



January was a very difficult month for global equities. It was a particularly tough period for growth equities, which suffered a material sell off after dominating market performance for many years. The Nasdaq fell by 9%, recovering from a fall of as much as 15% by late January, dragging the S&P 500 lower by 5.2% for the month and overall markets by 4.5% in Sterling terms. The Vermeer Global Fund declined by just over 7% for the month, impeded by the performance of our Japanese equities and a significant sell off in high quality franchises, which having performed very well, saw a sharp de-rating of their equity value.

At the January FOMC meeting, the Federal Reserve was forced to acknowledge that inflation has been far more persistent than it anticipated, and it will begin the process of normalising policy as soon as March, when it completes its bond purchase programme and starts raising interest rates. Following the FOMC meeting, a number of economic commentators have increased their expectations for the speed and scale of rate hikes over the coming two years. We have seen forecasts for as many as ten increases over that period. For this to be the case, inflation will need to persist at a rate probably above 4%, with supply chain issues continuing to persist and wage inflation maintained at elevated levels. Whilst we cannot rule this out, we do worry that such an aggressive stance by the Federal Reserve would lead to a dramatic slowdown in the economy especially as such persistently high inflation is likely to further damage consumer sentiment, which is pivotal to the overall health of the US economy.

Over January, the top five contributors to return were BP, Toyota Motor, Ericsson, Deutsche Bank and DBS Group. The top five detractors to return were Keyence, ASML, Sika, Treatt and Novo Nordisk.

There were very little changes to the Fund over the month however we did initiate a new position in Unilever right at the end of January. The stock has underperformed for a significant period of time and the market reacted very poorly to the news that it had seen several bids rejected for a potential acquisition of the Glaxo Consumer Health division. Following this news, it was reported that activist investor Nelson Peltz of Trian Fund Management had taken a stake in the company. Peltz has a very strong track record investing in the consumer staples space, driving successful turnarounds at both Pepsi and P&G in the past and we believe that the move will lead to a significant improvement in business performance as management needs to execute or Peltz will likely seek to sell off underperforming assets to either reinvest in high growth markets or buy back shares.

We are maintaining our balanced strategy and a healthy cash position as we see a challenging environment ahead, but one in which companies can continue to reward investors if they are able to deliver strong underlying business performance. We have already seen in the early part of the results season that quality growth can perform if it shows strong earnings momentum, especially now that the froth has been blown off a lot of growth oriented share prices.

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