

Asset Allocation Dashboard

■ Positive
 ■ Neutral
 ■ Negative

Asset class	View	Comments		
Equities		Positive	Negative	Our view
Developed equities	■	<p>The continued and concerted efforts of governments and central banks, reasonable news from the Eurozone and moderately positive developed markets macro data have been very well received, and continue to push markets up.</p> <p>Corporates continue to generate healthy level of profits. Whilst increasing valuations make the asset class less attractive, they are by no means stretched.</p>	<p>Many risks remain. The global macroeconomic situation continues to be uncertain. Despite some positive data surprises globally of late, there is little reason for macro economics to become a significant driver of markets in the short term; policy risks are a potential source of volatility, therefore.</p> <p>From a very short term perspective following strong returns over the past 12 months, the markets may be due a pause. The recent market sell-off has not materially changed valuations.</p>	At these valuation levels we view a broadly neutral allocation as appropriate. Policy is key for markets today, especially any surprises re debt ceiling or QE tapering.
UK equities Relative to developed	■	Valuations are marginally better than elsewhere and there is less systemic risk than Europe.	The UK's economic outlook is, on the face of it increasingly impressive, but despite strong headline data, there remain areas of fragility.	The UK is reasonably attractive, but remains vulnerable to resource price normalisation given its over-sized allocation to resource companies and to knock on effects from the EU.
European equities Relative to developed	■	<p>A relatively cheap developed market with the lowest investor expectations and the highest dividends.</p> <p>Sentiment remains very low, despite the market containing many global companies.</p>	<p>Economic data remains weak. Sovereign risks continue to dominate, and the banking sector in many countries remains fragile. There is no reason to expect this to change any time soon. The situation will remain compromised, even when Europe falls from the headlines. Austerity is unpopular outside the political classes and there is a risk that it is perennially pushed back.</p>	Europe remains cheap, but does not qualify for the "fat pitch" that we look for. It is also the most over indebted developed region. Ultimately the macro story and the lack of a valuation extreme suggests caution in this region. Longer term, Europe needs some sort of political and banking consolidation, but the ECB iscalming the waters for now.
US equities Relative to developed	■	Despite the occasional political misstep, the US economic outlook remains the best positioned among major economies. Overall it has been the beneficiary of solid news flow in 2013. Some economically significant sectors like housing, are recovering and the corporate sector remains in good shape. The consumer's confidence is improving thanks to improvements in housing and employment.	<p>The most expensive equity region, with low dividend yields and high investor expectations already priced in.</p> <p>Any surprises re QE will likely be interpreted as a short term negative signal by the markets and will likely result in volatility.</p>	<p>Consistently the most expensive market. Despite the better US news flow, it warrants an underweight. But this is not a "fat pitch". Be cautious on sizing. Investors can buy very similar companies elsewhere for less.</p> <p>Monetary policy remains a key swing factor for the US.</p>
Japan equities Relative to developed	■	The market has responded well to the governmental and central bank policy although it suffered a disproportionately large fall during the recent market sell-off. We are likely to see a continuation or increase in quantitative easing in order to stimulate the economy and inflation.	<p>When adjusted for differing accounting standards Japan in fact looks a little cheaper than Europe and comes with considerable uncertainty.</p> <p>Additionally the (still quite) strong yen, the dull economic backdrop and demographic headwinds are a long term concern.</p>	The government's pro liquidity policies are welcome – and a weaker yen helps – but inconsistent data readings and a habit of not 'mean reverting' make this a difficult market to call. Neutral.

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Equities		Positive	Negative	Our view
Emerging market equities	■	Emerging markets have meaningfully underperformed developed equity markets of late. Valuations appear attractive even on a cautious medium-term outlook for the region.	The asset class continues to face near term headwinds; withdrawal of US monetary stimulus, political uncertainty in the 'fragile five' economies and an apparent slowdown in Chinese growth may continue to weight on markets.	<p>Valuations, in our opinion, are sufficiently attractive to justify an allocation.</p> <p>Care should be taken to ensure the strongvaluation bifurcation between high and low quality stocks does not impact returns.</p>

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Fixed income		Positive	Negative	Our view
Government	■	<p>A withdrawal of monetary stimulus may still be some way off in the UK. With subdued inflation expectations, a further significant sell off in UK gilts appears less likely.</p> <p>High quality government paper remains the ultimate haven in times of elevated risk aversion. At a 3% yield on US treasury and UK gilt, these government bonds may offer investors an element of protection during a market sell-off, as they did in late January.</p>	Despite a drift up in yield last year, long term government bonds remain expensive in our view.	The US Federal Reserve has only just begun to reduce the extraordinary monetary stimulus in place since late 2008 with other developed market central banks arguably still some way behind. On a medium-term outlook government bond yields are not attractive.
Index-linked Relative to government	■	Given the stickiness of inflation at levels above breakeven inflation rates, linkers look like a more reasonable way of investing in government bonds than the fixed rate government bond market. Recent history suggests projected inflation decreases are over optimistic. A marginal red today.	<p>Linkers remain vulnerable to weak economic news flow.</p> <p>Real yields are still very low, or indeed negative and are expected to rise to more normal levels as monetary policy normalises.</p>	Like their nominal counterparts, linkers are ultimately expensive. Nonetheless, compared to a conventional government bond they could provide some protection against unexpected inflation, given that many market participants are expecting a relatively benign inflationary environment over the next few years
Investment grade Relative to government	■	<p>UK Investment grade spreads – a measure of relative value compared to government bonds – remain moderately attractive.</p> <p>Good quality corporates are able to access debt markets extremely cheaply – which bodes well for the future.</p>	<p>In absolute terms, rather than relative, the duration component of investment grade bonds will be a headwind, should government bond yields move higher.</p> <p>While spreads are reasonably attractive, nominal yield levels are not particularly compelling compared to their history due to low reference (government) rates.</p>	<p>Investment grade makes a decent play against government bonds. Our positive views on corporate credit health mean investment grade is a reasonable replacement for government debt. Should also benefit from strong technicals of any further liquidity measures.</p> <p>While still a reasonable yield opportunity today relative to governments, looking forward this trade seems to be running out of road – especially if attention is olnypaid to nominal yield levels.</p>

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High yield	■	<p>Remains a popular fixed income asset class. Spreads have compressed significantly, but at a total yield of 5.6% in the US, high yield yields may appear attractive for those investors in search of yield in a low rate environment.</p> <p>Default rates remain very low and recovery rates are ahead of expectations too.</p>	<p>Spreads and headline yields are low by historical standards. Spreads are below what we would regard as a sustainable long term level; they appear to be pricing in a continuation of the highly favourable environment we have had for corporate debt</p>	<p>The upside in allocating to high yield debt at present spread and yield levels is not sufficient, in our view, to compensate for the risks inherent in the asset class.</p>
Loans	■	<p>Long term value looks attractive. Unlike high yield, the spread available on loans appears attractive with the additional benefit of a floating rate coupon.</p>	<p>The less liquid part of the corporate debt market with wider bid/offer spreads. Risks are much the same as high yield in the sense that a significant pickup in defaults may negatively impact the asset class. With most US loans having LIBOR floor protection, investors will not benefit from an increasing coupon until policy rates have increased to around 1% or above.</p>	<p>Hold exposure if appropriate to mandate. Very similar to high yield, with the exception that investors need to consider the less liquid nature of this market. The main advantage is the floating rate nature of the loan universe, which will help if and when interest rates rise.</p>
Emerging market debt (hard currency)	■	<p>Despite relatively attractive yields, recent inflation data remains something of a worry, although it does appear to be waning.</p> <p>Spreads today make the hard currency denominated emerging markets debt a green on our colour code.</p> <p>Recent falls in emerging market currencies and attractive yields. We are actively investigating local currency debt.</p>	<p>China remains as murky as ever, and debt levels are growing. The data from that region remains mixed and often disappointing.</p> <p>In the short term, EMD is always sensitive to bad news regarding emerging markets and 'risk aversion' trades. The asset class remains sensitive to reducing QE and further investor outflows from the asset class.</p>	<p>EMD also appears sensitive to QE tapering, especially markets with current account deficits. However, spreads today make the hard currency parts of emerging markets debt a green on our colour code. Emerging markets are likely to face continued headwinds over much of 2014. Moderate allocations are justifiable, but be wary of making an oversized allocation today.</p>
Convertible bonds	■	<p>Trading at essentially fair value. Given the lack of attractive valuations in developed equity markets, the asset class provides an element of upside should the momentum in equity markets continue, with the benefit of a bond floor.</p>	<p>Significant systemic risks remain. The call optionality embedded in converts is only worth something if markets continue to increase.</p>	<p>Convertible bonds have moved to fair value relative to their constituent parts, with the exception of Asian converts, which look reasonable value. An allocation can be justified on the grounds that it retains some equity market upside with downside protection</p>

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Alternatives		Positive	Negative	
Commodities	■	In a world of fiat currencies, the storing of wealth in commodities has attractions. Global growth rates remain reasonable and will provide a baseline of demand.	<p>Economic data remains unexciting. Harsh austerity plans combined with sluggish growth does not suggest inflation is a major worry.</p> <p>Strength of final demand is still questionable; China remains as murky as ever. Furthermore, China holds significant inventories already.</p>	<p>Commodities remain sensitive to negative news on growth.</p> <p>They could rally from here but volatility and ongoing economic uncertainties suggest caution.</p>
Property (UK)	■	<p>Yields remain reasonably attractive. Reasonable vacancy rates still remain in certain areas.</p> <p>Active management remains key in this sector.</p>	<p>Economic data remains weak. In London significant systemic risks remain, notably concerning the European situation and the prospect of further retrenchments in the financial sector. Furthermore, reasonable supply is being generated in London.</p> <p>Outside London strength of final demand remains weak and the continued malaise of the high street potentially impacts a large section of the UK property bank.</p> <p>The illiquidity of direct strategies must also be borne in mind.</p>	Income attractive versus gilts but limited room for capital growth. Neutral.

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Currencies			
Dollar	■	The dollar is undervalued but the Fed's rhetoric suggests tightening will be pushed out for a long time and there is little reason for this to change in the short term. The political and rating situation is likely to remain a weight on the currency.	Neutral to slight overweight
Euro	■	Despite recent resilience, sovereign issues remain a threat to the value of the euro.	Neutral
Yen	■	Despite recent weakness, the yen remains vulnerable to central bank intervention.	Underweight
Emerging market currencies	■	While emerging markets do not have the same structural problems as developed economies and have stronger fiscal, debt and trade positions than developed markets, these advantages are wearing off. But emerging market debt is far more problematic to value and is more volatile making conviction harder to come by.	Long term overweight

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