



VIEWPOINT

Newsflash

A new month and the 135th issue of Viewpoint from **Financial Partners**.

This document will be made available on our website www.f-p.hk

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Market Commentary

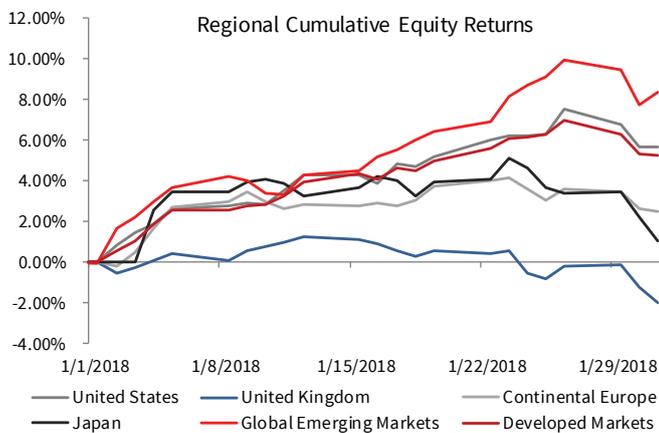
The pattern in market performance during 2017 of strong equities, rising bond yields and a weakening US Dollar continued into January. Notably the S&P 500 produced its fifteenth consecutive monthly gain, with a rise of 5.7%. Global emerging markets continued to perform solidly, returning 8.3%, supported by the strength of the global economy and a weak US Dollar. Global bonds had a more turbulent month, with yields generally rising.

However, as the month progressed there was a distinct change in markets. Indications of continuing global economic growth, particularly in the US following tax reform progress, began to weigh more heavily on bonds with US Treasuries notably affected. 10 year US Treasury yields had already risen from 2.0% in early September 2017 to 2.4% by year-end, but rose quicker during January to end the month at 2.7%, the highest level for nearly four years. Signs of an inflation pick-up, especially in the US where wage growth is rising amidst a tight labour market, heightened concerns that bonds were increasingly vulnerable. Towards the end of the month the sell-off in bonds, which spread from US Treasuries through to the UK, Europe, and somewhat to Japan, began to have an impact on equity markets, which retracted some of their earlier gains.



Ten year US Treasury yields rally late in 2017 and early 2018, pushing towards a 3.0% yield - Source: Bloomberg

In currencies, the euro and Sterling rose 3.4% and 5.0% respectively versus the US Dollar during the month, with Sterling boosted by indications of a softer Brexit stance within the UK government. In addition to the sharp gains in the euro and Sterling during 2017, the moves in January were enough to put pressure on share prices, particularly given the importance of trade to the UK and Europe. Amidst this, UK equities gave up all of their early gains in the month falling 2.0%, while Continental European equities underperformed, posting a 2.5% return. In Asia, despite the Yen rallying 3.2% versus the US Dollar, Japanese equities managed to add 1.1% in Yen terms, with markets reaching their highest level since 1990, a time when Japanese asset prices began crashing.



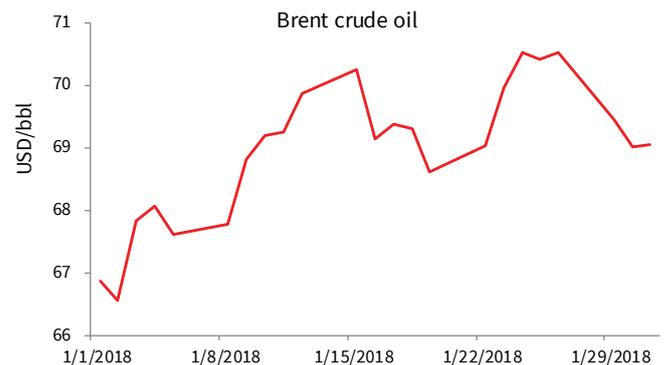
Equity returns tail off late in the month
Source: Bloomberg

The sell-off in government bonds was felt in investment grade credit, with UK corporates falling 0.9% in Sterling terms and US corporates falling 1.0% in US Dollar terms. Despite this, the majority of risks posed to fixed income markets during the month were rate risk related rather than credit risk and high-yield bonds held up, in part due to their higher coupon rates and shorter duration, with US high-yield rising 0.6%, with spreads on both IG and HY paper tightening in January.

In commodities, gold was a notable mover rising 3.2%, supported by a weakened US Dollar. Brent crude oil rose to its highest level since late 2014, hitting USD 70.5/bbl during the month, before ending the month up 3.3% at USD 69.1/bbl. This comes on the back of continued strong economic growth boosting demand while OPEC supply cuts continue to pressure inventories.

Economic news was almost universally encouraging, with data indicating strong growth across all major economies and forward indicators appearing positive. Furthermore, despite economic indicators in many countries suggesting a pick-up in inflation and wage growth, at this stage of the cycle

inflation remains generally subdued. Both the Bank of Japan and the European Central Bank remain dovish, continuing their asset purchasing programmes in the near to mid-term. This remains a good environment for the corporate sector and earnings are expected to enjoy another year of strong growth.



Brent crude hits USD 70/bbl in the month for the first time in over three years
Source: Bloomberg

However, it is clear that most central banks will follow in the footsteps of the Federal Reserve and progressively withdraw the ultra-loose monetary policy enacted post-crisis. With the Federal Reserve almost certain to increase rates by a further 25 basis points in March followed by two further 25 basis point hikes later in the year, and the ECB progressively withdrawing stimulus, the valuation hurdle for markets is rising. After the exceptional gains of 2017 and in the early weeks of 2018, some setback, prompted by profit taking and rising bond yields, appears likely. Although, we are firmly of the view that this cycle has further to run and we see a short-term setback as a healthy correction; it will be important to watch for movements in US Treasury markets, arguably the most important influence globally on asset valuations. With 30 year Treasury yields back above 3.0% and the 10 year yield approaching the same level, for the first time in several years there is both a reasonable nominal yield and a real yield of near 1.0% assuming long run inflation holds around 2.0%. A more rapid rise in yields in the short term could undermine equity markets and cause a more significant period of consolidation, although we would view such a move as an opportunity to add equity risk to our portfolios, while the time will come when US Treasuries offer their usual safe haven protection and a reasonably attractive real yield.

Market Performance - Global (Local returns)

Asset Class/Region	Index	To 31 January 2018			
		Currency	1 Month	3 Month	Year to date
Developed markets equities					
United States	S&P 500 NR	USD	5.7%	10.0%	5.7%
United Kingdom	MSCI UK NR	GBP	-2.0%	1.1%	-2.0%
Continental Europe	MSCI Europe ex UK NR	EUR	2.5%	-0.1%	2.5%
Japan	Topix TR	JPY	1.1%	4.2%	1.1%
Asia Pacific (ex Japan)	MSCI AC Asia Pacific ex Japan NR	USD	6.7%	10.7%	6.7%
Global	MSCI World NR	USD	5.3%	9.0%	5.3%
Emerging Market Equities					
Emerging Europe	MSCI EM Europe NR	USD	10.2%	16.0%	10.2%
Emerging Asia	MSCI EM Asia NR	USD	8.0%	11.2%	8.0%
Emerging Latin America	MSCI EM Latin America NR	USD	13.2%	14.6%	13.2%
BRICs	MSCI BRIC NR	USD	11.5%	15.4%	11.5%
Global emerging markets	MSCI EM (Emerging Markets) NR	USD	8.3%	12.4%	8.3%
Bonds					
US Treasuries	JP Morgan United States Government Bond Index TR	USD	-1.4%	-1.2%	-1.4%
US Treasuries (inflation protected)	Barclays Capital U.S. Government Inflation Linked TR	USD	-0.9%	0.3%	-0.9%
US Corporate (investment grade)	Barclays Capital U.S. Corporate Investment Grade TR	USD	-1.0%	-0.2%	-1.0%
US High Yield	Barclays Capital U.S. High Yield 2% Issuer Cap TR	USD	0.6%	0.6%	0.6%
UK Gilts	JP Morgan United Kingdom Government Bond Index TR	GBP	-2.1%	-0.4%	-2.1%
UK Corporate (investment grade)	BofA Merrill Lynch Sterling Non Gilts TR	GBP	-0.9%	0.5%	-0.9%
Euro Government Bonds	Citigroup EMU GBI TR	EUR	-0.4%	-0.9%	-0.4%
Euro Corporate (investment grade)	Barclays Capital Euro Aggregate Corporate TR	EUR	-0.3%	-0.7%	-0.3%
Euro High Yield	BofA Merrill Lynch Euro High Yield Constrained TR	EUR	0.4%	0.0%	0.4%
Japanese Government	JP Morgan Japan Government Bond Index TR	JPY	-0.2%	0.2%	-0.2%
Australian Government	JP Morgan Australia GBI TR	AUD	-0.5%	-0.1%	-0.5%
Global Government Bonds	JP Morgan Global GBI	USD	1.3%	2.8%	1.3%
Global Bonds	Citigroup World Broad Investment Grade (WBI) TR	USD	1.1%	2.5%	1.1%
Global Convertible Bonds	UBS Global Focus Convertible Bond	USD	3.7%	3.3%	3.7%
Emerging Market Bonds	JP Morgan EMBI+ (Hard currency)	USD	-0.5%	-0.7%	-0.5%

Source: Bloomberg | Past performance is not indicative of future returns. | * denotes estimate

Market Performance - Global (Local returns)

Asset Class/Region	Index	To 31 January 2018			
		Currency	1 Month	3 Months	Year to date
Property					
US Property Securities	MSCI US REIT NR	USD	-4.2%	-2.2%	-4.2%
Australian Property Securities	S&P/ASX 200 A-REIT Index TR	AUD	-3.3%	0.5%	-3.3%
Asia Property Securities	S&P Asia Property 40 Index NR	USD	7.5%	11.0%	7.5%
Global Property Securities	S&P Global Property USD TR	USD	1.1%	5.3%	1.1%
Currencies					
Euro		USD	3.4%	6.6%	3.4%
UK Pound Sterling		USD	5.0%	6.8%	5.0%
Japanese Yen		USD	3.2%	4.1%	3.2%
Australian Dollar		USD	3.2%	5.2%	3.2%
South African Rand		USD	4.9%	19.3%	4.9%
Commodities & Alternatives					
Commodities	RICI TR	USD	3.3%	7.5%	3.3%
Agricultural Commodities	RICI Agriculture TR	USD	2.0%	1.3%	2.0%
Oil	Brent Crude Oil	USD	3.3%	12.5%	3.3%
Gold	Gold Spot	USD	3.2%	5.8%	3.2%
Hedge funds	HFRX Global Hedge Fund	USD	2.4%*	3.2%*	2.4%*
Interest rates					
United States			1.50%		
United Kingdom			0.50%		
Eurozone			0.00%		
Japan			0.10%		
Australia			1.50%		
South Africa			6.75%		

Market Performance - UK (All returns in GBP)

Asset Class/Region	Index	To 31 January 2018			
		Currency	1 Month	3 Months	Year to date
Developed markets equities					
UK - All Cap	MSCI UK NR	GBP	-2.0%	1.1%	-2.0%
UK - Large Cap	MSCI UK Large Cap NR	GBP	-2.2%	1.4%	-2.2%
UK - Mid Cap	MSCI UK Mid Cap NR	GBP	-1.3%	-0.2%	-1.3%
UK - Small Cap	MSCI Small Cap NR	GBP	-1.5%	1.3%	-1.5%
United States	S&P500NR	USD	0.8%	3.0%	0.8%
Continental Europe	MSCI Europe ex UK NR	EUR	0.9%	-0.4%	0.9%
Japan	Topix TR	JPY	-0.8%	1.3%	-0.8%
Asia Pacific (ex Japan)	MSCIACAsia Pacificex Japan NR	USD	1.7%	3.6%	1.7%
Global developed markets	MSCI World NR	GBP	0.4%	2.0%	0.4%
Global emerging markets	MSCI EM (Emerging Markets) NR	GBP	3.3%	5.2%	3.3%
Bonds					
Gilts - All	BofA Merrill Lynch Gilts TR	GBP	-2.1%	-0.4%	-2.1%
Gilts - Under 5 years	BofA Merrill Lynch Gilts TR under 5 years	GBP	-0.6%	-0.4%	-0.6%
Gilts - 5 to 15 years	BofA Merrill Lynch Gilts TR 5 to 15 years	GBP	-2.1%	-0.8%	-2.1%
Gilts - Over 15 years	BofA Merrill Lynch Gilts TR over 15 years	GBP	-3.0%	0.0%	-3.0%
Index Linked Gilts - All	BofA Merrill Lynch Inflation-Linked Gilts TR	GBP	-2.6%	-0.1%	-2.6%
Index Linked Gilts - 5 to 15 years	BofA Merrill Lynch Inflation-Linked Gilts TR 5 to 15 years	GBP	-1.8%	-0.9%	-1.8%
Index Linked Gilts - Over 15 years	BofA Merrill Lynch Inflation-Linked Gilts TR over 15 years	GBP	-3.2%	0.3%	-3.2%
UK Corporate (investment grade)	BofA Merrill Lynch Sterling Non Gilts TR	GBP	-0.9%	0.5%	-0.9%
US Treasuries	JP Morgan United States Government Bond Index TR	USD	-6.0%	-7.5%	-6.0%
US Corporate (investment grade)	Barclays Capital U.S. Corporate Investment Grade TR	USD	-5.6%	-6.6%	-5.6%
US High Yield	Barclays Capital U.S. High Yield 2% Issuer Cap TR	USD	-4.1%	-5.8%	-4.1%
Euro Government Bonds	Citigroup EMU GBI TR	EUR	-1.9%	-1.2%	-1.9%
Euro Corporate (investment grade)	Barclays Capital Euro Aggregate Corporate TR	EUR	-1.8%	-1.0%	-1.8%
Euro High Yield	BofA Merrill Lynch Euro High Yield Constrained TR	EUR	-1.2%	-0.3%	-1.2%
Global Government Bonds	JP Morgan Global GBI	GBP	-3.4%	-3.8%	-3.4%
Global Bonds	Citigroup World Broad Investment Grade (WBIG) TR	GBP	-3.6%	-4.1%	-3.6%
Global Convertible Bonds	UBS Global Focus Convertible Bond	GBP	-1.2%	-3.3%	-1.2%
Emerging Market Bonds	JP Morgan EMBI+ (Hard currency)	GBP	-5.1%	-7.1%	-5.1%

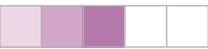
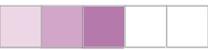
Source: Bloomberg | Past performance is not indicative of future returns. | * denotes estimate

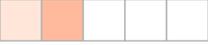
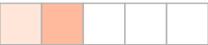
Market Performance - UK (All returns in GBP)

Asset Class/Region	Index	To 31 January 2018			
		Currency	1 Month	3 Months	Year to date
Property					
Global Property Securities	S&P Global Property USD TR	GBP	-3.6%	-1.5%	-3.6%
Currencies					
Euro		GBP	-1.5%	-0.2%	-1.5%
US Dollar		GBP	-4.8%	-6.4%	-4.8%
Japanese Yen		GBP	-1.8%	-2.6%	-1.8%
Commodities & Alternatives					
Commodities	RICI TR	GBP	-1.5%	0.6%	-1.5%
Agricultural Commodities	RICI Agriculture TR	GBP	-2.7%	-5.2%	-2.7%
Oil	Brent Crude Oil	GBP	-1.5%	5.3%	-1.5%
Gold	Gold Spot	GBP	-1.6%	-1.0%	-1.6%
Interest rates					
United Kingdom			0.50%		
United States			1.50%		
Eurozone			0.00%		
Japan			0.10%		

Asset Allocation Dashboard



Asset class	View
Equities	
Developed equities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » We retain a neutral allocation to global equities today. Valuations vary across regions and sectors and whilst in aggregate they look marginally rich, central bank policy remains accommodative and rates remain low which can support current valuations. » CB policy and politics will remain central to risk pricing, and volatility is likely to be more elevated. + Earnings growth has been robust and the global macro backdrop remains in something of a sweet spot for global equities. - Valuations are somewhat expensive at current levels and the market is arguably overdue a correction.
UK equities (relative to developed) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » UK equities are reasonably priced today but some caution is warranted given the uncertainty surrounding the UK's eventual Brexit terms. While the larger cap market constituents are more globally focused than they are UK, and have earnings shielded in large part from FX swings, the more domestically oriented names may face bigger challenges. On the plus side economic data has been resilient and better than many hoped. » The UK market remains sensitive to commodity prices. + The UK market is very much exposed to global markets and factors and somewhat insulated from the headline Brexit concerns, not least benefiting from any Sterling weakness. - Today the chief worries lie with the ongoing (and slow) Brexit negotiations.
European equities (relative to developed) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Infrastructure stocks trade at reasonable valuations today - broadly in line with global equities. Their income generating potential should continue to support the sector and attract buyers of quality infrastructure assets. + In a multi asset portfolio the relatively defensive nature of the asset class and a degree of inflation protection make the asset class appealing. - Regulation can work both for and against the underlying investments.
US equities (relative to developed) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » The US remains the most expensive of the major developed markets, even when adjusted for the strong tech sector performance. The US economy is in rude health but equity returns face a valuation headwind today, and prices already discount strong earnings growth ahead. However, with the market having repriced sharply in recent weeks we lift our rating off the lowest level. » Monetary policy remains crucial to keeping markets in check and volatility under control. To date the Fed has managed this well but there is always a risk of policy error, or an outside risk of higher inflation leaving the Fed little alternative to raising rates more quickly than docile rates markets are pricing. + The economy is strong and leading indicators positive. Tax repatriation could spur investment and share buyback programmes. - Valuations remain extended despite recent market volatility. This will challenge longer term real returns and we see better long term opportunities elsewhere.
Japan equities (relative to developed) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Japanese equities remain attractive and we acknowledge the government's policies to improve working practices and governance. However, after posting strong returns in the final quarter (and full year) the valuation is more in line with other ex US markets today. » Japanese assets should remain well buoyed by BoJ policy which remains aggressive when compared to the other main DM central banks. Any Yen weakness will likely boost equities as well, though not a base case. + Any Yen weakness will likely boost equities if the Fed does move in line with their stated intentions and the BoJ maintains their yield curve policy, that may play out through rate differentials. - In a protracted risk off scenario Yen strength would hit Japanese equities, as recently seen. The country also sits in an area of elevated geopolitical risk at the present time.
Emerging market equities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Valuations remain reasonably attractive today, even after the stellar 2017 performance. For that reason we continue to favour EM assets but moderate our view slightly as the long term return relative opportunity is less pronounced today. » More elevated volatility should be expected going forward, with CB policy and politics remaining central to risk pricing. - EM currencies remain somewhat cheap in aggregate which acts as a key support in a decision to allocate to EM. - Emerging markets remain prone to bouts of volatility and flow reversal at times of heightened perceived risk. - The Dollar has been extremely weak. Any reversal may see EM assets come under pressure.

Fixed Income	
<p>Government</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Despite on-going supportive policy actions, on a medium term outlook the majority of DM government bonds look unattractive today. » Treasuries offer improved value today as yields approach the 3% level but aggregate global government bond yields remain low. - Quality government bonds remain one of the best diversifiers in a multi asset portfolio. - 2018 is likely to mark the year that net central bank bond purchases turns negative. That provides a headwind for all rate sensitive debt.
<p>Index-linked (relative to government)</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Index linked bonds offer some selective value today but, like their nominal counterparts, they are expensive today. » UK linkers remain one of the more expensive DM markets. + Index linked bonds are one of the few ways to meaningfully protect against inflation risk. - Inflationary forces remain weak and on any renewed concerns over global growth would likely underperform nominal bonds.
<p>Investment grade (relative to government)</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Investment grade bonds provide some diversification benefit in a multi asset portfolio but valuations remain somewhat stretched today. Marginally preferred to sovereigns today. » Fundamentals remain solid but we would advocate owning more shorter dated credit at today's levels. + A reasonable alternative to owning sovereign bonds with diversifying qualities and spread. - It is difficult to see spreads tightening much further, and with central bank buying slowing the risks are asymmetric.
<p>High yield</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Spreads remain tight in leveraged credit markets, despite a recent repricing, and whilst fundamentals remain robust, all in valuations are somewhat expensive » We favour owning shorter duration credit where the risk return looks more favourable today, and loans where permissible. + In the absence of a systemic market shock high yield is likely to outperform DM sovereign bonds and investment grade credit. - Issuance terms are increasingly favouring the issuer, and valuations look somewhat expensive.
<p>Emerging market debt</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Emerging market bonds - both hard currency and local flavours - have had strong returns amidst a favourable macro backdrop and sentiment. Despite their rally, EM bonds still rank as one of the better real return opportunities. » With spreads remaining tight we favour reducing spread duration. A short duration strategy can help achieve this. + EM bonds continue to offer some of the best return opportunities in core bond markets today. - A resurgent dollar is likely to cause some temporary repricing in EM assets, and local bonds would likely bear the brunt of that.
<p>Convertible bonds</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Convertible bonds are priced slightly rich to their constituent parts today but we continue to favour an allocation to this asset class in a multi asset portfolio for the convexity it brings, which remains valuable today at a time of elevated valuations. » Some caution is warranted given the concentration to the US market and technology names. + The natural convexity provided by convertibles should continue to provide reasonable protection against any protracted equity correction. - The call optionality embedded into convertibles only really has any value if markets move higher. If volatility reverts again to the recent multi year lows then the optionality holds limited value.

Alternatives	
<p>Commodities</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Commodity prices are primarily supply and demand driven, and idiosyncratic factors will drive commodity prices as much or more so than the global economic cycle. Commodities remain sensitive to negative news on global growth » With inflation risk at the lower end of historical levels there is little upward pressure on underlying prices at present. + With the US Dollar coming down from cyclical highs, and growth reasonably strong globally, commodities have scope to generate positive returns. + Gold remains a good hedge against risk off outcomes. - Should the Dollar's decline come to a halt or reverse, commodities would likely come under pressure.
<p>Property (UK)</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Property remains an attractive asset class for investors requiring yield. In the UK returns look more attractive outside the capital at this time, where prices have come under pressure. » Total returns will come mostly in the form of income with limited scope for capital growth. When viewed against high quality longer duration Sterling assets and inflation linked bonds, property has appeal. + The retail property and mall sector has been supported in recent months with the announcement of several deals consolidating the larger players. - As a long duration asset class property remains susceptible to any repricing in long term bond yields.
<p>Infrastructure</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » generating potential should continue to support the sector and attract buyers of quality infrastructure assets. + In a multi asset portfolio the relatively defensive nature of the asset class and a degree of inflation protection make the asset class appealing. - Regulation can work both for and against the underlying investments.
<p>Liquid Alternatives</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » We define this section as less/non-directional, absolute return type strategies that seek to capture long term risk premia or market mispricings, and includes hedge fund alternatives in predominantly UCITS vehicles. » With valuations in the more core asset classes at more extended levels today, particularly in fixed income which is the traditional diversifier, we favour an allocation to a basket of liquid strategies today. + These strategies provide additional diversification with reasonable return potential. - The sector is relatively young and growing. It remains somewhat untested so thorough due diligence is vital, and recommended.
Currencies	
<p>GBP</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Sterling has moved markedly higher in recent months, both a function of continued Dollar weakness and some softening around the Brexit margins (though real progress remains limited). » In real terms the currency remains at the lower end of valuations and has room to appreciate over the medium to long term, but politics and rate policy are likely to dominate its nearer term path, and remain a source of volatility. » Valuation supports a long position but with the USD looking somewhat oversold, Sterling positioning having rebounded markedly, and Brexit front and centre, we rate slightly under neutral today.
<p>Euro</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » As with Sterling the Euro has benefitted most from the weaker Dollar but its own fundamentals have supported its gains. Whilst any change in explicit rate policy still remains some way off, the reducing quantum of bonds the ECB is now buying exerts some marginal upside to rates, certainly in sentiment, and the economic backdrop is as good as it has been for a number of years. » In real terms the common currency looks about fair value today and is not a compelling long term buy. » Positioning is ultra extended today and versus the Dollar the currency looks somewhat overbought. As such we look for a better entry level.
<p>Yen</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Rate differentials continue to offer little reason to buy the Yen as the Bank of Japan's yield curve policy means short rates will offer no real value for some time. However, in real terms the Yen looks cheap today. » Yen exposure is a useful portfolio diversifier but after a recent pick up in volatility this quality has mostly played out. Speculative positioning remains near the lows which may provide support. » We take a more cautious view today as the currency looks somewhat extended after rallying sharply in recent weeks.

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