

Reducing your investment risk

Do you want to create a wider spread for your portfolio?

If you require your money to provide the potential for capital growth or income, or a combination of both, provided you are willing to accept an element of risk pooled investments could just be the solution you are looking for. A pooled investment allows you to invest in a large, professionally managed portfolio of assets with many other investors. As a result of this, the risk is reduced due to the wider spread of investments in the portfolio.

Pooled investments are also sometimes called 'collective investments'. The fund manager will choose a broad spread of instruments in which to invest, depending on their investment remit. The main asset classes available to invest in are shares, bonds, gilts, property and other specialist areas such as hedge funds or 'guaranteed funds'.

Most pooled investment funds are actively managed. The fund manager researches the market and buys and sells assets with the aim of providing a good return for investors.

Trackers, on the other hand, are passively managed, aiming to track the market in which they are invested. For example, a FTSE100 tracker would aim to replicate the movement of the FTSE100 (the index of the largest 100 UK companies). They might do this by buying the equivalent proportion of all the shares in the index. For technical reasons the return is rarely identical to the index, in particular because charges need to be deducted.

Trackers tend to have lower charges than actively managed funds. This is because a fund manager running an actively managed fund is paid to invest so as to do better than the index (beat the market) or to generate a steadier return for investors than tracking the index would achieve. However, active management does not guarantee that the fund will outperform the market or a tracker fund.

Unit trusts

Unit trusts are a collective investment that allows you to participate in a wider range of investments than can normally be achieved on your own with smaller sums of money. Pooling your money with others also reduces the risk.

The unit trust fund is divided into units, each of which represents a tiny share of the overall portfolio. Each day the portfolio is valued, which determines the value of the units. When the portfolio value rises, the price of the units increases. When the portfolio value goes down, the price of the units falls.

The unit trust is run by a fund manager, or a team of managers, who will make the investment decisions. They invest in stock markets all round the world and for the more adventurous investor, there are funds investing in individual emerging markets, such as China, or in the so-called BRIC economies (Brazil, Russia, India and China).

Alternatively some funds invest in metals and natural resources, as well as many putting their money into bonds. Some offer a blend of equities, bonds, property and cash and are known as balanced funds. If you wish to marry your profits with your principles you can also invest in an ethical fund.

Some funds invest not in shares directly but in a number of other funds. These are known as multi-manager funds. Most fund managers use their own judgment to assemble a portfolio of shares for their funds. These are known as actively managed funds.

However, a sizeable minority of funds simply aim to replicate a particular index, such as the FTSE all-share index. These are known as passive funds, or trackers.

Open-ended investment companies

Open-ended investment companies (OEICs) are stock market-quoted collective investment schemes. Like unit trusts and investment trusts they invest in a variety of assets to generate a return for investors.

An OEIC, pronounced 'oik', is a pooled collective investment vehicle in company form. They may have an umbrella fund structure allowing for many sub-funds with different investment objectives. This means you can invest for income and growth in the same umbrella fund moving your money from one sub fund to another as your investment priorities or circumstances change. OEICs may also offer different share classes for the same fund.

By being "open ended" OEICs can expand and contract in response to demand, just like unit trusts. The share price of an OEIC is the value of all the underlying investments divided by the number of shares in issue. As an open-ended fund the fund gets bigger and more shares are created as more people invest. The fund shrinks and shares are cancelled as people withdraw their money.

You may invest into an OEIC through a stocks and shares Individual Savings Account ISA. Each time you invest in an OEIC fund you will be allocated a number of shares. You can choose either income or accumulation shares, depending on whether you are looking for your investment to grow or to provide you with income, providing they are available for the fund you want to invest in.

AS PART OF OUR SERVICE WE ALSO TAKE THE TIME TO UNDERSTAND OUR CLIENT'S UNIQUE INVESTMENT PLANNING NEEDS AND CIRCUMSTANCES, SO THAT WE CAN PROVIDE THEM WITH THE MOST SUITABLE SOLUTIONS IN THE MOST COST-EFFECTIVE WAY. IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO DISCUSS THE RANGE OF WEALTH CREATION SERVICES WE OFFER, PLEASE CONTACT US FOR FURTHER INFORMATION.

The fund value may fluctuate and can go down as well as up. You may not get back your original investment. Past performance is not an indication of future performance. Tax benefits may vary as a result of statutory change and their value will depend on individual circumstances. This is for your general information and use only and is not intended to address your particular requirements. It should not be relied upon in its entirety and shall not be deemed to be, or constitute, advice. Although endeavours have been made to provide accurate and timely information, Critchleys Financial Planning cannot guarantee that such information is accurate as of the date it is received or that it will continue to be accurate in the future. No individual or company should act upon such information without receiving appropriate professional advice after a thorough examination of their particular situation. We cannot accept responsibility for any loss as a result of acts or omissions taken in respect of any articles. Thresholds, percentage rates and tax legislation may change in subsequent Finance Acts.