

UK Smoothed Managed With-Profits Fund Investment Report

Q1 2024

This leaflet gives information on the following

- factors that affect with-profits plan values
- types of assets – how these affect investment returns
- investment market conditions
- asset and investment return details



This leaflet is intended for individuals who are familiar with investment terminology. If you need an explanation of the terms used email us at with_profits@standardlife.com

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Factors that affect with-profits plan values

The return on the asset mix is only one of the factors that affect with-profits plan values. Other factors are the deductions we make, and any other discretionary adjustments that we may apply such as smoothing. The deductions are similar to charges for investment-linked funds available to Stakeholder plans. These deductions will be no more than the maximum allowable under Stakeholder regulations.

The value of with-profits investments can go down as well as up and you may get back less than you paid in. For more information on with-profits please see our guides available on our website at standardlife.co.uk/investments/funds/with-profits-information

Types of assets

We invest in a wide range of assets including equities, bonds and cash deposits. We expect that a higher proportion of equities will produce returns that are higher over the long term, but more variable over the short term. We expect that a higher proportion of bonds and cash will result in returns that are more stable, but lower over the long term.

Investment Market Conditions

- Global equity markets ended the quarter notably higher, supported by reduced inflationary pressures in most developed economies after a prolonged period of monetary tightening.
- The improved backdrop means that major central banks are now expected to start cutting interest rates from the middle of 2024. Nevertheless, they remain determined to keep inflation under control for now.
- Meanwhile, economic data has generally been more robust than was feared, meaning that a 'soft landing' is now more likely. However, investors continued to be concerned about the outlook for the Chinese economy – especially the country's property sector – and the implications for global economic growth. The ongoing wars in Ukraine and the Middle East remain other key risks.
- Government bond markets ended lower. Concerns about the risk of a global economic recession lessened given robust economic data, particularly in the US. Also, with core inflation still elevated, central banks have maintained a data-dependent stance for now. However, spreads on both US investment-grade and high-yield corporate bonds tightened over the quarter, reflecting improved investor risk appetite.

UK Equities

UK equities ended higher in both local-currency and euro terms but underperformed most other regional indices. The internationally focused FTSE 100 Index outperformed the domestically focused FTSE 250 Index. The UK economy entered a recession in the fourth quarter of 2023. Annual inflation fell from 4.0% in January to a lower-than-expected 3.4% in February but remained above the Bank of England (BoE)'s 2% target. Moreover, annual core inflation was also below expectations, falling from 5.1% to 4.5% over the same time frame. The BoE maintained its Bank Rate at a 15-year high of 5.25% over the quarter.

Overseas Equities

US equities rose strongly in both dollar and euro terms. US annualised GDP grew by 3.4% in the fourth quarter of 2023. Inflationary pressures continued to ease. In particular, the US Federal Reserve (Fed)'s favoured measure of inflation, the core Personal Consumptions Expenditures Price Index, fell from an annual rate of 2.9% in January to 2.8% in February. The Fed kept the target range for the fed funds rate at a 42-year high of 5.25–5.50% over the period. However, it has signalled three rate cuts over the remainder of 2024, with more easing to come in 2025 and 2026.

European equities rose in local-currency terms over the quarter. Annual GDP in the eurozone grew by just 0.4% in 2023, with the region's economy stagnating in the fourth quarter of the year. According to a preliminary estimate, annual inflation fell from 2.6% in February to a lower-than-expected 2.4% in March (with the core rate declining from 3.1% to a lower-than-expected 2.9%) but remained above the European Central Bank (ECB)'s 2% target. Therefore, the ECB kept its main refinancing operations rate at a 22-year high of 4.5% over the quarter.

Japanese equities rose notably in yen terms but by less in euro terms. Japan's economy only narrowly avoided a recession in the fourth quarter of 2023. Annual core inflation of 2.8% in February remained above the Bank of Japan (BoJ)'s 2% target.

Asia Pacific ex-Japan equities rose in both local-currency and euro terms over the quarter. Markets in the region generally ended higher given increased optimism about the global growth outlook as falling annual inflation rates led to central banks considering future interest-rate cuts.

Fixed Interest

Global government bonds fell in local-currency terms but by less in sterling terms. As price pressures continued to ease in most major economies, investors began to look ahead to potential rate cuts in 2024. However, with core inflation still elevated, central banks have maintained a data-dependent stance. Meanwhile, concerns about the risk of a global economic recession lessened given robust economic data, particularly in the US.

Corporate bonds had a solid quarter. In the US, riskier high-yield bonds outperformed higher-quality investment-grade bonds, with the spreads on both instruments tightening. This was against a backdrop of reduced inflationary pressures, which led to central banks maintaining interest rates and flagging potential easing ahead. Moreover, investor fears of a global recession diminished, particularly given the robust performance of the US economy.

Asset Mix

Our aim when managing our with-profits business is to provide growth over the long term, while continuing to maintain an appropriate level of financial strength so that we can meet all contractual obligations to our customers.

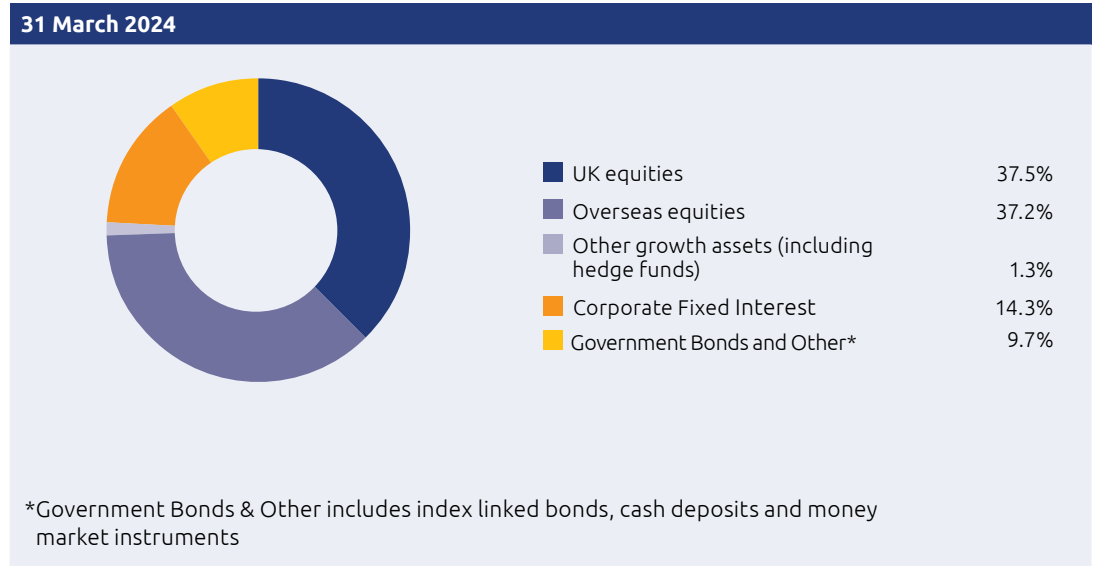
We regularly review the asset mix that backs our with-profits business, taking account of such things as:

- the strength of the fund
- any changes in current and expected future market conditions

Note: the asset mix will also change as market values change.

Any change in the asset mix is likely to result in a change in future returns and plan payouts, see page 1 – Types of assets.

Asset Mix Details



Recent investment returns are best estimates. These investment returns do not allow for charges or any smoothing and have been rounded down.

Customers should refer to their annual statement to see how the value of their plan changes over time.

These figures refer to the past. Past Performance is not a reliable guide to future performance.

Investment returns: Last four quarter years

Quarter year ending on:	30/06/23	30/09/23	31/12/23	31/03/24
Stakeholder With Profits 2006 Fund and Corporate Stakeholder With Profits 2006 Fund	0.1%	1.3%	5.2%	4.6%

The Asset Mix for the Stakeholder Funds is predominately invested in equities, in particular UK equities. The returns in Q1 reflect the positive returns in most asset classes tempered to some extent by the negative returns in government bonds over the period.

Asset mix details for last five calendar years

Asset mix at 31 December	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
UK Equities	45%	44%	49%	44%	38%
Overseas Equities	22%	21%	23%	28%	36%
Fixed Interest & Other*	33%	35%	28%	28%	26%

*Fixed Interest & Other includes Corporate fixed interest, Government bonds including index linked bonds, cash deposits and money market instruments.

Investment returns: last five calendar years

2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
15.8%	0.2%	11.2%	-7.0%	10.4%

For more information on with-profits please see our With-Profits guides available on our website at standardlife.co.uk/investments/funds/with-profits-information

www.standardlife.co.uk

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