ROYAL LONDON UK GOVERNMENT BOND FUND

Quarterly Report 30 June 2021

For professional clients only, not suitable for investors

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Asset split

	Fund (%)	Benchmark[1] (%)
Conventional credit bonds[2]	3.9	0.0
Index linked credit bonds	0.0	0.0
Sterling conventional gilts	94.4	100.0
Sterling index linked gilts	0.0	0.0
Foreign conventional sovereign	0.0	0.0
Foreign index linked sovereign	1.7	0.0
Derivatives	0.0	0.0
Other	0.0	0.0

Fund data

	Fund	Benchmark[1]
Duration[3]	11.4 years	12.1 years
Gross redemption yield[4]	0.70%	0.75%
No. of stocks	41	53
Fund size	£847.7m	-

Source: RLAM, based on the Z share class. Launch date: 30.01.1990.

[1]Benchmark: FTSE® Actuaries All Stock Gilts Index.

[2]Conventional credit bond allocation includes exposure to non-sterling credit bonds and CDs, where applicable.

[3]Excluding cash

[4]The gross redemption yield is calculated on a weighted average basis

Reported yields reflect RLAM's current perception of market conventions around timing of bond cash flows. Heightened uncertainty due to the COVID 19 crisis may impact these timings for bonds with callable feature.

Performance

	Fund (%)	Benchmark[1] (%)	Relative (%)
Q2 2021	**1.56**	**1.70**	**-0.14**
Year-to-date	-5.30	-5.67	0.36
Rolling 12 months	-5.78	-6.24	0.45
3 years p.a.	3.52	3.03	0.50
5 years p.a.	2.54	2.02	0.52
10 years p.a.	4.84	4.69	0.16
Since inception p.a. 30.04.2010	5.10	4.75	0.35

Past performance is not necessarily a reliable indicator of future performance. The value of investments and the income from them is not guaranteed and may go down as well as up and investors may not get back the amount originally invested.

All performance figures stated gross of fees and tax unless otherwise stated.

Source: RLAM, based on the Z share class.

[1]Benchmark: FTSE® Actuaries All Stock Gilts Index.

On 1 May 2012, the Royal London UK Government Bond Fund (Class B) was renamed the Royal London UK Government Bond Fund (Class Z). The Z share class was launched on 30 April 2010. All performance after this date is for the Z share class. All performance for periods prior to 30 April 2010 is for the Royal London UK Government Bond Fund (Class A).Therefore the performance shown in this table is a merged return which includes the historical 'A' share return for the periods to 30 April 2010, before the Z share existed. If you were invested in the fund prior to this, your investment was in the A shares. If you require separate performance solely for the Z shares since 30 April 2010, please contact your Client Account Manager.

Performance for the Royal London UK Government Bond Fund is based on pricing at noon, while index performance is based on pricing at close of business, preventing direct performance comparison. The significance of this timing discrepancy is likely to be greater for shorter measurement periods.

As of 6 April 2017, the UK Government announced that funds paying interest distributions will be required to pay those distributions gross of tax.

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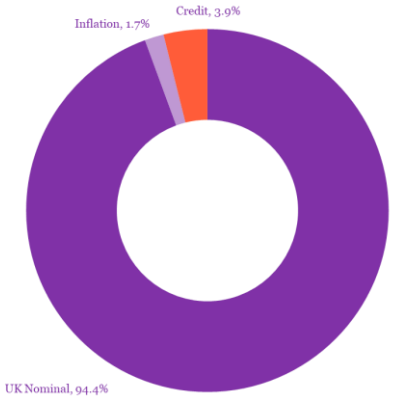
Ten Largest Holdings

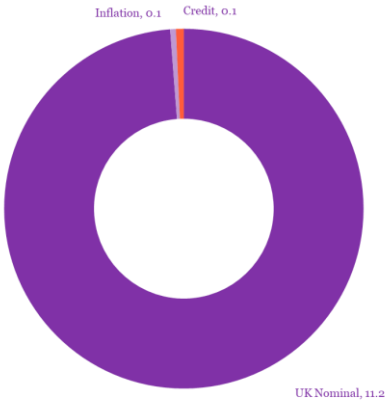
	Weighting (%)
UK Treasury 0.125% 2024	12.1
UK Treasury 0.125% 2026	7.8
UK Treasury 0.125% 2028	7.3
UK Treasury 1.75% 2037	6.9
UK Treasury 0.125% 2023	6.2
UK Treasury 0.625% 2035	5.2
UK Treasury 1.25% 2041	4.5
UK Treasury 1.75% 2057	4.3
UK Treasury 0.25% 2031	4.1
UK Treasury 1.625% 2054	3.9
Total	**62.2**

Source: RLAM. Figures in the table above exclude derivatives where held, subject to rounding

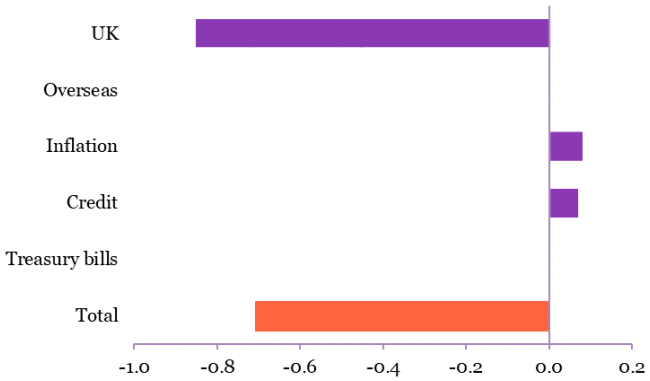
Asset split by percentage



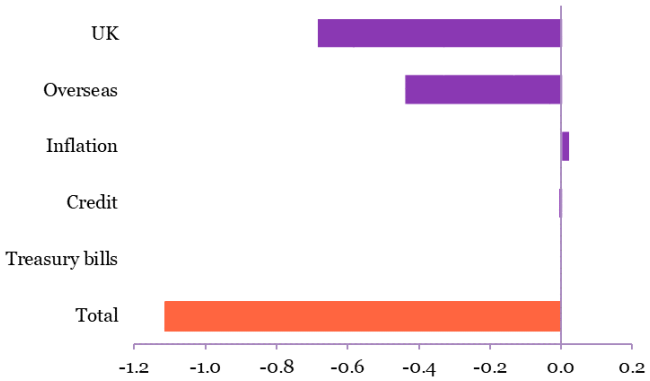
Asset split by duration



Asset allocation relative to benchmark (duration)



Asset allocation change on the quarter (duration)



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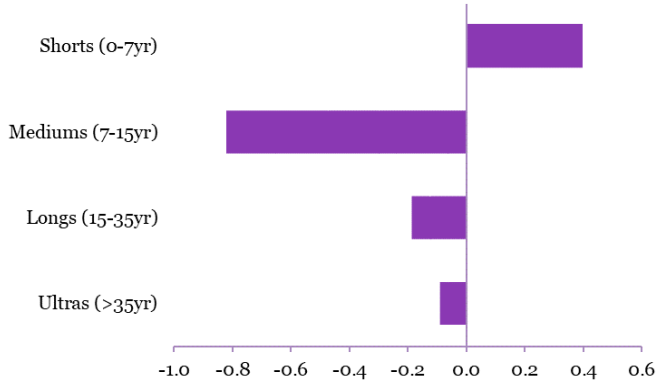
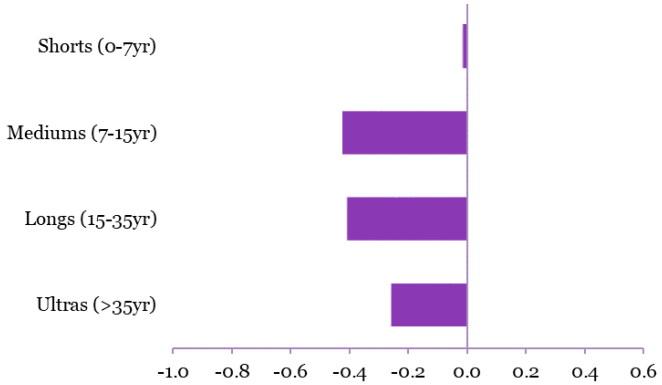
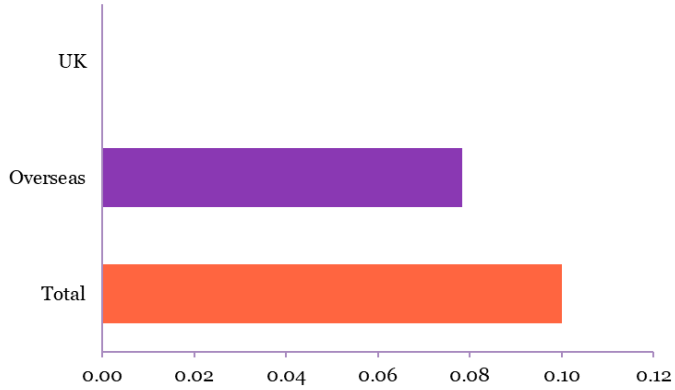
Yield curve relative to benchmark (duration)



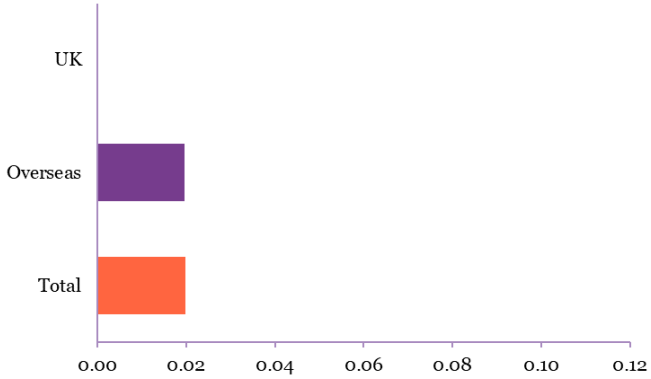
Yield curve change on the quarter (duration)



Inflation exposure (duration)



Inflation exposure change on the quarter (duration)



Market overview

- Global government bond returns were mixed in the second quarter. The US 10-year treasury led global markets, as its yield fell by 27 basis points (bps) over the quarter to 1.47%. In the UK, 10-year yields ended down 13bps to 0.72% – having traded within a stable 15bps range throughout quarter, after a relatively volatile first three months of the year. Europe was the laggard of major global markets and core market yields were up for the quarter rather than down; the 10-year bund was up by 9bps to -0.21%. The deviation in performance in Europe compared to in the US and UK can partly be attributed to the delays in its vaccine programme. Rising yields have been closely linked to the success of vaccine programmes, and as the US and UK made a flying start on vaccinations in 2021, which led to a rise in yields, while the EU only began to make good progress in the spring. Furthermore, substantial European government bond issuance in the first quarter, a traditional feature of the European market, added to the market's underperformance in this quarter.
- The second quarter saw investors re-engage with global economic data, and while data was broadly very strong and supported predictions of a sustained global economic recovery, a particularly strong US CPI print sent jitters through global markets on 12 May. As the US inflation measure hit 4.2%, the major global discussion point for the quarter turned to whether high inflation might be sustained rather than pass as transitory. Although the Federal Reserve reassured markets that inflation would indeed be transitory, and that they were not yet 'talking about talking about tapering', taper talk begun at the June Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) meeting and forecasts showed a more hawkish stance. Median committee forecasts showed rates at 0.6% at the start of 2023 – much closer to current market prices – pricing in two 25bps rate rises during 2022. In comparison, March forecasts had predicted no rate rises over the same period.
- In Europe, the ECB followed a similar stance to the US on inflation and vied not to slow the pace of their asset purchasing programme as a response to strong data. Panetta, an economist and member of the ECB's executive board said; "only a sustained increase in inflationary pressure … could justify a reduction in our purchases." At the close of the quarter, any decision by the ECB to roll back support for markets had been delayed to a later date.

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- Market events in the UK in the quarter tended to have little impact on market prices. In April, the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) revised down its borrowing forecasts, leading to a £40bn reduction in issuance by the Debt Management Office (DMO), mainly across short and medium-dated gilts. Although this supported prices in those sectors, gilts were largely stable during the second quarter. In May, the Bank of England (BoE) began tapering, slowing the pace of its quantitative easing programme – this had been broadly expected and was therefore already fully priced into gilt markets. However, surprisingly hawkish comments on interest rates from Gertjan Vlieghe, a Bank of England policymaker, pushed gilt yields up in the latter half of May, but only temporarily. In all, the UK economy remained strong in the second quarter, against a backdrop of potential Brexit-related uncertainty over trade, and irrespective of the four-week delay to the exit from lockdown which was postponed until 19 July. At the end of the period, the BoE remained supportive of the UK economy. It was announced on 24 June that the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) would leave interest rates unchanged at 0.1% and keep the total size of its bond-buying programme unchanged at £895bn, to be completed by the end of 2021.

Portfolio commentary

- We continued to avoid taking a strong strategic duration position during the quarter. While yields were volatile on an intraday, and intra-week basis, the market traded in a narrow yield range for much of the second quarter. However we are becoming increasingly confident that the current economic strength being seen will to continue into the second half of the year, and the market will start to price in rate hikes for late 2022/early 2023. This should see yields rise from current levels, and as a result, we have started to rebuild the portfolio's strategic duration short relative to the benchmark. The fund began the quarter with a duration around 0.4 years long relative to its benchmark, the FTSE Actuaries UK Conventional Gilts All Stocks Index, and closed the period around 0.5 years short. Given the small relative duration position, and relatively range-bound markets, the fund's strategic duration positioning had little impact on performance.
- With regard to yield curve positioning, we held a slight steepening bias throughout the period, through a long 5-year gilts and short 10- and 30-year gilt stance. This had a broadly neutral impact on performance across the quarter. It is worth noting that this bias was a consequence of our short position being both in 10- and 30-year maturities, rather than a specific view on the curve. The current view is that the shape of the curve is neither too steep nor too flat from 10-year and longer, rather it is the overall level of yields that is mispriced given current economic conditions.
- The fund increased its gilt underweight in the second quarter, closing the period around 1 year short in duration terms. This was reflected through the fund's outright short duration of around 0.5 years, as well as being short gilts on a cross-market basis – broadly, our positions have been positive for performance. During the quarter we took profits on Australia and US, moving proceeds back into gilts, while Japanese real yields also added value as markets continued to buy into the reflation theme. Although we took losses on French green bonds in May, we sold gilts back into France in June as we felt the market had underperformed by too much relative to other European markets. This was in part due to political concerns, but also due to the to the inaugural issuance of the EU's 'Next Generation EU' (NGEU) bonds, the fruition of an €800bn loan and grant programme agreed in April that runs through until 2026. We tactically traded NGEU and Italy in the quarter, which added to fund performance.
- In inflation, we tactically sold gilts (2061s) into index-linked gilts (2065s) on the day of the June auction, and took profits after the spread had moved by 5bps.
- The fund's highly rated sterling credit exposure had no significant impact on performance in the quarter, as credit spreads (the average extra yield available from corporate bonds compared with government debt of equal maturity) tightened by 5 basis points to 0.91%. The fund's credit exposure remains focused in highly rated, covered, floating rate notes.

Outlook

- As the vaccination rates increase and confidence around vaccine efficacy heightens, the prospect of a return to more normal conditions draws closer. Optimism for the UK's economic is growing too, with data remaining strong despite the additional economic concerns related to Brexit. As such, central bank support is beginning to wane, and markets are changing focus to the potential for tapering and rises in base rates. The BoE slowed the pace of its purchases in May and the level of quantitative easing is likely to be further reduced over time, and other monetary policy makers are at least 'talking about talking about tapering'. We therefore expect yields to rise across the near to medium term and will look at increasing the strategic short into market rallies.
- Uncertainty remains high in markets, particularly regarding inflation and future rises in base rates. Investors are searching for evidence to decipher whether current inflationary pressures are indeed transitory, while simultaneously hanging on every word of central bankers in the lookout for signals offering insight into when rate rises will begin and how quickly each incremental rise will occur. With this in mind we will continue to employ a tactical investment approach in the fund, trading short-term market volatility to add to fund performance.

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