

UK economic outlook: ready for a Boris-bounce?

- Could an election end the political mess?** Yes. On 12 December UK voters will head to the polls for the third time since 2015. [Polling suggests that current Prime Minister Boris Johnson \(Conservative\) will likely win a majority](#). For two reasons, this outcome would be positive for the medium-term UK economic outlook: 1) it would put the UK on the path to an orderly Brexit on 31 January 2020; and 2) it would do away with the risk that Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn could ever become prime minister and damage the UK with left-wing economic policies.
- Upgraded economic outlook:** If our base case prevails, rising confidence and reduced uncertainty can underpin a rebound in domestic demand growth. We therefore raise our 2020 call for GDP growth to 1.8% from 1.3% and our 2021 call to 2.1% from 1.8%.
- Fiscal stimulus:** If re-elected, Johnson looks set to throw money at the economy through a combination of tax cuts and higher public spending. This will add to demand growth in the near term. It may elicit a positive market response – as did US President Donald Trump’s fiscal stimulus in 2017/18. However, the risks would not be worth it, in our view. A stimulus will likely raise inflationary pressures and amplify existing long-run fiscal challenges linked to rising health costs and an ageing population. A push for pro-growth reforms would be welcome, though.
- Gradual rate hikes ahead:** The Bank of England (BoE) has long signalled that it would raise rates in case of an orderly Brexit. We expect the BoE to hike rates by 25bp in Q3 2020 and again by 25bp in Q3 2021. This would take the Bank Rate to a still-low 1.25% by end-2021. The likelihood of a fiscal stimulus strengthens the case for a policy normalisation and tilts the risks to the path for rates to the upside.
- Some uncertainty persists:** An orderly Brexit on 31 January 2020 reduces uncertainty by dramatically narrowing the range of scenarios for the UK’s near-term outlook. This is a big plus. However, it does not end the uncertainty about the final shape of Brexit – ie the future UK-EU economic relationship – which could remain a modest drag on business activity. Also, the risk of a hard Brexit is not fully off the table in case the EU and the UK fail to strike a deal on their future economic relations – that leaves open the risk of a hard Brexit at the end of 2020.

Chart 1: UK headed for a cyclical upturn as Brexit clarity and fiscal stimulus lift momentum

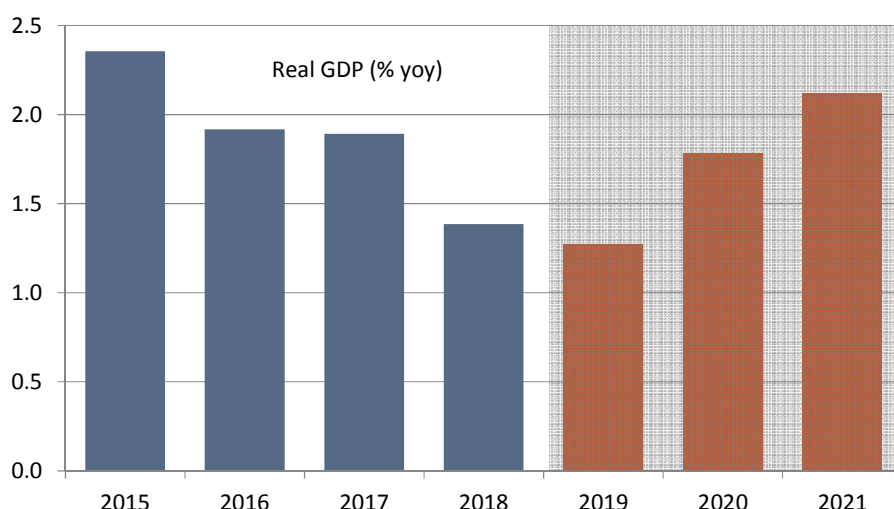


Chart shows annual change in real GDP (%). Grey area highlights Berenberg forecasts. Annual data. Source: Berenberg, ONS.

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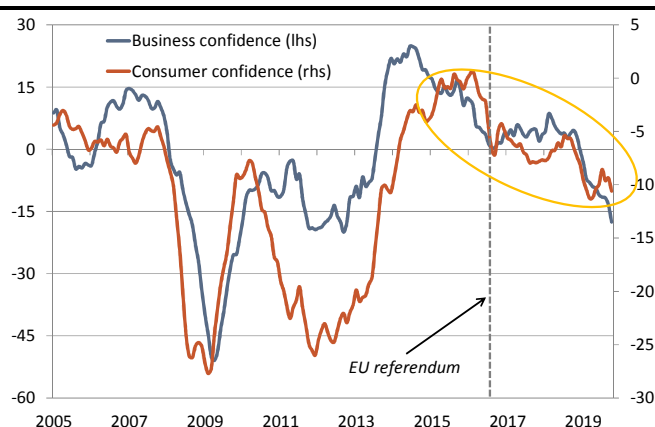
We have long warned about the risks Brexit poses to UK potential growth. All else equal, erecting barriers to trade, investment and migration with its biggest market – the EU – will reduce the rate at which the UK can sustainably grow in the long run. Inside the EU, the UK has a potential growth rate of c2.1% yoy. The future UK-EU relationship set out in the political declaration agreed by Johnson and EU leaders centres on a free-trade agreement (FTA) focused on goods, with only limited access to the EU market for services and finance. We estimate that this will lower UK growth potential to c1.7%. The UK’s future policy on immigration, especially towards EU migrants as the UK leaves the single market for labour, could materially change this outlook. A more open approach to immigration could lessen the impact on potential growth.

In the short-term, however, UK economic growth will likely accelerate to above its new, lower potential rate for a while as the UK makes up for some of the lost output growth since June 2016. Rising confidence and reduced uncertainty about the economic outlook can underpin stronger gains in domestic demand. Having edged down consistently over the past three years, business and household confidence should begin to rebound soon (Chart 2).

We base our medium-term economic outlook on four assumptions.

1. The global economy will exit the ongoing trade and industrial recession in early 2020; China manages to stabilise its economy and the Eurozone recovers to its trend growth rate by mid-2020 – see [Approaching the bottom?](#)
2. In the upcoming snap election, the Conservative Party wins a majority and Johnson remains UK prime minister. This ends the political uncertainty for the next few years. It also materially reduces the risk that left-wing Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn could rise to power and damage the UK economy with a socialist agenda.
3. UK parliament passes Johnson’s Brexit deal in time for the planned Brexit date of 31 January 2020. The UK and the EU enter an FTA following a transitional period that begins when the UK leaves the EU and lasts until at least the end of 2020.
4. The new Johnson administration undertakes a sizeable debt-financed fiscal stimulus comprising tax cuts (income tax, national insurance and corporation tax) plus increased spending on infrastructure, health and defence. These policy changes will mostly take effect from April 2020 – the start of the fiscal year – and hence help to sustain the momentum in consumption and investment beyond an upcoming short relief rally that follows the partial clearing up of Brexit uncertainty. We believe there is a modest chance of some pro-growth deregulation and positive supply-side reforms – see [Fiscal stimulus ahead? Consequences and risks.](#)

Chart 2: Lower uncertainty = confidence recovery



Data shows three-month moving average net balance. Business confidence is based on a weighted average of services (80%) and industrial (20%) confidence series. Monthly data. Source: European Commission, Berenberg.

Chart 3: UK real GDP (annualised growth %)

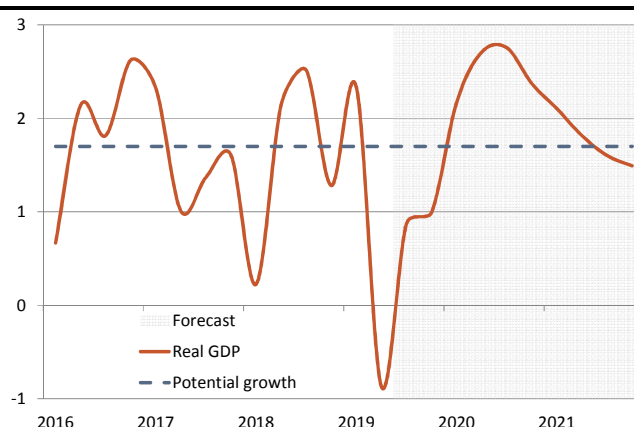


Chart shows annualised growth in real GDP (%). Grey area highlights Berenberg forecasts. Quarterly data. Source: Berenberg, ONS.

We raise our 2020 call for GDP growth to 1.8% from 1.3% and our 2021 call to 2.1% from 1.8% (Table 1 shows the full breakdown on a quarterly basis). Chart 3 shows our updated forecast in quarterly annualised terms relative to our estimate for UK potential growth.

Table 1: Berenberg UK economic forecasts

		2018	2019	2020	2021	1Q19	2Q19	3Q19	4Q19	1Q20	2Q20	3Q20	4Q20	1Q21	2Q21	3Q21	4Q21
GDP	% y/y	1.4	1.3	1.8	2.1	2.1	1.3	0.9	0.8	0.8	1.7	2.2	2.5	2.5	2.3	2.0	1.8
	% q/q					0.6	-0.2	0.2	0.2	0.5	0.7	0.7	0.6	0.5	0.5	0.4	0.4
	%q/q ann.					2.3	-0.9	0.9	1.0	2.2	2.7	2.8	2.4	2.1	1.8	1.6	1.5
Private Consumption	% y/y	1.6	1.2	2.0	1.8	1.2	1.0	1.1	1.3	1.6	1.9	2.2	2.3	2.2	2.0	1.7	1.6
	% q/q					0.3	0.3	0.4	0.4	0.5	0.6	0.7	0.5	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.4
Government Consumption	% y/y	0.6	3.9	4.6	2.8	2.8	4.0	4.6	4.3	4.8	4.7	4.7	4.4	3.5	3.0	2.5	2.0
	% q/q					0.8	1.1	1.0	1.3	1.3	1.0	1.0	1.0	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5
Investment	% y/y	-0.1	0.1	2.3	3.4	0.8	0.3	-0.9	0.0	-0.1	1.9	3.5	3.6	3.6	3.4	3.3	3.2
	% q/q					0.9	-0.9	-0.7	0.8	0.8	1.0	0.9	0.9	0.8	0.8	0.8	0.8
Final Domestic Demand ¹	% y/y	1.1	1.5	2.5	2.3	1.4	1.4	1.4	1.7	1.9	2.4	2.9	2.9	2.7	2.4	2.1	2.0
	% q/q					0.5	0.2	0.3	0.6	0.7	0.7	0.8	0.6	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5
Net Exports ¹	% y/y	-0.5	-1.5	0.2	-0.4	-3.7	-0.3	-1.9	-0.1	2.1	-0.5	0.2	-0.9	-0.5	-0.4	-0.4	-0.4
	% q/q					-2.7	2.5	-0.9	1.1	-0.5	-0.1	-0.2	-0.1	-0.1	-0.1	-0.1	-0.1
Stockbuilding ¹	% y/y	0.2	0.5	-0.4	-0.4	1.9	-0.2	1.2	-1.0	-1.4	-0.2	-1.0	0.5	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2
	% q/q					0.9	-1.2	0.9	-1.5	0.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.1	0.0	0.0
Current Account Balance	GBP bn	-92.5	-116.4	-118.2	-103.8	-33.1	-25.2	-29.6	-28.5	-30.9	-30.0	-29.1	-28.2	-27.3	-26.4	-25.5	-24.6
	% of GDP	-4.3	-5.3	-5.2	-4.5	-6.0	-4.6	-5.4	-5.1	-5.4	-5.3	-5.1	-5.0	-4.7	-4.6	-4.4	-4.2
Industrial Production ²	% y/y	0.1	-0.8	1.0	1.5	-0.8	-0.9	-1.3	-0.4	-0.1	1.2	1.4	1.6	1.5	1.5	1.4	1.4
	% q/q					0.1	-0.8	0.1	0.2	0.5	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.4
Unemployment Rate ²	%	4.1	3.9	3.8	3.7	3.9	3.8	3.9	3.9	3.8	3.8	3.8	3.7	3.7	3.7	3.6	3.6
CPI ²	% y/y	2.5	1.9	2.3	2.3	1.9	2.0	1.9	1.8	1.9	2.2	2.4	2.5	2.4	2.3	2.3	2.3
General Govt. Balance ³	% of GDP	-1.6	-1.6	-3.0	-2.6												
General Govt Debt ³	% of GDP	87.5	86.4	86.9	87.6												
BoE Bank Rate ⁴		0.75	0.75	1.00	1.25	0.75	0.75	0.75	0.75	0.75	0.75	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.25	1.25	1.25

¹ Contribution to GDP growth ² Period averages ³ Maastricht basis ⁴ End period

Source: Berenberg, ONS

- Rising investment:** Driven by gains from both the private and government sectors, we look for gross fixed capital formation (the broadest measure of investment) to rise by 2.3% in 2020 and by 3.4% in 2021 after stagnating in 2018 and 2019. Having held back on major projects in the past three years, businesses should feel more confident to unleash some pent-up investment spending. However, the persisting hard-Brexit risk at the end of the transitional period will likely constrain the rebound in private investment somewhat. On the government side, Johnson has signalled a significant step-up in public investment in the coming years. Still, our projection is modest by historical comparison. In the three years to the referendum, annual investment growth averaged 4.9%.
- Stronger household consumption:** Labour demand and employment have edged a little lower in recent months amid heightened global risks and Brexit uncertainties. We expect the labour market to rebound on the back of rising business confidence and demand. Employment remains at a near-record high (c76% for 16-64 year olds) and real wages are expanding solidly (up c2% yoy in August). A stronger sterling exchange rate will further lift real incomes in the coming months. Credit conditions remain supportive and net wealth is at a near-record high. We forecast that real private consumption growth will accelerate from 1.2% yoy in 2019 to 2.0% in 2020 before slowing a little to 1.8% in 2021. Possible income tax cuts and a higher threshold at which workers pay national insurance tilt the risk to the outlook for consumption to the upside.
- Government spending is a wild card:** The precise details of Johnson's tax and spending plans will be announced shortly after he is re-elected. We project sustained strong growth in public spending that picks up from 3.9% yoy in 2019 to 4.6% in 2020 before slowing a little to 2.8% in 2021. This represents a major acceleration relative to the 10-year average to Q2 2019 of 1.0%. In our view, a large demand-side stimulus at this stage of the economic cycle would be misguided and carries risks. It would add to inflationary pressures and amplify existing long-run fiscal challenges linked to rising health costs and an ageing population. While markets may respond well to the initial sugar high of fiscal easing, the risks are not worth it.
- Stock building corrects and trade drags:** After adding 0.5ppt to annual GDP growth in 2019 as firms built up inventories in case of a hard Brexit, firms will likely de-stock over the medium term as the outlook has become more certain and the no-deal risk is

largely off the table. We project that destocking will subtract 0.4ppt from annual growth in 2020 and 2021. Due to a likely stronger exchange rate, net trade is likely to drag on annual growth by 0.1ppt per quarter beginning in Q2 2020 as import growth picks up.

Some uncertainty persists – still a risk of a hard Brexit

An orderly Brexit on 31 January 2020 would reduce economic uncertainty by dramatically narrowing the range of likely scenarios for the near-term economic and political outlook. However, it would not end the uncertainty about the final shape of Brexit – ie the future UK-EU economic relationship. This could remain a modest drag on business activity.

During the transition period in which the entire UK would still be a member of the EU single market and its customs union, the key aspects of the future relationship would still need to be nailed down. A future detailed post-Brexit treaty between the EU27 and the UK may even deviate from the general statement on future relations that is part of the Brexit deal agreed.

Hardline Brexiteers within the Conservative Party could still campaign for an even looser relationship that would give the UK maximum scope to deviate from EU regulations at the expense of losing privileged access to the vast EU market – with an uncertain and probably negative net-net impact on UK growth potential.

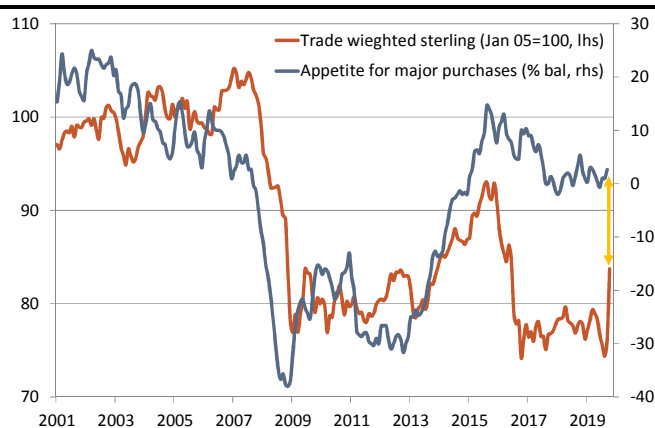
Critically, if the UK and the EU do not manage to agree to an FTA in time for the end of the transitional period, the UK could still have a hard exit from the single market and customs union at the end of 2020. That would not apply to Northern Ireland as the emergency protocol to keep the Irish border open would take effect at that point. While the UK could ask the EU to extend the transitional period beyond 2020, a UK government with a hardline-Brexit tilt could decide to forgo that option and instead leave the single market without a trade agreement that goes beyond the basic World Trade Organization rules.

Stronger growth and reduced risks should lift sterling and bond yields

Exchange rates and bond yields reflect a range of economic and market factors. For nearly four years, trends in sterling and gilts have mainly reflected financial markets’ shifting probability-weighted assessment of the UK economic outlook in the wide range of Brexit scenarios (from hard Brexit to no Brexit) plus additional risks such as the risk of a left-wing administration led by Labour leader Corbyn.

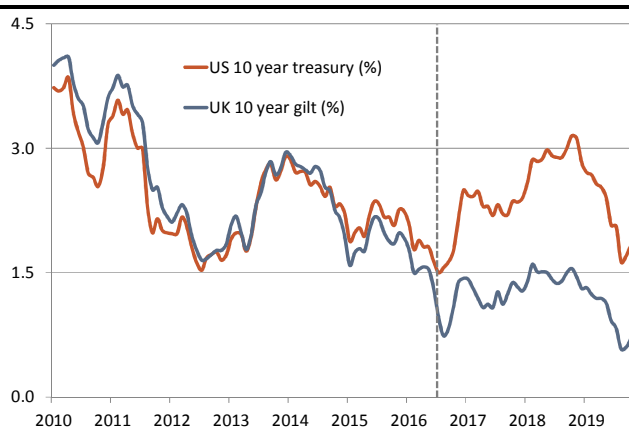
Sterling and bond yields declined in the run-up to the June 2016 referendum as markets began to price in the prospect of slower growth from a Brexit vote. Sterling fell sharply following the referendum, reflecting an anticipated slump in near-term demand and weaker future trend growth. After peaking in November 2015, trade-weighted sterling dropped by 20% to a post-Brexit vote low in October 2016. Meanwhile, 10-year gilt yields declined from 2.0% in November 2016 to a low of 0.7% in August 2016.

Chart 4: Sterling gap is not yet closed despite latest rebound



Monthly data. Consumer confidence based on three-month rolling average. Source: BoE, GfK

Chart 5: UK and US 10 year-government bond yields (%)



Monthly data. Source: Bank of England, US Treasury.

Recently, these trends have partly reversed as markets anticipated improved chances of an orderly Brexit soon and a lower risk of a hard Brexit. Compared to the 8 August 2019 low, sterling has risen by 7% versus the US dollar and nearly 8% against the euro. As Chart 4

shows, sterling still remains weak relative to economic fundamentals such as consumers' appetites for major purchases. This gap between sterling, which reflects diminishing risks, and mostly healthy economic fundamentals should close in the coming months.

The rebound in gilts yields is so far more modest. However, that partly reflects global risks linked to trade wars and the ongoing trade and production recession, which has led to higher demand for safe assets globally. After a 15 August 2019 low of c.0.4%, 10-year gilt yields have risen to 0.7%. The gap that has emerged between the US 10-year treasury yields and UK 10-year gilt yields since 2016 reflects the Brexit vote on the UK side and the fiscal stimulus plus tighter Fed policy relative to the BoE (Chart 5). We expect this spread to narrow somewhat over the medium term as the risks on the UK side fade and the monetary policy outlook reverses.

We look for sterling and gilt yields to rise further over the next year, conditional on: 1) a cyclical upturn in UK economic growth; 2) Johnson winning the 12 December 2019 snap election before stimulating growth via fiscal policy and deregulation; and 3) gradual rate hikes by the BoE.

We expect the re-pricing to be front-loaded. We look for sterling to rise versus the euro from its current rate of 1.15 to 1.20 by end-2020 before oscillating around this rate over the course of 2020. Versus the US dollar, sterling could appreciate from its current rate of 1.28 to 1.34 by end-2019, with a continued rise to 1.39 by end-2020. We project that 10-year gilt yields will increase to 0.9% by end-2020, continue to rise over the course of next year and finish 2020 at 1.7%.

Downside risks

The risks to our upgraded economic outlook are tilted to the downside. We identify three key risks.

1. The US-China trade war escalates and/or the ongoing China slowdown intensifies. In turn, the global economic downturn deepens in 2020 with the recession in industrial production and trade spreading to services and consumption. The Eurozone economy starts to stagnate or enters recession.
2. Johnson fails to win a majority in snap elections. The expected sizeable fiscal stimulus does not happen. Instead, an election ends with a hung parliament, or with Labour's Corbyn in power (unlikely) with some non-Conservative coalition or, perhaps, with a Labour majority (highly unlikely) – the UK economy faces new uncertainties pertaining to the domestic economic policy outlook and, crucially, Brexit.
3. Johnson wins a majority in the election and parliament passes his Brexit deal but UK-EU talks on the future relationship break down and no FTA is in place when the transitional period ends at the close of 2020. Even if the UK and the EU agree an FTA in time to avoid a hard Brexit, noisy and uncertain negotiations during 2020 could weigh heavily on business investment by more than we already anticipate and hold back headline GDP growth in 2020, especially in the second half of the year.

Monetary policy impact

In recent weeks, markets have reacted positively to the improved chance of a Brexit deal and lower Corbyn risk. Following on from that, market-implied inflation expectations have fallen sharply (Chart 6). On its own, the rise in sterling will dampen near-term inflationary pressures by lowering import costs. Does this change the policy outlook for the BoE? Not much, in our view.

After dipping in the near term due to the weaker oil price and a rise in sterling, we expect inflation to gradually drift above the BoE's 2% inflation in the second half of 2020 lifted by accelerating wage growth (Chart 7) that supports stronger gains in domestic demand. Nominal wage growth has risen towards 4% yoy in recent months. We look for a further modest acceleration over the medium term in response to tight UK labour markets. Unemployment, at 3.9%, is below consensus estimates of full employment. Vacancies remain near record highs.

Due to some persisting Brexit uncertainty linked to the risk of a hard Brexit at the end of 2020, the rebound in business investment may be modest relative to the rebound in other components of final domestic demand, which will be underpinned by a sizeable income-tax driven fiscal stimulus. On the back of a rise in household and business confidence,

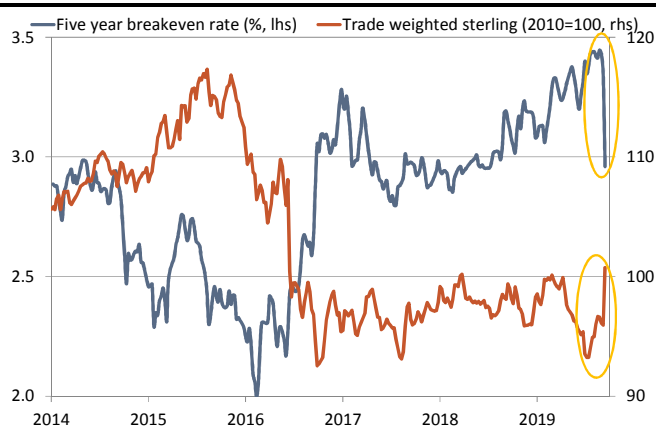
workers and vendors alike will try to bargain up wages and prices more aggressively. We project a rise in inflation from 1.8% yoy in Q4 2018 to a peak of 2.5% by Q4 2019.

Reacting to the inflation risks, we expect the BoE to gradually raise rates over the medium term. In its most recent policy statement following the 19 September 2019 monetary policy committee (MPC) meeting, the BoE continued to guide towards further interest rate hikes:

“In the event of greater clarity that the economy is on a path to a smooth Brexit, and assuming some recovery in global growth... the Committee judges that increases in interest rates, at a gradual pace and to a limited extent, would be appropriate”.

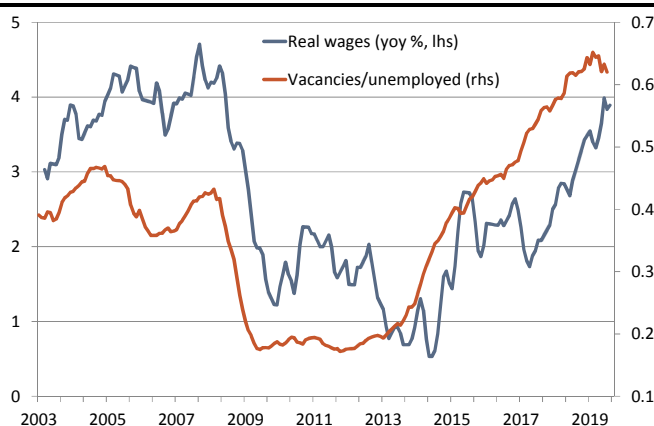
The BoE has maintained similar forward guidance since hiking rates in August 2018 some 14 months ago. We expect the BoE to hike rates by 25bp in Q3 2020 and again by 25bp in Q3 2021. This would take the bank rate to a still low 1.25% by end-2021.

Chart 6: Sterling versus inflation expectations



Monthly data. Source: Bank of England, Bank for International Settlements.

Chart 7: Wage growth accelerating amid tight labour markets



Monthly data. Source: ONS, Berenberg calculations.

If our base case unfolds, the prospect of a large fiscal stimulus tilts the risks to the outlook for rates to the upside. By how much the BoE would step up the pace of rate hikes if a fiscal stimulus goes ahead is not obvious. It would likely react to an anticipated stimulus only once the details of the fiscal policies had become clear.

The BoE would probably take its cue from market-implied indicators of inflation expectations and changes in long-term bond rates as markets judge the implications of any policies. A big jump in market expectations for growth and inflation would likely prompt a swift reaction by the BoE, whereas more muted reaction by markets would give the BoE some room to wait and see how the data develop.

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Tom Floyd	+44 20 3753 3136
Tristan Hedley	+44 20 3753 3006
Peter King	+44 20 3753 3139
AJ Pulleyn	+44 20 3465 2756
Paul Somers	+44 20 3465 2753
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BUSINESS SERVICES, LEISURE & TRANSPORT

BUSINESS SERVICES

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LEISURE

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TRANSPORT & LOGISTICS

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William Fitzalan Howard	+44 20 3465 2640
Joel Spungin	+44 20 3207 7867
Adrian Yanoshik	+44 20 3753 3073

CONSUMER

BEVERAGES

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FOOD MANUFACTURING AND HPC

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Fulvio Cazzol	+44 20 3207 7840
James Targett	+44 20 3207 7873

FOOD RETAIL

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GENERAL RETAIL

Michael Benedict	+44 20 3753 3175
Oliver Anderson	+44 20 3753 3173
Graham Renwick	+44 20 3207 7851
Michelle Wilson	+44 20 3465 2663

LUXURY GOODS

Lauren Molyneux	+44 20 3207 7892
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ENERGY

OIL & GAS

Baha Bassatne	+44 20 3753 3158
John Gleeson	+44 20 3465 2716
Ilkin Karimli	+44 20 3465 2684
Edward Pizzey	+44 20 3753 3185
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ENERGY (cont'd)

UTILITIES

Andrew Fisher	+44 20 3207 7937
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FINANCIALS

BANKS

Adam Barrass	+44 20 3207 7923
Frederick Brennan	+44 20 3753 3171
Michael Christodoulou	+44 20 3207 7920
Andrew Lowe	+44 20 3465 2743
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DIVERSIFIED FINANCIALS

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INDUSTRIALS

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CAPITAL GOODS

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SALES (cont'd)

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Beau Dibbs	+44 20 3753 3048
Jessica Jarmyn	+44 20 3465 2696
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MATERIALS

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Lars Schwartau +1 646 949 9101
Bob Spillane +1 646 949 9102
Donato Tierno +1 646 949 9109