



One mortgage journey no longer fits every borrower

In the mortgage market, we describe customers according to where they are in life: first-time buyers, mainstream borrowers, complex-income customers and later-life borrowers. Yet these are not necessarily different groups. One borrower may move through several during their mortgage journey.

A customer's circumstances do not stand still after completion. Someone buying with two incomes today might later become self-employed, move onto one income or carry their mortgage further into later life than expected.

The same label can hide very different borrowers

Research by reallymoving found that a solo first-time buyer in England saving 10% of take-home pay, would need nine years and five months to build the £27,315 required for a typical 10% deposit and upfront costs. For joint buyers, that falls to four years and eight months. The same label can therefore conceal very different challenges.

Rightmove's August figures put the average asking price of a typical first-time-buyer property at £225,525. Borrowing at 4.5 times the average salary equates to £176,904 for one person, compared with £353,808 for two. Their needs can differ before income, deposit and property nuances are considered.

When different parts of the market meet

We often see cases that show how blurred these lines can be. One recent case involved a first-time buyer purchasing her home, with her mother joining the mortgage through a Joint Borrower Sole Proprietor arrangement. The term extended into the mother's retirement, combining first-time buying, family support and later-life affordability in one application.

The customers' aim was not complicated: a daughter wanted to buy her first home and her mother wanted to help. Yet translating that ordinary ambition into mortgage criteria crossed three distinct lending categories.

Are borrowers really becoming more complex?

This raises a question: does borrower complexity come from the borrower, or from the way the market divides customers into categories? Those categories have a purpose, but become less useful when they dictate what somebody's finances or circumstances should look like.

Nor should we assume that circumstances at completion will remain unchanged. A homeowner may move from employment into running a business or experience a significant change in household income. A straightforward mortgage at purchase could therefore require a different approach when the customer next needs a lending solution.

That change does not necessarily make the customer a worse lending risk, or require a complicated answer. Propositions need sensible guardrails, but understanding what sits behind a case can mean the difference between finding a sound solution and ruling someone out because they no longer fit their original category.

Perhaps we need to be more careful with the word 'complex'

Some mortgage cases will always require more work, and lending must retain sensible boundaries. But customers should not become "complex" simply because life has moved them between market segments. Lenders must recognise the good borrower beneath changing labels, while brokers need to know which propositions offer enough flexibility for the case before them.

If we get that right, many supposedly complex mortgage journeys may prove to be ordinary lives viewed through criteria expecting something else. This matters because customers need lending decisions that reflect their real circumstances rather than a label applied at one point in time. Greater flexibility does not mean weakening standards; it means assessing the full case, recognising credible affordability and applying informed judgement within clear boundaries. Lenders then have an opportunity to provide appropriate, sustainable solutions without compromising the responsible lending principles behind every mortgage.



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