

Signature Global Bond Fund Second Quarter 2019

Market Overview

- The global economic outlook has softened since the first quarter of 2019, with inflation remaining uncomfortably low and growth risks generally skewed to the downside. Despite a de-escalation in the U.S-China trade conflict during the recent G-20 summit, the outcome of subsequent talks remains highly uncertain and continues to weigh on business sentiment and global growth.
- Anticipating economic deceleration, central banks around the world stand ready to ease monetary policy. Accordingly, markets have priced in rate cuts from the U.S. Federal Reserve (the “Fed”) and the European Central Bank (ECB), precipitating a further decline in interest rates around the globe during the second quarter of 2019. As a point of reference, 10-year bond yields dropped 0.4% in the United States, 0.25% in Europe and 0.15% in Canada this quarter.
- In the United States, despite moderate economic growth and a robust labour market, inflation continues to undershoot the Fed’s 2% target. Persistently low inflation is front and centre to the Fed’s dovish (i.e., cautious) tack earlier this year. More recently, the Fed cited concerns about the impact of escalating trade tensions and cross-currents from global growth, thereby cementing market expectations of so-called “insurance” rate cuts.
- Similarly, in Europe, a worsening economic outlook and uncertainty over Brexit emphasize the downside risks to growth. The ECB, alongside the Fed, has opened the door to additional monetary policy accommodation, including lowering forward guidance, interest-rate cuts and quantitative easing.
- The Bank of Canada had maintained its policy rate steady since October 2018. Recent Canadian economic and inflation data, helped by the recovery of the energy sector, had surprised to the upside relative to the Bank of Canada’s most recent economic forecasts. Nevertheless, escalated trade tensions and dimming global growth prospects continued to weigh on the economic outlook.



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Performance Summary

- Over the second quarter of 2019, Class F of Signature Global Bond Fund (the “Fund”) returned 1.3%, slightly outperforming its benchmark, the J.P. Morgan Global Government Bond Total Return Index, which returned 1.2% over the same period.
- The total return for both the Fund and the benchmark was predominantly attributed to duration exposure as interest rates globally rallied sharply over the quarter. Total returns were hurt by currency exposures, as the Canadian dollar was one of the best-performing currencies among G10 countries.
- Relative to the benchmark, an overweight duration positioning in U.S. and Canadian government bonds added 0.38% to the Fund’s outperformance, while net currency positioning contributed 0.1%. In addition, credit spread exposures – U.S. investment-grade corporates and U.S.-dollar-denominated emerging-market sovereign bonds – contributed 0.12%. However, duration positioning in the Japanese yen and peripheral European government bonds detracted 0.19% and 0.17%, respectively, from alpha, given the Fund’s underweight position in these markets.

Portfolio Activity

- During the quarter, we maintained the Fund’s exposure to credit spreads via U.S. investment-grade corporates and selected U.S.-dollar-denominated emerging-market sovereign bonds. Our view is that continued accommodative policy from major central banks will be supportive of higher-yielding assets.
- Similarly, we remain overweight in French government bonds and have added to the Fund’s position in Spanish government bonds, as negative yields in Europe and Japan, together with ample liquidity conditions, are conducive for further spread compression. The Fund’s exposure to Italian bonds, however, remains underweight due to political risks.
- We increased the Fund’s currency exposure to the Japanese yen during the quarter on the view that the Fed and the ECB have more room to ease monetary policy than the Bank of Japan, which would strengthen the yen versus the U.S. dollar and the euro.



- The Fund’s Japanese-yen duration exposure remained underweight relative to the benchmark in favour of higher-income-generating Canadian- and U.S.-dollar-denominated bonds.

Outlook

- The global economic outlook has softened, with inflation remaining uncomfortably low and growth risks generally skewed to the downside. Against this backdrop, central banks around the world have signalled a bias to ease monetary policy, and markets have moved to price in such a scenario. Overall, we hold a positive outlook for interest rates globally.
- In the United States, with roughly 70 basis points (bps) of Fed rate cuts by year-end currently priced into markets, a tactical approach is warranted. The near-term direction of government bond yields will depend on the evolution of economic data uncertainty around trade disputes. Longer term, however, we view the significant decline in government bond yields as part of a recalibration of market expectations to structurally lower interest rates.
- In Europe, the economic outlook has also weakened and inflation remains stubbornly low. The ECB has tacked cautious alongside the Fed, opening the door for lowering forward guidance, interest-rate cuts (deeper into negative territory) and expansion of quantitative-easing measures.
- In Canada, we hold a neutral outlook. Market pricing of the Bank of Canada’s policy rate path continues to reflect an anticipation of interest-rate cuts, with an initial 25-bp move over the next 12 months near fully priced in. United States-led trade conflicts with other nations have increased the downside risks to already slowing global economic activity, and the Canadian economy is not immune to these risks. Inversion remains a feature of the Canadian yield curve for now. However, moving forward, we see the degree of inversion reduced.

Class F returns (in %) as at June 30, 2019	Year-to-date	1 year	3 year	5 year	10 year	Since inception (08/08/2000)
Signature Global Bond Fund	1.0	4.1	-0.4	4.1	3.4	3.6

Sources: Bloomberg L.P. and Signature Global Asset Management, as at June 30, 2019.



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