



Investment Update March 2026

Investment Headlines & Comment

- A bad month for markets as the US causes absolute chaos by attacking in the Middle East.
- The flip side was that the price of oil rocketed, leading to a high Commodities return.
- There was strong demand for the new Green gilt maturing in 2037.

Feature Section

This month we update our past feature on corporate debt default rates, using the Standard & Poor's annual survey, which now covers data to the end of 2025. The main casualties in 2025 were once again (for the 5th straight year) from the consumer / service sector.

Figure 1a: Average Cumulative Default Rates (%)
(Extracts from "Table 24" in S&P)

Time	1 year	5-year	10-year
Investment grade	0.08	0.76	1.65
AAA	0.00	0.34	0.68
AA	0.02	0.27	0.65
A	0.04	0.38	0.99
BBB	0.13	1.33	2.78
High Yield	3.53	13.49	18.87
BB	0.55	5.59	10.10
B	2.87	15.34	21.67
CCC/C	26.12	46.24	50.00
All ratings	1.51	5.97	8.60

Source: Standard & Poor's (also for the Figures below)

Figure 1a shows historical default rates averages across global corporate bonds in 1-, 5- and 10-year versions. The dataset covers 1981-2025 (but the 5- and 10-year figures use rolling sets of overlapping periods, not successive distinct ones), but unfortunately it does not show recovery rate statistics. However, as per our Figure 5 for Sterling investment grade bonds (on page 4), actual corporate bond default rates have still been below those priced into yields, even if with no recovery. For example, over the last 20 calendar years, the iBoxx All-Dated Non-Gilts Index returned 3.7% p.a. vs 2.5% p.a. for the FT-A All-Dated Gilt Index. This "earned credit margin" gap is similar to last year's 20-year gap, although part will relate to small underlying yield rises (gilts being typically longer-dated than corporates).

Figure 1b shows 2025's moves in isolation (row = start rating, column = end rating). Most bonds retain the same credit rating at the end of the year as at the start, hence a dominant diagonal for the figures in bold. Eventually there is a *sharp* decline on the CCC row, reflecting a greater instability for bonds that have got that close to the edge – the 2025 CCC default rate saw a further slight fall, and well below the 47% seen in 2020. Figure 1c gives an alternative way of looking at the 1-year data from Figure 1a, with the minimum and maximum 1-year default rates by credit rating, which in turn renews the question on what level of deduction it might be prudent to make from investment grade bond yields in actuarial valuations. With the average *cumulative* investment grade 10-year default rate being

Figure 1b: Global Credit Rating Transitions % in 2025 in isolation
(Extracts from "Table 20" in S&P, with D = Default, N.R. = not rated)

	AAA	AA	A	BBB	BB	B	CCC	D	N.R.
AAA	100.00	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
AA	-	95.44	3.86	-	-	-	-	-	0.70
A	-	2.85	93.47	1.04	-	-	-	-	2.64
BBB	-	-	3.19	90.28	0.69	0.05	-	-	5.79
BB	-	-	-	2.83	78.62	2.91	0.16	0.08	15.38
B	-	-	-	-	3.41	75.03	3.82	1.18	16.57
CCC/C	-	-	-	-	-	11.15	44.26	25.90	18.69

Figure 1c: Profile of individual year default percentages
(Extracts from "Table 4" in S&P)

	AAA	AA	A	BBB	BB	B	CCC
Minimum	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.25	0.00
Maximum	0.00	0.38	0.38	1.00	4.24	13.84	49.46
Average	0.00	0.02	0.04	0.13	0.55	2.87	26.12

1.65%, and the worst is 4.24% (from "Table 31", for the 10 years to 1991, when the market was much smaller than now), there still does not seem to be a reasonable case for making a deduction of more than, say, 0.2% or 0.3% p.a. from the yield as an allowance for future defaults and/or forced sales for index-trackers due to downgrading from investment grade.



Asset Returns and Financial Measures [in Sterling unless marked otherwise]

The cells in bold with light shading show the best and worst performing asset classes from each column. The commodities and \$-based and unhedged-£-conversion hedge fund returns are excluded from that.

[NB: Future returns cannot be inferred from this table alone, but coupled with other items within *Update*, readers can make inferences as to whether they should be higher or lower than the past returns shown below.]

Table 1: Investment Data to 31 March 2026

Asset Class	1 month (%)	3 months (%)	12 months (%)	3 years (% p.a.)	5 years (% p.a.)	10 years (% p.a.)	20 years (% p.a.)
UK Equities	-6.7	2.4	21.5	13.4	11.1	8.7	6.7
Overseas Equities	-5.3	-0.9	19.2	14.9	11.1	13.1	10.0
US Equities	-3.1	-2.5	15.8	16.1	12.8	15.2	7.2
Europe ex UK Equities	-8.8	-2.2	15.2	9.7	8.3	9.8	12.1
Japan Equities	-10.5	3.8	24.1	13.6	7.9	9.8	5.7
Pacific ex Japan Equities	-13.1	10.4	53.6	17.3	8.4	11.2	9.7
Emerging Markets	-11.4	1.7	27.1	12.9	5.0	9.1	7.2
UK Long-dated Gilts	-7.3	-4.1	0.4	-4.3	-10.5	-3.1	2.0
UK Long-dated Corp. Bonds	-6.2	-4.0	3.3	1.0	-6.2	0.2	3.1
UK Over 5 Yrs Index-Linked Gilts	-4.1	1.0	3.8	-4.9	-8.8	-1.5	3.1
High Yield (Global)	-0.2	0.9	5.2	6.5	4.2	6.3	7.7
Overseas Bonds	-1.1	0.9	-0.1	-1.5	-1.8	0.5	3.5
Property *	0.5	1.6	6.9	5.1	4.3	4.3	4.8
Cash	0.3	0.9	4.1	4.7	3.3	1.9	2.0
Commodities £-converted	26.9	42.6	39.5	15.6	20.6	10.9	0.5
Hedge Funds original \$ basis *	1.4	5.2	15.9	10.7	6.9	7.3	5.3
Illustrative £-converted version *	2.9	3.3	8.2	6.8	7.6	7.7	6.7
Euro relative to Sterling	-0.3	0.2	4.4	-0.3	0.5	1.0	1.1
US \$ relative to Sterling	1.9	1.8	-2.4	-2.2	0.8	0.8	1.4
Japanese Yen relative to Sterling	0.2	0.5	-8.1	-7.8	-6.2	-2.6	-0.1
Sterling trade weighted	0.0	-0.7	-1.2	2.0	0.4	-0.2	-0.7
Price Inflation (RPI) *	0.4	0.6	3.6	3.8	6.6	4.6	3.8
Price Inflation (CPI) *	0.4	0.4	3.0	3.1	5.1	3.5	2.9
Price Inflation (RPIX) *	0.4	0.6	3.5	3.4	6.2	4.5	3.8
Earnings Inflation **	-0.9	1.6	3.8	4.8	5.1	4.2	3.0
All Share Capital Growth	-7.2	1.5	17.5	9.4	7.2	4.8	2.9
Dividend Growth	2.8	2.8	6.8	5.2	9.7	3.1	3.4
Earnings Growth	0.9	19.5	8.6	2.0	16.1	9.2	2.2

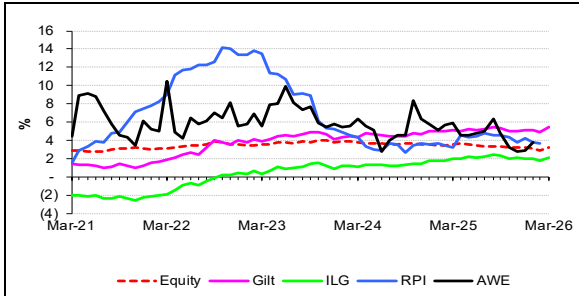
Note: All market returns are total returns for pension funds with income reinvested monthly. Indices used are as follows:

- UK Equities (incl. dividends and earnings) – FT-A All Share.
- Overseas Equities (incl. regions) – blend of FT All-World / World sub-indices
- Emerging Markets from MSCI US \$ based total return index (overall Index to 31 Oct 2001, Free Index from 1 Nov 2001 to take account of foreign investment restrictions), conversion to UK £ by J&A.
- UK Bonds – FT-A indices (Gilts Over 15 Years, ILG Over 5 Years)
- UK Corporate Bonds – iBoxx Non-Gilt **Over 15 Year** index (all credit ratings combined)
- High Yield – ICE Global, £ Unhedged
- Overseas Bonds – JP Morgan Traded Unhedged World ex UK
- Property – MSCI IPD UK Monthly Property Index
- Commodities – GSCI Total Return, converted to UK £ by J&A
- Hedge Funds Composite – HFRI US \$ based total return index plus converted to UK £ by J&A. **NB A smooth “cash + x%” return will only be shown in the base ‘hedged’ currency, here the US \$.**
- Cash – an indicative index based on the three-month London Interbank Sterling mid-rate, and SONIA since March 2021, calculated internally by J&A
- Price and earnings inflation – RPI, CPI, RPIX, and Average Weekly Earnings (whole economy, not seasonally adjusted, latest provisional data)
- Currency data – London close, from the Financial Times
- * denotes data lagged by 1 month, ** by 2 months – these reflect the later publication dates of these data items.

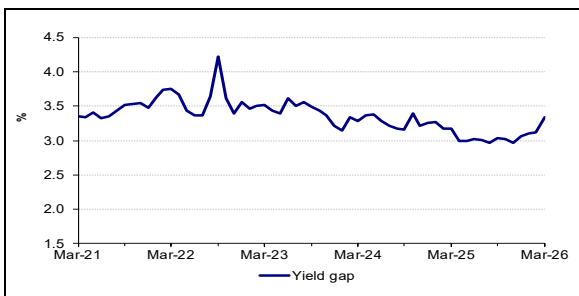


Yields and Yield Gaps

Figure 2: Yields, Inflation and Yield Gaps



The yield gap is a measure of expected average future inflation, derived as long bond yield minus ILG yield.

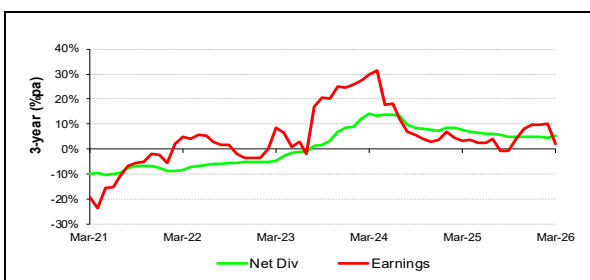
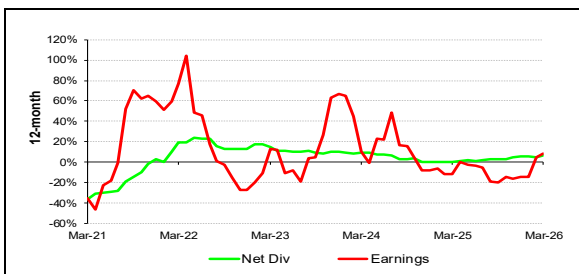


The gap gives a current expectation of around 3.4% p.a. for longer-term inflation including the (unknown) risk premium for gilts, relative to index-linked gilts.

Growth in Earnings and Dividends

These charts show movements in rolling 12-month and 3-year dividend and earnings growth for UK Equities over the last 5 years. [NB the charts have different scales]

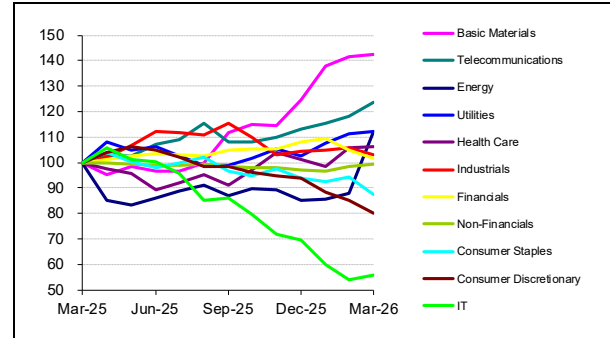
Figure 3: Dividend & Earnings Growth



Note: Earnings data from mid-2015 onwards is no longer reliable as one-off events may be affecting the prospective P/E ratios

UK Equity Sector Returns

Figure 4a: Sectors relative to All Share



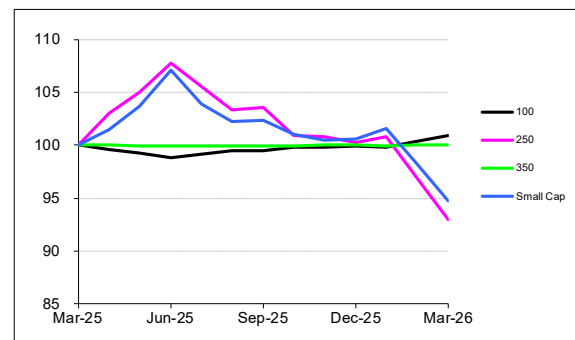
Note: Sector labels for relative lines are in end-value order

There was a rise this month in the rolling 12-month sector dispersion (up from 81% to 87%).

(% absolute return)	1 mth	3 mth	12 mth
Energy	19.4	35.0	36.5
Basic Materials	-6.1	17.2	73.3
Industrials	-9.1	0.8	24.9
Consumer Staples	-13.6	-4.7	6.0
Health Care	-6.3	7.3	29.0
Consumer Discretionary	-12.5	-12.6	-2.9
Telecommunications	-2.5	12.0	50.1
Utilities	-5.9	12.1	36.3
Non-Finan	-5.7	4.9	20.7
Financials	-9.2	-3.7	23.7
IT	-3.2	-17.7	-32.0
All Share	-6.7	2.4	21.5

UK Equity Size Returns

Figure 4b: Size groups relative to All Share



This month, both Mid and Small Cap fell relative to the All Share.

Sources for charts on this page:
Financial Times, Office for National Statistics, J&A



Bond market information

Figure 5: £ Non-Gilt Credit Margins

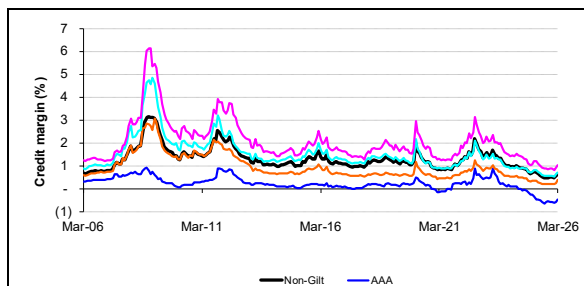


Table 2a: Over 15 Yr Corporate Yields & Margins

Month End	iBoxx Corp AA Y'ld (%)	FT 20 yr Gilt (%)	Margin (%)
Oct '25	5.43	5.02	0.41
Nov '25	5.48	5.05	0.43
Dec '25	5.49	5.07	0.42
Jan '26	5.57	5.14	0.43
Feb '26	5.44	4.89	0.55
Mar '26	6.06	5.42	0.64

Tables 2b, 2c: £ Market Size (£bn) and Maturity

Category	Mkt Val (£bn @ Mar 26 & 23, 20)			Weight (%)
	Mar 26	Mar 23	Mar 20	
Gilts (65)	1,665	1,425	1,467	74.9
Non-Gilts (1,226)	558	548	629	25.1
AAA (134)	116	113	138	5.2
AA (150)	66	73	83	3.0
A (447)	174	153	177	7.8
BBB (495)	203	209	230	9.1

Category	Mkt Val (£bn @ Mar 26 & 23)		W't (%)	Dur'n (yrs)
Gilts (65)	1,665	1,425	74.9	8.1
< 5 Yrs (15)	543	449	24.4	2.6
5-15 Yrs (23)	676	449	30.4	7.6
> 15 Yrs (27)	445	527	20.0	15.7
Non-Gilts (1,226)	558	548	25.1	5.4
< 5 Yrs (552)	289	256	13.0	2.6
5-15 Yrs (470)	197	202	8.9	6.7
> 15 Yrs (204)	71	90	3.2	12.7

Tables 2d, 2e: € Market Size and Maturity (Mar 26)

Category	Mkt Val (€bn)	Weight (%)
Sovereigns (562)	8,030	55.9
Non-Sovereigns	6,345	44.1
AAA (1,452)	2,300	16.0
AA (720)	808	5.6
A (1,920)	1,665	11.6
BBB (2,228)	1,572	10.9

Category	Mkt Val (€bn)	Weight (%)
1 - 3 Yrs (1,904)	3,585	24.9
3 - 5 Yrs (1,804)	3,160	22.0
5 - 7 Yrs (1,307)	2,302	16.0
7 - 10 Yrs (1,054)	2,348	16.3
10+ Yrs (813)	2,981	20.7

Table 2f: Breakdown of £ Index-Linked Market

Category (Number of issues)	Mkt Val (£bn @ Mar 26 & 23)		W't (%)	Dur'n (yrs)
Gilts (34)	556	595	100.0	13.7
< 5 Yrs (4)	101	96	18.1	2.6
5 - 15 Yrs (11)	224	202	40.3	9.1
> 15 Yrs (19)	231	297	41.6	23.1

Table 2g: High Yield bond yields (BB-B indices)

Month End	US (%)	Euro (%)	Sterling (%)
Nov '25	6.48	5.07	7.55
Dec '25	6.45	5.09	7.49
Jan '26	6.49	5.02	7.33
Feb '26	6.56	5.02	7.35
Mar '26	7.00	5.93	8.34

Sources: DMO, FTSE, iBoxx, ICE, J&A

£ Gilt Market "main" & "Green" Issuance

- £3.50bn, 4% 2029 (3.49x, 3.81%, 0%, Jan '26)
- £4.26bn, 4¹/₈% 2031 (3.33x, 4.23%, 6%, Feb '26)
- £2.25bn, 4³/₄% 2035 (3.50x, 4.91%, 0%, Jan '26)
- £6.25bn, 4⁵/₈% Gr 2037 (**12.9x**, 4.72%, n/a, new)
- £0.50bn, 1⁷/₈% IL 2049 (3.57x, 2.02%, 0%, Jul '25)
- £0.30bn, 5³/₈% 2056 (3.84x, 5.52%, n/a, Sep '25)

Note: Issuance amounts are nominals. The second % figure in each row is the yield or real yield. The third % figure is the additional amount taken up under the Post Auction Option Facility (PAOF), as a % of the amount of the issue. No PAOF applies for Green Gilt (Gr), tender or syndication cases.

