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# Royal London Sustainable Growth Fund

Quarterly Investment Report

30 June 2024

# Quarterly Report

## The fund as at 30 June 2024

The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the Royal London Sustainable Growth Fund. The report has been produced by Royal London Asset Management. The report starts with a summary dashboard showing key information about the fund. A glossary is located at the end of the report covering the description of some of the more technical terms used within the report. All data is as at the report date unless otherwise stated.

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# The fund

## Fund performance objective and benchmark

The Fund's investment objective is to achieve capital growth over the medium term, which should be considered as a period of 3-5 years, by investing in a diverse range of equity and fixed income assets. Investments in the Fund will adhere to the Investment Manager's ethical and sustainable investment policy.

The Fund is actively managed, meaning that the Investment Manager will use their expertise to select investments to meet the objective. The IA Mixed Investments 40-85% Shares sector is considered an appropriate benchmark for performance comparison.

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## Fund value

	Total £m
30 June 2024	138.24

## Asset Mix

	Holdings	Weight
Equity	45	73.86%
Fixed Income	186	23.60%
Cash	11	2.53%

## Fund analytics

	Fund
Fund launch date	24 May 2022
Base currency	GBP

# Performance and activity

## Performance

	Fund (%)
Quarter	1.10
YTD	7.47
1 Year	15.75
Since inception (p.a.)	11.15

Past performance is not a guide to future performance. Please refer to the Glossary for the basis of calculation and impact of fees. Performance and since inception date based on Royal London Sustainable Growth (M Acc). Source: Royal London Asset Management; Gross performance; Since inception date of the share class is 24 May 2022.

## Performance commentary

The fund produced positive returns over the quarter. In our equity exposure, performance benefitted from its technology holdings which were the top contributors to performance during the second quarter. In particular, companies enabling and exposed to advancements in AI performed well and were amid the top contributors to performance. The world continues to digitalise, transforming the way we live and work, artificial intelligence is the latest iteration of that long-term trend. Semiconductors companies like TSMC also performed well in the quarter – these are the key enablers of AI and the ongoing digitalisation trend.

On the negative side, our industrial holdings underperformed, due to overall slowing economic activity data. Examples include high end machinery manufacturer Nordson, specialty chemical distributor IMCD and US water product distributor Core & Main. These names performed well in 2023 and despite the recent cyclical weakness, we believe these remain well positioned over the long term. Other notable underperformers included US life sciences company Thermo Fisher, whose shares were impacted by the delay in life sciences recovery, and Indonesian microfinance provider Bank Rakyat after Indonesian macroeconomic environment deteriorated. What has been noticeable in the second quarter is the increasing concentration of market returns performance in a few large companies over the last few months. We believe this reflects the significant investments required to tackle some of the global challenges which only large companies can afford.

We have a portfolio exposed to some exciting and powerful multi-year structural growth themes – the key ones being the ongoing digitalisation of society through things such as cloud computing and AI, which we think we're incredibly early in. We also have exposure to companies enabling the development of a more sustainable and resilient physical world. These include areas such as HVAC (heating, ventilation, and air conditioning), building electrification and more sustainable transport such as rail. We also continue to be excited by the opportunities in the healthcare sector where we observe advancements in computing are accelerating new drug discovery combined with large disease categories such as obesity emerging.

The corporate bond exposure saw a small negative return in the period, in line with the wider sterling corporate bond market. The main driver of positive performance was stock positioning – notably in the bank sector, helped by the additional yield built into the portfolio.

# Performance and activity

## Top 10 holdings

	Weighting (%)
Alphabet Inc. Class A	3.38
Microsoft Corporation	3.37
Broadcom Inc.	2.92
ASML Holding NV	2.80
Visa Inc. Class A	2.75
Thermo Fisher Scientific Inc.	2.53
MercadoLibre, Inc.	2.48
Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Co., Ltd. Sponsored ADR	2.41
Schneider Electric SE	2.39
Canadian National Railway Company	2.35
<b>Total</b>	<b>27.38</b>

## Fund activity

Our sustainable strategies are orientated to those companies that have a net benefit to society and create value for investors through their products and services and the way they manage environmental, social and governance (ESG) issues. Areas such as healthcare and technology remain at the core of the equity portfolios, complemented by engineering, utilities, selected financial services, and companies that lead their industries in ESG performance. This means that we do not invest in some sectors, such as oil & gas, extractive industries, or tobacco. We believe that the exposure to those sectors which offer a positive contribution to society is consistent with outperformance over the medium term.

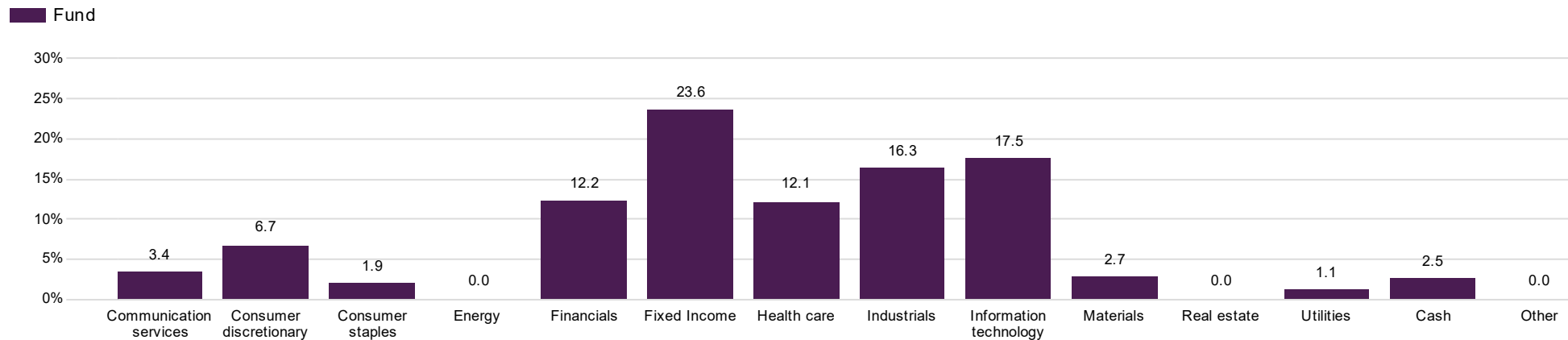
During the period, we initiated a new position in British Pharmaceutical company GlaxoSmithKline. The company has gone through a long period of restructuring, investing significantly in R&D, and is starting to see improvements in its pipeline that are not yet reflected in its valuation. Meanwhile, we exited a position in UK consumer goods company Unilever as we saw better opportunities elsewhere.

Within our fixed income exposure, new issue activity provided numerous opportunities for the fund over the quarter. Financials continued to dominate primary market activity. We added bonds from Coventry Building Society, yielding over 9% as well as from asset manager Schroders, yielding over 6%. In the insurance sector, we added a new issue from US insurer Protective Life. These bonds rank alongside policyholders, offering strong downside protection and were attractively priced at a yield of over 5%.

In the structured area, a key component of the portfolio, we continue to believe that the additional security and covenants are underpriced by the wider market. During the quarter we bought a new issue from UK Logistics – a commercial mortgage-backed security FRN, backed by a portfolio of logistics assets mainly in the Greater Manchester area with an attractive loan to value ratio and AAA rating. The assets, which are positioned in a close proximity to urban centres, allow SMEs to reduce their direct emissions as well as transportation costs thanks to being closer to end customers. In more familiar names, we added a new issue from PCL funding, who provide financing for lump sum insurance, professional fees, and school fees.

# Fund breakdown

## Sector weights



# Characteristics and climate

## ESG characteristics rationale

The Fund focuses on the sustainability of the products and services of the companies it invests in, as well as their standards of environmental, social, governance ("ESG") management, alongside financial analysis. The investment approach is fundamentally based on positive screening; identifying companies that are making a positive contribution towards a cleaner, healthier, safer and more inclusive society, through assessing both what a company does and how it does it, and through active engagement to encourage continual improvement. The fund will not invest in companies that undertake business activities deemed to be detrimental to society and that breach our Do No Significant Harm principle. Further details of the Funds Sustainable Investment process can be found in the ethical and sustainable investment policy at [www.rlam.com](http://www.rlam.com)












## ESG characteristics

Royal London Asset Management has a controversial weapons exclusion across all investments. Our full policy can be found on our website: [www.rlam.com/globalassets/media/literature/policies/controversial-weapons-policy.pdf](http://www.rlam.com/globalassets/media/literature/policies/controversial-weapons-policy.pdf)

	Yes	No
ESG integration	✓	
Promotes environmental or social characteristics		✓
Sustainable fund objective	✓	
Additional exclusions	✓	

## Additional exclusions

Exclusion criteria that make sure a fund does not invest into a specific service or product. Royal London Asset Management has a controversial weapons exclusion across all investments.

 Adult entertainment	✓	 High environmental impact	✓
 Alcohol	✓	 Human rights issues	✓
 Animal welfare	✓	 Nuclear power	✓
 Armaments	✓	 Nuclear weapons	✓
 Fossil fuels	✓	 Tobacco	✓
 Gambling	✓		

## Climate metrics

	Fund	Benchmark	Difference (%)
Financed emissions (tCO2e)	1,538	n/a	n/a
Financed emissions coverage	82.40%	n/a	n/a
Carbon footprint (tCO2e/\$M invested)	9.03	n/a	n/a
Carbon footprint coverage	82.40%	n/a	n/a
Weighted average carbon intensity (tCO2e/\$M sales)	42.08	n/a	n/a
Weighted average carbon intensity coverage	94.33%	n/a	n/a

All climate metrics presented above are for Scope 1-2 emissions. Unless specified in the objective, the data is for information only and should not be taken to mean they are being managed to/controlled.

## Implied temperature rise

	Fund (%)	Benchmark (%)	Difference (%)
Implied temperature rise (ITR) coverage	82.40	n/a	n/a
% of portfolio below 2°C ITR	50.53	n/a	n/a
% of portfolio below 1.5°C ITR	33.54	n/a	n/a

## SBTi net - zero

	Fund (%)	Benchmark (%)	Difference (%)
SBTi Net-Zero committed	30.55	n/a	n/a
SBTi Near-Term committed	12.33	n/a	n/a
SBTi Near-Term targets set	43.69	n/a	n/a

# Fund Engagement

## Engagement definition

Engagement is active dialogue with investee companies (or other entities). There are two types: engagement for information, which is dialogue as part of investment research or ongoing monitoring, without specific objectives for change, and engagement for change, which is purposeful dialogue to influence positive change, with defined objectives and demonstrable outcomes.

## Engagements

Engagement activity	Fund 3 months	Fund 12 months
Number of entities engaged	9	44
Number of engagements	12	93

This is an estimate. Some engagements at the issuer level may not have been attributed to the specific bond held in the fund, resulting in a lower number of engagement activities.

## Total engagements by theme and topic



Climate	3
Climate - Transition Risk	3
Governance	6
Remuneration	4
Corporate Governance	2
Social & Financial Inclusion	2
Just transition	2
Technology, Innovation & Society	2
Technology & Society	2

## Engagement focus

Firm-wide engagement activity is centred around six themes which we have identified in consultation with our clients. These are: climate change; nature and biodiversity; health; governance and corporate culture; social and financial inclusion; innovation, technology and society. Portfolio level engagements are not thematic and are focussed on issues specific to managing the portfolio and meeting the investment objective.

Engagement data represents all engagements undertaken at both firm and portfolio level across Royal London Asset Management, and may not be limited to those undertaken solely for the purpose of managing the fund.

The numbers of engagements and themes/topics discussed may differ where a single engagement covers multiple themes/topics.



# Fund Engagement

## Engagement outcomes

### BNP Paribas SA – Net zero

#### Purpose:

We, as part of a collaborative investor group coordinated by ShareAction, asked a question at BNP Paribas' AGM regarding its financing of oil and gas companies.

#### Outcome:

The CEO of BNP Paribas has expressed confidence in the bank's decision to cease involvement in oil and gas bond transactions since mid-February 2023. This move is indicative of the bank's disinterest in participating in oil and gas bonds and is seen as a positive step. BNP Paribas utilises International Energy Agency scenarios as a guide and seeks to reflect its insights in its policies. During our meeting, the CEO reaffirmed the bank's commitments, including its 10-90 goal, which aims for 90% of its energy sector financing to be low carbon, with the remainder for fossil fuels, contingent on suitable opportunities for financing. We will continue to monitor BNP's disclosures and assess the company's progress.

### Eskmuir Properties Ltd – Net zero

#### Purpose:

We participated in Eskmuir's annual bondholder meeting, which provided a valuable platform to engage in discussions about its sustainability initiatives and specifically its progress towards achieving net zero.

#### Outcome:

Eskmuir shared its current environmental initiatives, highlighting its focus on improving its Global Real Estate Sustainability Benchmark (GRESB) in 2024. The company aims to achieve this through enhanced data collection of energy usage across its portfolio, utilising a platform for live data access, rather than relying on tenant engagement which had a low response rate. Although the adoption of solar panels is minimal due to property constraints, the company is making strides with a majority of its portfolio rated EPC C or above, with a modest Capex spend. Eskmuir is also beginning to address embedded carbon, acknowledging the need for offsetting strategies. We will continue to monitor the company's net zero progress.

# Fund Engagement

## Engagement outcomes

### NatWest Group Plc – Just transition

#### Purpose:

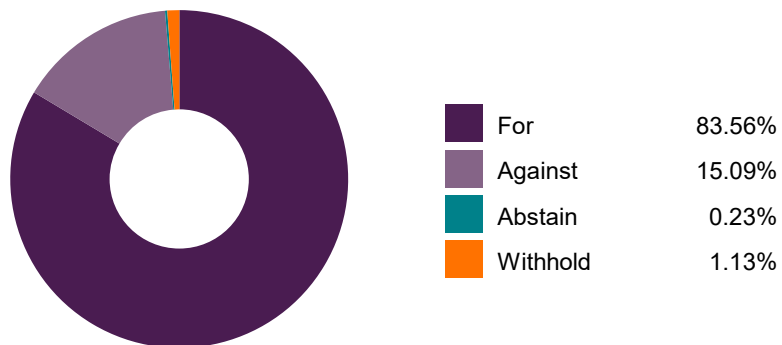
At the 2024 Annual General Meeting, in partnership with Border to Coast and Friend Provident Foundation, we posed a question regarding the company's commitment to integrating the principles of a just transition within its climate transition plan.

#### Outcome:

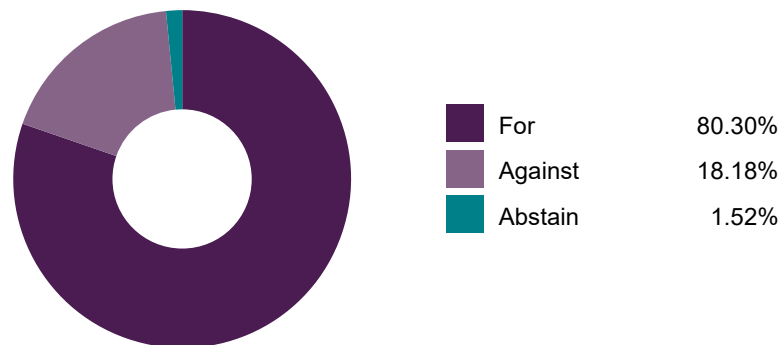
The Chair responded that NatWest is determined to be a leading bank on sustainability in general and just transition specifically. The Chair believes that the bank understands the need for a just transition and continues to consider how it can integrate it into its climate plan and sustainability regularly. The bank's current climate transition approach has been informed by best practice guidance, and it uses partnerships to put into practice some of the principles of a just transition. We appreciated the Chair's response to our question, yet the answer did not provide any commitments beyond what we have discussed with the company in private meetings. We have recently published investor expectations for banks on just transition and we will look to use this to continue our engagement with the bank.

# Fund Voting

## Total proxy voting activity



## Executive remuneration voting activity



## Notable votes

### Astrazeneca Plc

Elect Sherilyn S. McCoy - against: We welcomed the opportunity to engage with the company, however we maintain a number of concerns with the newly proposed remuneration policy and are unable to support at this time.

Elect Marcus Wallenberg - against: We have long-standing concerns over the additional external time commitments held by the nominee, as he serves as chair at two external companies compounded with three further non-executive's roles, including this company.

Remuneration Policy - against: We welcomed the opportunity to engage with the company, however we maintain a number of concerns with the newly proposed remuneration policy and are unable to support at this time.

Amendment to Performance Share Plan - against: As per the Remuneration Policy.

Authority to issue shares without pre-emptive rights and Authority to issue shares without pre-emptive rights (specified capital investment) - both against: In line with the updated Pre-Emption Group guidelines, the company sought shareholder approval to disapply pre-emption rights up to 20% of the issued share capital in aggregate. We voted against the authorities in line with policy, owing to dilution concerns.

# Fund Voting

## Notable votes

### Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing

Elect KUNG Ming-Hsin - withhold: The nominee has attended less than 75% of meetings without a valid excuse.

Elect Sir Peter L. Bonfield - withhold: The nominee is not independent with a board tenure of 22 years and serves on the Audit Committee which should remain fully independent in our view.

Elect Moshe N.Gavrielov - withhold: The nominee serves as Chair of the Nomination and Governance committee and we note that a Senior Independent Director or equivalent has not been appointed, particularly given the absence of an independent Chair on the board.

# Market commentary

## Market overview

Markets have once again been dominated by interest rates during the quarter, despite little or no movement in this area. 2024 started with expectations that central banks would cut early and cut often. However, as the year has progressed, those expectations have changed. Inflation has generally not come down quite as fast as hoped, with services inflation proving sticky, particularly in the UK, while growth has generally not been as weak as feared – particularly in the US. Interest rates were cut just once across the Federal Reserve, European Central Bank and Bank of England, with the ECB cutting rates in June. Most central bank forecasters now only expect one or two cuts from each of these banks over the course of 2024 as a whole.

Ahead of the US Presidential elections in November, snap parliamentary elections were called in the UK and France, providing reminders that voter dissatisfaction with the seeming consensus on economic policy and ongoing lack of consensus on longer-term issues such as climate change create an uncertain backdrop for businesses and consumers alike.

Some of the same trends that were driving global equity markets during the first quarter continued into the second quarter of 2024. While the technology sector has continued to outperform, there has been an underlying rally in equity markets with sectors such as financials and utilities also performing well. The technology sector has remained the best performing sector, driven by artificial intelligence (AI) which is triggering significant investments in technology infrastructure – particularly semiconductors. The financial sector benefitted from the diminished expectations of interest rates cuts. Finally, utilities benefitted from increased demand for electricity driven in part by the growth of datacentres. Cyclically sensitive sectors such as industrials and consumer discretionary were among the worst performers, impacted by deteriorating activity data.

Government yields generally rose over the quarter, particularly following poor US inflation data released in April with yields largely range-bound through May and June. In the US, 10-year treasury yields rose from 4.21% to 4.40%, while German 10-year bunds similarly saw yields rise from 2.30% to 2.50%. Benchmark 10-year gilt yields rose from 3.94% to 4.18%.

The sterling investment grade credit market (iBoxx non-gilt index) returned -0.13% over the quarter, with the average sterling investment grade credit spread (the average extra yield available from non-gilt bonds compared with government debt of equal maturity) widening marginally from 1.02% to 1.03% (iBoxx). Given the modest rise in yields, sectors with a greater proportion of long-dated bonds performed less well, including utilities and social housing. Of the major sectors, supranationals and banks produced positive returns, while insurance lagged.

## Outlook

Markets have moved significantly over the last 12 months, pricing in peak interest rates, yet history has taught us the macroeconomic environment can change quickly. We are not macroeconomic forecasters and refrain from predicting the direction of interest rates or inflation, but evidence is accumulating that we might be at peak interest rates. However, the path to lower interest rates remains in flux. While macroeconomics, central bank decisions or politics can have a significant impact on markets in the short term, we believe long-term investors should focus on microeconomic trends, as these will be more important drivers of returns over time.

There is a narrative that sustainable investing is becoming less relevant given the economic and political changes we have seen over the last few years, however we believe the drive towards a more sustainable society which we define as cleaner, healthier, safer, and more inclusive continues unabated. When looking at markets we see sustainability becoming more, not less relevant and is illustrated by, but not limited to, trends in digitalisation through artificial intelligence, infrastructure through electrification and healthcare through obesity drugs. These trends make us optimistic about the long-term outlook for sustainable investing.

In an uncertain environment we will continue to follow our disciplined process which has served us well over the years and believe our portfolios are diversified and focused on high quality sustainable and financial companies that are well positioned to drive long-term performance.

## Further Information

Please click on the links below for further information:



### Find out more

In an uncertain geopolitical and economic environment, we recognise the importance of keeping our clients updated on our current investment thinking.

Articles, videos, podcasts and webinars giving the latest views of our investment experts can be found in the Our Views section of [www.rlam.com](http://www.rlam.com), including regular updates from our Fixed Income, Global Equity, Sustainable and Multi Asset teams.

# Disclaimers

## Important information

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This is a financial promotion and is not investment advice.

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The Fund is a sub-fund of Royal London Equity Funds ICVC, an open-ended investment company with variable capital with segregated liability between sub-funds, incorporated in England and Wales under registered number IC000807.

The Authorised Corporate Director (ACD) is Royal London Unit Trust Managers Limited, authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority, with firm reference number 144037.

For more information on the fund or the risks of investing, please refer to the Prospectus or Key Investor Information Document (KIID), available via the relevant Fund Information page on [www.rlam.com](http://www.rlam.com).

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# Risks and Warnings

## Investment risk

The value of investments and any income from them may go down as well as up and is not guaranteed. Investors may not get back the amount invested.

## EPM techniques risk

The Fund may engage in EPM techniques including holdings of derivative instruments. Whilst intended to reduce risk, the use of these instruments may expose the Fund to increased price volatility.

## Exchange rate risk

Changes in currency exchange rates may affect the value of your investment.

## Liquidity risk

In difficult market conditions the value of certain fund investments may be difficult to value and harder to sell, or sell at a fair price, resulting in unpredictable falls in the value of your holding.

## Emerging markets risk

Investing in Emerging Markets may provide the potential for greater rewards but carries greater risk due to the possibility of high volatility, low liquidity, currency fluctuations, the adverse effect of social, political and economic instability, weak supervisory structures and accounting standards.

## Counterparty risk

The insolvency of any institutions providing services such as safekeeping of assets or acting as counterparty to derivatives or other instruments, may expose the Fund to financial loss.

## Responsible investment risk

The Fund can only invest in holdings that demonstrate compliance with certain sustainable indicators or ESG characteristics. This reduces the number securities in which the Fund can invest and there may as a result be occasions where it forgoes more strongly performing investment opportunities, potentially underperforming non-sustainable funds.



# Performance to 30 June 2024

## Cumulative (%)

## Annualised (%)

	3 Month	6 Month	1 Year	3 Years	Since Inception	3 Years (p.a.)	Since Inception (p.a.)
<b>Fund (gross)</b>	1.10	7.47	15.75	-	24.91	-	11.15
<b>Fund (net)</b>	0.90	7.06	14.86	-	22.90	-	10.30

## Year on year performance (%)

	30/06/2023 - 30/06/2024	30/06/2022 - 30/06/2023	30/06/2021 - 30/06/2022	30/06/2020 - 30/06/2021	30/06/2019 - 30/06/2020
<b>Fund (gross)</b>	15.75	9.93	-	-	-
<b>Fund (net)</b>	14.86	9.08	-	-	-

Past performance is not a guide to future performance. The impact of fees or other charges including tax, where applicable, can be material on the performance of your investment.

Source: RLAM as at 30 June 2024. All figures are mid-price to mid-price in GBP for the Royal London Sustainable Growth (M Acc); Since inception date 24 May 2022.

# Glossary

## Carbon footprint

Exposure to high emitters in the portfolio, expressed in tCO<sub>2</sub>e/\$M invested. Financed emissions are divided by the portfolio value, the same approach for listed companies and private issuers is applied in this metric.

## ESG Integration

The consideration of environmental, social and governance (ESG) risk as part of the investment process. ESG integration does not mean the fund is trying to achieve a particular positive ESG outcome. Please check prospectus documentation for details on specific fund-level objectives.

## Exclusions

Explicitly prohibits investing in a particular company, sector, business activity, country or region.

## Financed emissions

The emissions from activities in the real economy that are financed through lending and investment portfolios, expressed in tCO<sub>2</sub>e. Emissions are attributed to a portfolio based on the portion of the company's value the portfolio holds, and using different accounting values for public and private corporates. We provide financed emissions for scope 1 and 2 emissions.

## Fund restrictions definitions

**Adult Entertainment:** Companies which own or produce adult entertainment services, or engage in the distribution or sale of adult entertainment services.

**Alcohol:** Companies which have involvement in brewing, distillation or sale of alcoholic drinks.

**Animal Welfare:** Companies that conduct animal testing (other than for purposes of human or animal health and/or where it is required by law or regulation).

**Armaments:** Companies who manufacture armaments or nuclear weapons or associated products.

**Controversial Weapons:** Weapons which have an indiscriminate and disproportional impact on civilians or weapons that are illegal and prohibited by international conventions and treaties.

**Fossil Fuels:** Companies involved in the exploration, extraction or refining of oil, or gas, or coal, plus any activity relating to thermal coal.

**Gambling:** Companies who promote irresponsible gambling which includes betting shops, casinos or amusement arcades.

**High Environmental Impact:** Companies which have a high environmental impact, and which have 'no evidence' of appropriate environmental management systems.

**Human Rights Risks:** Companies with a strategic presence operating in countries of concern and which have 'no evidence' of policies or systems to manage human rights risks.

**Nuclear Power:** Companies who generate energy from Nuclear Power.

**Nuclear Weapons:** Companies that manufacture, nuclear; or are involved in the production of intended-use parts, whole weapons systems, or exclusive delivery platforms.

**Tobacco:** Companies which are growing, processing or selling tobacco products.

## Fund value

Total value of the fund as of the last business day of the calendar month. The fund value is as at close of business and on a mid-price basis.

## Implied temperature rise (ITR)

ITR aims to measure the global warming outcome from the emissions trajectory of a company, if the whole economy followed the same trajectory.

## Number of holdings

Total number of unique holdings of the Fund excluding cash, currency and derivatives.

## Performance

Performance is calculated using the daily end of day NAV per share produced by HSBC based on the mid price.

## Promotes environmental or social factors

An ESG Fund promotes, among other characteristics, environmental or social characteristics, or a combination of those characteristics, provided that the companies in which the investments are made follow good governance practices.

## Regional weights

Breakdown of holdings by country of risk relative to the benchmark index and grouped using RLAM's proprietary regional classification scheme.

## SBTI

The Science-Based Targets initiative is a consortium of organisations that set up the definition and promotion of science-based target setting.

# Glossary

## Sector weights

Breakdown of holdings by FTSE ICB (Industry Classification Benchmark) sector relative to the benchmark index.

## Sustainable fund objective

A product that has sustainable investment or a reduction in carbon emissions as its objective.

## Top 10 holdings

Top 10 assets held by market value, excluding derivatives and cash.

## Weighted Average Carbon Intensity (WACI)

Portfolio's exposure to carbon-intensive companies, expressed in tCO<sub>2</sub>e / \$M revenue. Scope 1 and scope 2 GHG emissions are divided by companies revenues, then multiplied based on portfolio weights (the current value of the investment relative to the current portfolio value). The WACI is calculated as a weighted average sum of the holdings with carbon intensity coverage.