toward a goal say it motivates them (87%)
- ♦ Two in three say goals improve their saving/investing habits (63%)
- ♦ Yet only around one in five are currently saving or investing toward a specific goal (22%)





The role of advice: how partnership powers purpose and success

Our insights show that people who reach their saving and investing goals are usually driven by a clear sense of purpose – whether that’s preparing for retirement, achieving life milestones, or building lasting financial security. Yet for many, turning intent into consistent progress remains a challenge.

The findings in this chapter reveal that while clear goals help people focus, professional advice provides the structure, discipline and accountability to achieve them.

- ◆ **95%** of people receiving ongoing financial advice say it helps them **reach and stay on track** with their goals.
- ◆ **85%** of advised individuals say their spending, saving and investing are **aligned with their life aspirations** – compared with just **60%** of those without advice.
- ◆ Those receiving ongoing advice are **more than twice as likely** to have a comprehensive financial plan with timelines and clear life goals compared to those that are not (**68% vs 32%**).
- ◆ They are also **twice as likely** to be working towards a specific goal (**37% vs 16%**).

- ◆ Most importantly, **eight in ten (85%)** of those with ongoing advice say they are **on track or ahead** of their savings and investment targets – compared with **six in ten (64%)** of those without.

People receiving regular advice are not only more likely to set clear goals, but also to stay on track and achieve them. Advice turns intention into action, helping people maintain good financial habits, make informed decisions and realise measurable outcomes across the nation.

Adam’s story brings this to life. As a young professional athlete starting his career, Adam recognised early on that he needed guidance to help him manage his earnings and plan for the future. Working closely with his adviser, Ben, he has learned how to budget, save and plan ahead – building the foundations for long-term financial confidence while still focusing on his sporting ambitions. Through their relationship, Adam has gained the knowledge and structure to make informed financial decisions and the reassurance that he is on the right path for the future.

As this chapter reinforces, advice gives goals purpose and structure. It helps individuals align their day-to-day decisions with their wider ambitions, stay focused as circumstances change, and build financial confidence that lasts well beyond the next milestone.

Adam's story

"Since I was eight years old, I've known that boxing was what I wanted to do, and it's been part of my life ever since. But turning professional came with a lot of changes. Suddenly there were contracts to negotiate, money coming in, and things I'd never really had to think about before. I didn't have any experience managing finances, so I knew I'd need some help.

I met my adviser, Ben, by chance at a wrestling event we were both watching as fans. We got talking and when I mentioned I was about to sign my professional boxing contract, he gave me his details. Not long after we started working together.

At that point, I didn't know much about tax, saving or how to manage my money, but Ben made it clear and easy to understand. The first thing I asked him about was buying my first car. He helped me look at every option so I could decide what made the most sense financially. From there, he's guided me through everything from setting a budget to broader financial planning – understanding tax, saving for the future, and thinking about the bigger picture.

In boxing, your career doesn't last forever. Ben has helped me think about what comes next – how to save, what to invest in, and how to make sure I have income when I'm older. We've talked about putting money into things like an ISA to help me buy a home and building towards long-term financial security.

I've learned a lot since working with Ben. Before, I didn't know anything about financial planning. Now I have a clear idea of what I can spend, what I should save, and how to make my money work harder for me. Ben's always there if I need him – whether it's for financial advice or general guidance.

I've got a busy year ahead with three more fights lined up, and it's good to know I have the right plan in place. Working with Ben has given me confidence in my finances and helped me focus on what I do best – boxing."

The value of an investment with St. James's Place will be directly linked to the performance of the funds selected and may fall as well as rise. You may get back less than the amount invested.

The levels and bases of taxation, and reliefs from taxation, can change at any time and are generally dependent on individual circumstances.

"I've learned a lot since working with Ben. Before, I didn't know anything about financial planning. Now I have a clear idea of what I can spend, what I should save, and how to make my money work harder for me."



From travel horizons to life after work: what people are saving for

Across the UK, people's savings goals reveal a blend of practical priorities and personal aspirations. Among those saving towards a specific goal, retirement tops the list, cited by 43% of savers. Beyond this, goals range from life's major milestones to everyday ambitions.

Nearly one in three (31%) are saving for travel, while others focus on long-term care (19%), a home deposit (13%), or large purchases such as a car (13%) and hobbies (11%). Family motivations also feature strongly, with some saving for children's education (11%), to support grandchildren (6%), or to cover family care costs (4%).

Evolving ambitions: what drives each generation to save

Perhaps as expected, there are clear generational differences behind the reasons for saving. Younger adults are more likely to save for tangible, near-term milestones – buying a home, starting a family or travelling – while older adults, having achieved many of these goals, increasingly focus on wealth preservation and financial security in later life. Encouragingly, younger adults are also more likely to be saving with a clear sense of purpose, with 26% of 18–34 year olds having a defined goal, compared

with 17% of over-55s – a promising sign that goal setting is helping younger generations establish positive saving habits earlier in life. In contrast, older generations are more inclined to save habitually – 30% of over-55s versus 18% of 18–34 year olds.

However, the most pronounced difference is around retirement saving. Although starting early can make the greatest long-term impact, only one in five (22%) Gen Z savers (aged 18–27) are focused on retirement – compared with a peak of 63% among Gen X (aged 44–59).

From intention to action: why advice makes the difference

As highlighted earlier in the chapter, professional advice plays a defining role in shaping purposeful saving. Unsurprisingly, those receiving ongoing financial advice are more than twice as likely to have a structured financial plan (68% vs 32%) and twice as likely to be working towards a specific goal (37% vs 16%).

When it comes to preparing for the longer-term future, the difference is even more pronounced. Six in ten (58%) advised clients are saving for retirement, compared with just 35% of those without advice.

The data underscores a clear pattern – advice drives purpose, and purpose drives progress. Those with guidance and clearly defined goals are not only more likely to save, but to do so with intention, confidence and long-term vision.

What people are saving for

- ♦ Retirement (43%)
- ♦ Travel (31%)
- ♦ Longer-term care costs (19%)
- ♦ Home deposit (13%)
- ♦ Large purchase e.g. car (13%)
- ♦ Hobbies (11%)

Goals across the nation: how saving priorities differ around the UK

Attitudes towards goal-driven saving and investing vary widely across the UK. Londoners are the most likely to save and invest with a clear purpose (29%), while those in the South West and North East are the least likely (17%). This trend extends to longer-term planning: almost half (48%) of Londoners are saving for retirement, compared with just 38% in Scotland and 39% in Wales.

Other differences that stand out across the UK:

- ♦ **Home ownership ambitions** are strongest in Northern Ireland, where 18% are saving for a deposit – closely followed by London (17%), and well ahead of the West Midlands (9%), Wales (10%), and Yorkshire & Humberside (10%).
- ♦ While saving for **care costs later in life** ranks third overall, only around one in seven people in Northern Ireland (16%), Scotland (14%), Yorkshire & Humberside (13%), and the South West (13%) list it as a goal – compared with one in five across the rest of the UK.

- ♦ **Entrepreneurial intent** peaks in London, where one in ten (11%) are saving to start a business – almost double the rate in the North West (6%) and far higher than the South West (2%).
- ♦ **Education goals** also stand out in the capital: one in five (22%) Londoners are saving for their children's education, compared with 13% in the North West and just 5% in the East Midlands.

Overall, while there are similarities across the main savings goals, the data also reveals clear contrast in financial purpose and long-term planning.

Region	Overall percentage saving / investing toward a specific goal	Percentage saving for retirement	Percentage saving for care costs in later life	Percentage saving for a home deposit	Percentage saving for their children's education	Percentage saving to start a business
London	29%	48%	23%	17%	22%	11%
North West	25%	45%	20%	13%	13%	6%
Yorkshire & Humberside	24%	45%	13%	10%	9%	5%
West Midlands	23%	41%	20%	9%	10%	4%
Northern Ireland	21%	42%	16%	18%	10%	6%
Scotland	20%	38%	14%	11%	8%	4%
East Midlands	19%	39%	20%	15%	5%	4%
Wales	19%	39%	19%	10%	7%	5%
East of England	19%	44%	21%	10%	7%	3%
South East	19%	41%	21%	13%	7%	5%
North East	17%	40%	23%	14%	6%	5%
South West	17%	44%	13%	11%	9%	2%

Shared goals: how collaboration strengthens motivation

For those working towards specific goals, motivation is rarely just financial – it's deeply personal and emotional. Saving for a house isn't simply about owning property worth a certain amount; it's about creating a family home, a space to grow and make memories. Likewise, putting money aside for long-term care isn't only about covering future costs, but about preserving independence, wellbeing, and time with loved ones.

Shared goals often strengthen both motivation and accountability. Nearly half (47%) of UK adults say they find it easier to save or invest when working towards a shared goal with a partner or family member, and a similar proportion (48%) say it makes them feel more motivated to keep going.

Younger adults are particularly responsive to this sense of shared purpose. Two in three (64%) 18–34 year olds say saving as a team helps them stay on track, compared with half (51%) of 35–54 year olds and just one in three (31%) over-55s.

More than half (53%) of those receiving professional advice also say they find it easier to save with a shared goal, compared with 39% of those without.

For those working towards specific goals, motivation is rarely just financial – it's deeply personal and emotional.

This suggests that collaboration – whether with a partner, friend, or adviser – builds the discipline and consistency that independent saving can sometimes lack. As a result, advice may play an increasingly important role for younger generations who place greater value on support and shared accountability when working towards their financial goals.



Social media and saving: help or hindrance?

While advice remains rooted in human relationships, digital influence can't be ignored.

Just over one in two (55%) people say they encounter goal-based saving challenges on social media from “no-spend” months to “52-week” savings challenges. Yet the response is mixed. Fewer than one in ten (9%) find them genuinely motivating, and a similar proportion (9%) say they give them ideas but don't change their habits.

Younger audiences are slightly more receptive, with social media becoming a growing source of financial content and information. 16% of 18–34 year olds say such challenges motivate them.

As we noted in our second chapter, social media's influence on financial behaviour is complex. Parents increasingly recognise its power to shape financial habits, yet many also see it as a double-edged force. While social media platforms have made conversations about money more accessible, can act as short-term motivators and spark interest in saving and goal setting, the line between genuine guidance and unverified advice has become blurred.

Proper financial planning will remain essential, helping to maintain focus, adjust plans as circumstances change, and keep people on track to achieve their financial goals.

Social media

– spark versus staying power

- Over half encounter goal-based challenges online (55%)
- Fewer than one in ten find them truly motivating (9%); among 18–34s this nearly doubles (16%)



Conclusion: helping the nation plan for what matters

The findings of this year's Real Life Advice Report paint a clear picture: when people have purpose, they make progress. Clear goals, structured plans and access to professional advice all play a vital role in helping people feel more confident, more motivated and more in control of their financial futures.

Yet too many remain on the sidelines, and many are held back not just by income, but by perception – seeing planning as too complicated, stressful or out of reach. These are barriers we must break down.

That's why initiatives such as the government's Targeted Support proposals matter. By creating a middle ground between general guidance and full regulated advice, they have the potential to help more people access the right support, at the right time.

Financial planning shouldn't feel exclusive. It should feel empowering – a practical and personal route to progress and peace of mind. The challenge ahead is to make that sense of purpose, and the benefits it brings, accessible to more people.





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