

Three IFA companies meet the Gold Standard



From left to right: Independent Financial Advice category winners Don Clark and Tracey Turner of Torquil Clark, Lee Robertson of Investment Quorum and Martin Bamford of Informed Choice show off their Gold Standard Awards

A trio of independent financial advisers were among the dozen financial services firms to win a 2007 Gold Standard Award at a ceremony at the House of Commons last week. Torquil Clark, achieving a Gold Standard for Independent Financial Advice for the fourth year in succession, was joined on the roll of honour by Informed Choice and Investment Quorum.

The Gold Standard Awards, organised by *Professional Adviser's* publisher Incisive Media, seek to go further than any other set of financial services awards by assessing companies' performance across the five elements of trust, fair value, financial strength, service and their capability to conduct business well.

"A Gold Standard award demonstrates the winner commands trust, offers fair value for its products, is financially sound and delivers the highest level of service," said Julian Marr, editorial director of *Professional Adviser* and chairman of the 19-strong judging panel. "If no entrants meet the requisite standard in a particular category, no award is given."

Such is the high standard demanded of entrants that only 48 Gold Standards have now been awarded in total over the Awards' five-year history. Other groups recognised this year were Friends Provident for Group Pen-

sions, Scottish Widows for Individual Pensions and five Fund Management category winners: BlackRock, F&C Asset Management, Fidelity International, Gartmore Investment Management and JP Morgan Asset Management, which has achieved a Gold Standard every year since the Awards began in 2003.

Two other entrants recorded their fifth win out of five with Friends Provident achieving a Gold Standard for Protection and Standard Life Healthcare a Gold Standard for Healthcare. Three firms were highly commended by the judges: Churchouse Financial Planning (Independent Financial Advice); Scottish Widows (Protection); and Tomorrow (Individual Pensions).

"The importance of assessing product providers across the wide range of elements considered by the Gold Standard Awards cannot be overstated as the Government and regulatory bodies move towards a greater sense of partnership between financial services groups and consumers," Marr said.

"In this brave new world, companies will no longer be able to hide behind walls of compliance but will have to demonstrate commitment to the sector by helping to educate and engender trust by treating customers fairly."

For further information, go to www.goldstandardawards.com.