

The performance of a blended real estate portfolio for UK DC investors

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to provide a better understanding of the performance implications for UK DC pension fund investors who choose to combine global listed and UK unlisted real estate in a blended allocation relative to a pure unlisted solution.

Design/methodology/approach – Blended listed and unlisted real estate portfolios are constructed. Investor risk and returns are then studied over the full 15 year sample horizon and distinct cyclical phases over this period using a number of risk-return metrics. Performance is then contrasted with that of a pure unlisted solution, as well as UK equity market and bond total returns over the same period.

Findings – A UK DC pension fund investor choosing to construct a blended global listed and UK unlisted real estate portfolio would have experienced material return enhancement relative to a pure unlisted solution. The “price” of this enhanced performance and improved liquidity profile is, unsurprisingly, higher portfolio volatility. However, because of the improved returns, the impact upon measured risk adjusted returns is less significant.

Practical implications – Relatively liquid blended listed and unlisted real estate portfolios create efficient risk and return outcomes for investors.

Originality/value – This study uses actual fund return rather than index data (i.e. measures delivered returns to investors), has chosen a global rather than single country listed real estate allocation and is focused on providing clarity around the real estate exposure for a specific investment requirement, the UK DC pension fund market.

Keywords Finance, Portfolio management, Investment, Listed real estate, Pension fund, Unlisted real estate

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

This paper seeks to provide a better understanding of the performance implications for investors who choose to combine a global listed real estate with an unlisted real estate allocation. Specifically, it provides a detailed investor level analysis of the impact of combining UK unlisted fund and global listed real estate fund exposures to satisfy the requirements of a real estate allocation in a UK Defined Contribution Pension Fund (“DC”). The catalyst for this paper was the recent report by the Pensions Institute (2013). This highlighted both the rationale for real estate in DC funds and specifically the use of a blended product, which combined a 70 per cent UK unlisted allocation with a 30 per cent global listed allocation to provide this exposure. For the purposes of this study we refer to this 70/30 mix as the “UK DC Real Estate Fund”.

There are currently three factors which are of utmost importance to investors and which lie behind the increased interest in blending listed and unlisted real estate, namely liquidity, cost and ease of execution. It is well understood that direct real estate can be a beneficial component of a multi-asset portfolio, primarily due to the diversification



benefits that it provides. However, one of the key challenges for both asset allocators and product developers is how to provide a direct or at least a direct-proxy real estate exposure in a mixed asset portfolio with acceptably high levels of liquidity and low levels of cost. This is a challenge for all private market asset classes. Clearly, a 100 per cent exposure to unlisted funds or direct real estate would not be expected to meet these practically demanding criteria.

Aside from these general considerations, there are a number of specific reasons why this topic is particularly relevant currently. Most recently, and of most significance to investors, the decision by the UK's National Employment Savings Trust ("NEST") to include a 20 per cent allocation to real estate in its DC fund, and for that 20 per cent allocation to be executed via a hybrid vehicle (managed by Legal and General). This comprises a 70 per cent weighting to UK direct real estate via their unlisted fund, and a 30 per cent weighting to listed real estate via a Global REIT tracker fund. There has also been an increase in the emphasis placed by investors and investment consultants on liquidity post the global financial crisis ("GFC"). This clearly is an advantage for listed real estate relative to unlisted real estate. There continues to be significant growth in real asset allocations i.e. real estate, agriculture, commodities, and infrastructure. A number of practitioners have suggested that this real asset allocation could increase to 20 per cent of portfolio weightings.

However, recent evidence identifies that there has been reluctance by a number of UK and European institutions to incorporate listed real estate into their real estate allocation – Baum and Moss (2013). This can be attributed to a number of reasons, ranging from the different volatility profile of listed real estate to practical aspects of integrating a team that invests in both listed and unlisted vehicles. Prima facie, a simple, cost effective, and mechanistic approach to combining listed and unlisted real estate should satisfy the criteria outlined above and practically be sufficiently straightforward to execute such that a large internal resource should not be required. However, the performance impact of blended listed and unlisted real estate exposures has received little academic and/or practitioner attention.

Thus, more work is required to examine in detail the risk and return implications of adding listed real estate to an unlisted real estate portfolio. This paper seeks to do this in the context of the UK DC Real Estate Fund and answer the following questions:

- (1) Return enhancement: What is the "raw" performance impact of adding listed real estate to an unlisted portfolio?
- (2) Risk adjusted impact: What is the impact on portfolio volatility and risk-return measures?
- (3) Tracking error: Does adding a global listed element significantly increase the tracking error of the portfolio relative to a UK direct property benchmark?

Notably this study uses actual fund rather than index data (i.e. measures delivered returns to investors), has chosen a global rather than single country listed real estate securities allocation and is focused on providing clarity around the real estate exposure for a specific investment requirement, the UK DC Pension Fund market.

Prior work

There has been a significant body of work undertaken by both practitioners and academics on the beneficial impact of adding unlisted and listed real estate to an investor's portfolio, but there is little available research on incorporating blended real estate exposures.

Lee (2005) looked at the justification for including direct real estate in mixed asset portfolio and showed that its inclusion generally enhanced terminal investor wealth. Bond *et al.* (2007) investigated the performance of alternative asset classes and their risk-return contributions in a multi-asset portfolio context for a UK investor. On a risk-adjusted basis, direct UK real estate was one of the best-performing asset classes over the sample period studied and had significantly better risk hedging characteristic than any of the other asset classes. The body of work studying the inclusion of unlisted real estate in multi-asset portfolios shows that it provides both diversification and risk reduction benefits as well as return enhancement. Most of this research has been focussed on domestic real estate allocations, although Hoesli *et al.* (2004) showed that incorporating a non-domestic real estate allocation was generally beneficial. This result varied by investor jurisdiction with optimal real estate allocations ranging from 15 to 25 per cent.

Lee (2010) found that that REITs offer different benefits to different asset classes in the mixed asset portfolio and that these benefits have changed over time. Thus, whether REITs can have a place in any future mixed-asset portfolio largely depends on the relative return performance of REITs vs the alternative asset classes within the mixed-asset portfolio. Lee and Stevenson (2005) showed that the diversification benefits from REITs improved as investment horizon increased. Hoesli and Oikarinen (2012) and Yunus *et al.* (2012) are recent studies exploring the relationships between unlisted and listed real estate markets. The results of this work show that listed real estate becomes more influenced by direct real estate performance as time horizons increase, with shorter term movements being more heavily influenced by broader stock markets. REITs are seen to produce real estate returns over the medium (three year) term (Hoesli and Oikarinen, 2012), as well as having useful predictive properties (Cohen and Steers, 2009). Whilst investors can benefit from the clear long-term relationship between direct and listed real estate, the trade-off faced is between the enhanced liquidity and heightened short-term volatility, which creates a higher degree of correlation with broader equity markets.

Only a handful of studies have looked at the impact of combining listed and unlisted portfolios to enhance risk-adjusted performance in a pension fund context. Stevenson (2001) demonstrated that the inclusion of domestic and international listed real estate securities allocations diversified direct US real estate portfolios. However, the results were largely contingent upon whether the direct portfolio was itself well diversified by sector and/or US region. A study by NAREIT (2011) also focussed on US markets started with the premise that for most investors, gaining access to real estate exclusively through publicly traded REITs is the most practical way to invest in the asset class. The sample was comprised of 22 years of historical data and shows that an optimally blended portfolio including approximately one-third in REITs has provided stronger returns, even on a risk-adjusted basis, than portfolios dominated by private real estate investments. This was due to the strong outperformance by REITs and investing is much less costly than private real estate investing. The “lead/lag” relationship between REITs and private real estate was found to create an opportunity for diversification within the real estate asset class that can demonstrably reduce volatility.

Data and methodology

As this study seeks to estimate realistic investor total returns from exposure to a UK DC investor pooled fund solution, we have created a sample comprising both existing unlisted real estate and global real estate listed securities (REIT) funds. The unlisted

real estate funds were sourced from The Townsend Group database and the global real estate securities funds from the Consilia Capital database. The sample comprises five unlisted UK managed real estate funds and four global listed securities fund. The sample time series data available for all funds was for the 15 years to 30 June 2013.

The five UK unlisted real estate funds selected were large managed real estate funds (i.e. they reinvest income) and quarterly performance was provided by Investment Property Databank (“IPD”). All of these funds have relatively liquid open-ended structures and typical hold cash balances of 5-8 per cent of NAV. Monthly total returns have been created by interpolation and we recognise that this will create a degree of artificial smoothing. All performance provided did not include the impact of any subscription/redemption costs, but is calculated net of fees and fund running costs. The estimated total expense ratio for these funds is approximately 0.9 per cent of fund net asset value per annum when including the impact of all management fees and running costs.

The four global listed real estate securities funds were required to have a 15 year track record. This excluded some funds which had previously been used in the Consilia Capital study. The performance data was sourced from Bloomberg and denominated in US dollars. The funds are all open-ended, and we have provided investor-level returns by deducting the requisite transaction costs. When introducing a global exposure, investors must also contend with the associated currency risk, although specific asset class characteristics will determine the extent to which this risk will be actively mitigated.

A non-domestic fixed income allocation is typically thought to require hedging so as to mitigate currency risk which dominates investor returns. Conversely, listed equity allocations are generally not fully hedged. With the global listed funds being USD denominated and approximately 50 per cent of the global REIT universe also being USD denominated, the USD is the key currency to hedge although an exposure to a global basket of currencies would remain. Additionally we would also expect that this currency basket would “hedge-itself” to a certain extent given the net effect of various currencies moving in different directions. To assess the currency risk faced by a UK investor we have calculated the performance of the global listed real estate fund exposure on an unhedged and hedged GBP basis. The results are as follows (Table I):

Unhedged GBP-based performance is closely related to performance in USD terms. Whilst both risk and return has marginally improved for a UK investor on this basis, the key finding is that currency risk is essentially neutral over the full 15 year period. Both the correlation and R^2 measures point to a close association in GBP-based returns and this is due to the impact of currency risk being denominated by global listed real estate security market movements. Given this and due to the additional complexity of managing a currency hedging programme and the potential incompatibility of currency derivative instruments within many UK pension scheme types, we have assumed an unhedged USD exposure for the purposes of this study.

Asset	Local (\$USD)	GBP unhedged	GBP hedged
Annualized mean	10.23%	10.56%	10.36%
Annualized volatility	20.20%	16.3%	20.25%
Correlation with USD total return		0.90	1.00
RSq with USD total return		0.82	1.00

Table I.
Currency impact –
global real estate
securities funds
(monthly total
returns statistics)

These two exposures were then combined to simulate the delivered performance of the UK DC Real Estate Fund. The summary statistics for the sample used in this study are shown in Table II.

Using this sample we explore the short run risk and return dynamics using monthly frequency data. We believe that the past 15 years can be characterized by four separate phases where economic and capital market conditions have materially differed and impacted real estate markets accordingly. The first of these was the TMT boom and subsequent bust; the second was the strong rise in UK commercial real estate values up to the recent market peak in the summer of 2007; thirdly there was then the impact of the GFC which led to UK commercial real estate values falling to a trough two years later; and finally there has been a moderate recovery which has benefitted from monetary policy stimulus – “quantitative easing”. Within these phases we assess the relative performance of unlisted UK real estate funds and global listed securities, as well as a blended 70:30 allocation.

We believe that there a number of reasons why this study differs from prior work and adds to the current thinking on real estate asset allocation. First, we have taken actual fund data rather than index data, i.e. we are analysing deliverable returns to investors. A number of previous studies have used IPD/NCREIF indices as a proxy for direct real estate and an EPRA Index as a proxy for listed real estate. The sample we have used in this study comprises UK unlisted real estate funds, and actively managed global listed real estate funds. The reason for using funds data is that we are interested in implementable investor level returns, and capturing both the cost leakage and tracking error that arises at when executing an investor’s exposure.

Whilst listed markets can be passively replicated this is not possible for direct real estate and so tracking error is inevitable when allocating to the asset class. This study’s sample is comprised of five large unlisted UK real estate funds, and four of the leading global real estate securities funds. To calculate the performance of both unlisted UK real estate and global real estate securities funds, the 15 year historic monthly individual fund total returns were averaged on an un-weighted basis to create to calculate composite time series. The individual time series created for both asset classes were then used to the conduct analysis in this study. The global listed funds were chosen for reasons of liquidity, diversification, fund availability, and the Legal and General/NEST precedent. Our study is thus seeking to provide greater understanding around the real estate asset exposure for a specific investment requirement, namely the UK DC market.

Second, rather than use a single period, or peak to trough periods, we have broken down the study into analysis during distinct stages of the cycle and over the full horizon (15 years). We believe that this is relevant to asset allocators to help them assess how listed and unlisted perform at times when real estate criteria is a key driver, as well as times when macro themes are the most significant determinant of returns. Third, we have shown the impact of different thresholds of listed real estate on portfolio performance, which are maintained throughout the period. We have not

Table II.
Monthly total
returns summary
statistics

Asset	Mean (%)	Maximum (%)	Minimum (%)	SD (%)	Skewness	Kurtosis
Unlisted property funds	0.6	2.4	-4.2	1.1	-2.1	8.6
Global listed funds	0.9	16.3	-18.2	5.4	-0.5	4.3
Cash	0.3	0.6	0.0	0.2	-0.4	1.8

used any portfolio optimization techniques to determine these weightings. We have also assessed risk using measures which account for the non-normality seen in direct real estate performance. Fourth, our data set comprises UK unlisted funds and global real estate securities funds, whereas previous studies have looked at the performance impact of combining listed and unlisted indices of the same country.

Results

Total returns

First, we examine delivered investor total returns and have used 12 month rolling returns, with monthly frequency for valuations. Our data starts from June 1998, so the first data point is June 1999. We believe that showing the results on a rolling monthly basis shows a far better impression of the dynamics and quantum of the results.

The pattern is as we would expect, given the gearing, predictive nature and equity market characteristics in the listed sector, namely that when direct real estate values are rising steadily (2003-2007) listed real estate enhances unlisted returns, when real estate values are falling (2007-2009) they detract from performance (but only marginally), and when capital values are steady (± 2 per cent p.a.) the result will be more dependent upon non real estate influences. This can be seen during the TMT led boom and bust where between 1998 and 2003 real estate returns were positive, yet listed performance was mixed in relative terms. However, what is noticeable in Figure 1 is the consistency of the return enhancement from adding listed. Of the 180 months in the period, listed real estate enhanced returns in 105 (i.e. 58 per cent of them).

The next question to be asked is regarding the cumulative impact of these gains, and what strategies could be used to minimise the maximum drawdown seen from 2007-2009. To do this we divided the study into the four clearly identifiable periods described above namely:

- (1) the TMT led boom and bust – June 1998 to June 2003;
- (2) rising real estate values – June 2003 to June 2007;
- (3) the GFC – July 2007 to June 2009; and
- (4) the QE led recovery September 2009 to June 2013.

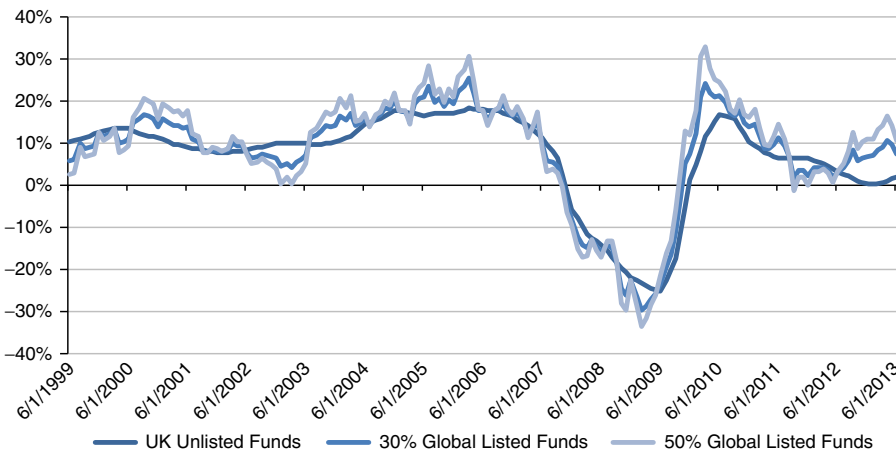


Figure 1.
Rolling 12 month
total returns

As can be seen from Tables III and IV the results provide a strong case for incorporating listed into an unlisted portfolio. At the most basic level, over the 15 year period studied, adding 30 per cent global listed exposure to UK unlisted funds would have added 18.8 per cent to the cumulative performance of unlisted funds in isolation and 0.9 per cent p.a. on an annualised basis. In terms of breaking down these returns into different periods of the cycle, clearly the impact of the Dot-Com bubble and subsequent bust has dragged the historical benefit of including a listed exposure, although performance during this period was still positive. Whilst this was to be expected during the real estate driven bull market due to the gearing, and predictive power of listed real estate what we believe will surprise many is the fact that during the GFC the inclusion of a 30 per cent listed real estate weighting led to only a marginal (–1.3 per cent over a two year period) diminution

Table III.
Cumulative total returns

Period	Dates	Cumulative total returns			
		UK unlisted funds	Global listed funds	70:30	Return enhancement from adding listed (%)
TMT boom and crash	June 1998-June 2003	65.5	33.9	56.0	–14.4
Rising UK property values	July 2003-June 2007	81.7	107.7	88.4	8.2
Global financial crisis	July 2007-June 2009	–33.0	–34.5	–33.5	–1.3
QE led recovery	July 2009-June 2013	32.3	103.6	52.2	61.6
Past five years	July 2008-June 2013	4.1	62.6	20.3	390.6
Past ten years	July 2003-June 2013	59.7	154.8	85.6	43.3
Full Period	June 1998-June 2013	166.4	270.8	197.7	18.8

Table IV.
Annualized total returns

Period	Dates	Annualized total returns (%)			
		UK unlisted funds	Global listed funds	70:30	Return enhancement from adding listed
TMT boom and crash	June 1998-June 2003	10.1	7.2	9.0	–1.1
Rising UK property values	July 2003-June 2007	15.0	19.7	16.1	1.0
Global financial crisis	July 2007-June 2009	–19.8	–16.3	–19.8	0.0
QE led recovery	July 2009-June 2013	7.0	19.0	10.7	3.6
Past Five years	July 2008-June 2013	0.6	12.6	3.8	3.3
Past ten years	July 2003-June 2013	4.9	12.2	6.7	1.9
Full period	June 1998-June 2013	6.6	10.6	7.5	0.9

in returns. This represents an extremely small cost when taken against the dramatic improvement in liquidity as a result of the listed weighting.

Risk measures

Having looked delivered performance trends we now turn to the traditional investor risk measures volatility and tracking error. In Figure 2 below we employ a similar approach. As before, we have used a 12-month rolling volatility window, with monthly frequency for valuations. Again the pattern is broadly as would be expected, with the portfolio volatility increasing with the percentage of listed added. However, we would point out that the returns data we have taken for the unlisted funds is based on stated NAV, and takes no account of secondary pricing i.e. the “real” cost of entry and exit at a point in time (assuming the availability of sufficient liquidity). If we were to take account of this (which broadly mirrors the NAV based pricing in the listed sector) then the difference between the volatility of listed and unlisted would be reduced.

Looking at the breakdown of volatility by period in Table V we can see that taking fund NAVs rather than secondary pricing volatility has reduced post GFC whilst the price of liquidity in listed funds is reflected in the maintained higher level of volatility post GFC. Outside of the GFC period, the volatility pattern remained remarkably consistent. It should also be noted that the unlisted fund returns shown below were

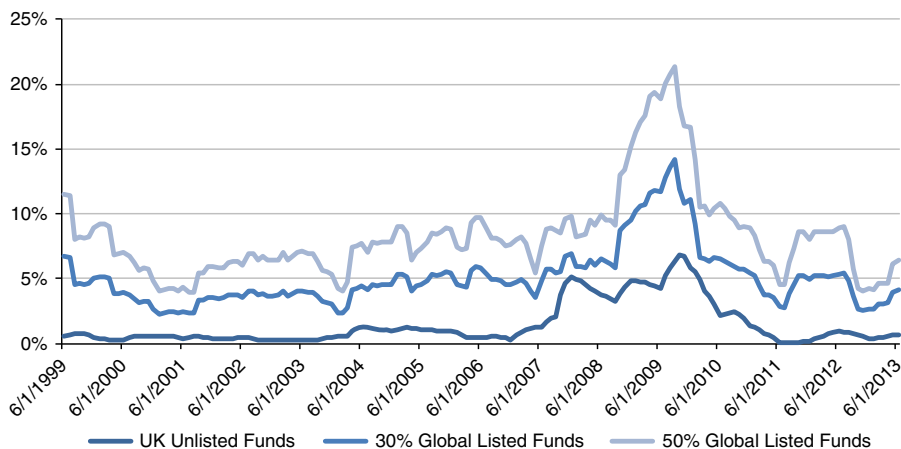


Figure 2.
Rolling 12 month
total return volatility

Period	Dates	Annualized total return volatility (%)		
		UK unlisted funds	Global listed funds	70:30
TMT boom and crash	June 1998-June 2003	0.6	16.5	4.3
Rising UK property values	July 2003-June 2007	1.3	16.1	4.9
Global financial crisis	July 2007-June 2009	4.2	31.0	9.3
QE led recovery	July 2009-June 2013	2.0	15.3	5.1
Past five years	July 2008-June 2013	4.6	22.5	7.9
Past ten years	July 2003-June 2013	4.4	19.9	7.2
Full Period	June 1998-June 2013	3.7	18.8	6.4

Table V.
Annualized total
return volatility

interpolated from quarterly performance numbers and so exhibit a high degree of valuation smoothing.

We also conduct the same analysis using tracking error as the risk measure. One of the major issues that has been raised by asset managers is that whilst adding a global real estate listed securities fund exposure may improve returns, surely it significantly increases tracking error to the underlying (domestic) real estate benchmark? In this instance it is the IPD Monthly total return index which represents a “true” direct return exposure. Looking at Figure 3 we can see the result. Table VI shows that by moving from a 100 per cent weighting to UK real estate, to a 70 per cent weighting in a pooled fund solution (with 30 per cent Global REITs) the tracking error increases from 1.2 to 5.2 per cent. Practitioners can therefore now attempt to quantify the tracking error risk they are likely to encounter when adding global listed real estate to the portfolio. Tracking-error noticeably increased during the GFC for all real estate exposures considered.

The results in Table VI show that there is a strong case for UK investors to include a global listed real estate securities exposure to their domestic real estate allocation. Over the period considered in this study a 30 per cent allocation to global listed led to a 0.9 per cent p.a. improvement in performance. However, this exposure clearly led to increases as measured by both absolute volatility and tracking error when measured against the IPD Monthly Index, a measure of direct private real estate market returns.

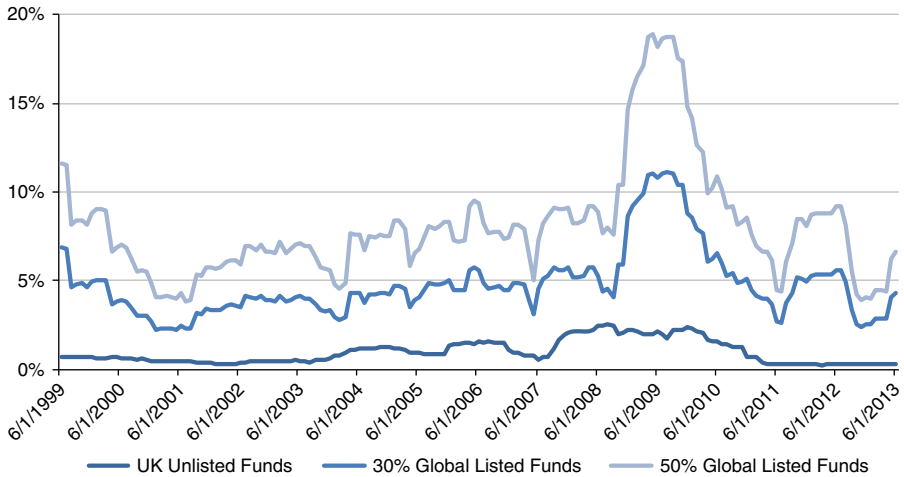


Figure 3.
Rolling 12 month
tracking error

Period	Dates	Annualized tracking error (%)		
		UK unlisted funds	Global listed funds	70:30
TMT boom and crash	June 1998-June 2003	0.5	16.6	4.4
Rising UK property values	July 2003-June 2007	1.1	15.8	4.6
Global financial crisis	July 2007-June 2009	2.3	30.7	8.3
QE Led Recovery	July 2009-June 2013	0.9	15.2	4.9
Past five years	July 2008-June 2013	1.4	22.0	6.4
Past ten years	July 2003-June 2013	1.5	19.3	5.6
Full period	June 1998-June 2013	1.2%	18.4%	5.2%

Table VI.
Annualised tracking
error

So given the need to create a more liquid portfolio to satisfy the needs of the burgeoning DC market, we can see that over the past 15 years that the inclusion of a 30 per cent global securities exposure provided improved returns of c. 1 per cent p.a. but came at the “expense” of an additional c. 4 per cent tracking error. This is not high in the context of active equity funds, e.g. Vanguard (2012) and as a result of the inability of managers to closely replicate the performance of a direct property benchmark such as the IPD Monthly Index, we consider this to be an attractive trade-off and certainly one which should be tolerable for investors within the asset class.

Multi-asset context

In similar vein to the analysis above we initially assess the shorter-term periodic risk-return dynamics of both unlisted real estate fund performance and a combined 70:30 allocation to unlisted and global listed securities funds. This is contrasted with UK equity market and UK government bond performance over the same period. First, we consider rolling annual performance patterns:

As can be seen in Figure 4, the performance of both real estate portfolios’ was initially largely uncorrelated with equity markets. This relationship shifted post 2003 and through the GFC, a closer correlation is evident. If investors seek to make real estate allocations so as to diversify against equities then asset allocation frameworks will need to account for these changing correlation regimes. However, when contrasted with government bond market performance both real estate portfolios were uncorrelated. Over the entire 15 year time period both real estate portfolios outperformed equities and bonds (Tables VII and VIII):

The outperformance of unlisted real estate funds over bonds was 1 per cent p.a. and when factoring in the typical 1-1.25 per cent p.a. fund fees/costs and cash performance drag, this equated to an approximate delivered risk premium from direct real estate above bonds of 2-2.25 per cent. However, equity market performance was significantly negatively impacted by two severe market downturns during the period and as a result underperformed both real estate portfolios and only marginally outperformed bonds.

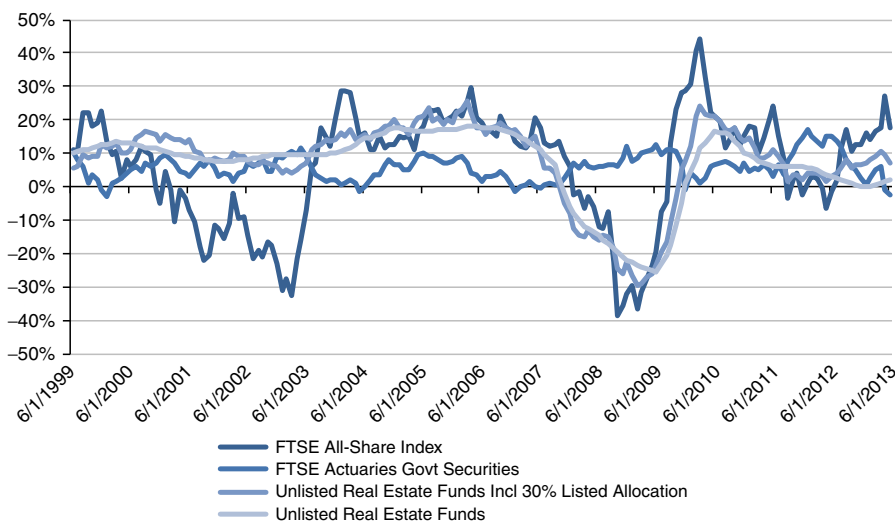


Figure 4.
Real estate and other
asset classes rolling
12 month total
returns

Table VII.

Real estate & other asset classes cumulative total returns

Period	Dates	FT all share index	Total returns			70:30
			FTSE securities	actuaries govt	Unlisted property funds	
TMT boom and crash	June 1998-June 2003	-16.4	40.2		65.5	56.0
Rising UK property values	July 2003-June 2007	101.7	11.7		81.7	88.4
Global financial crisis	July 2007-June 2009	-30.0	19.9		-33.0	-33.5
QE led recovery	July 2009-June 2013	77.3	24.5		32.3	52.2
Full Period	June 1998-June 2013	109.4	133.8		166.4	197.7

Table VIII.

Real estate and other asset classes annualised total returns

Period	Dates	FT all share index	Annualized total returns (%)			70:30
			FTSE securities	Govt	Unlisted property funds	
TMT boom and crash	June 1998-June 2003	-2.1	6.9		10.6	9.3
Rising UK property values	July 2003-June 2007	17.9	2.8		16.1	17.2
Global financial crisis	July 2007-June 2009	-15.7	9.4		-18.2	-18.4
QE led recovery	July 2009-June 2013	14.2	5.8		7.3	11.1
Full period	June 1998-June 2013	6.1	5.8		6.8	7.5

This is out of line with typical institutional investor expectations of c. 4-6 per cent p.a. premium from this asset class. (Figure 5)

The rolling volatility profile shows the extreme movement seen in equity market volatility. It is also interesting to see the correlation spike in volatility during the GFC where dislocated capital markets led to both the risk and return of multiple asset classes moving in tandem. Outside of the GFC period the volatility pattern for bonds and real estate remained broadly consistent.

Conclusions

Given the increasing requirements for greater liquidity from the defined contribution pensions market, real estate portfolios will increasingly need to incorporate listed allocations within them. A number of existing funds have the ability to include listed real estate in their portfolio but choose not to do so. Similarly a number of investors do not regard listed real estate as part of their overall real estate allocation. This study has sought to understand the performance and risk characteristics of a blended real estate portfolio through cyclical phases over the past 15 years. The UK DC Real Estate Fund studied reflects the most prominent real estate solution currently available for UK defined contribution investors. The results and analysis provided reflect the a likely set of investor outcomes by using a sample of UK unlisted and global listed real estate

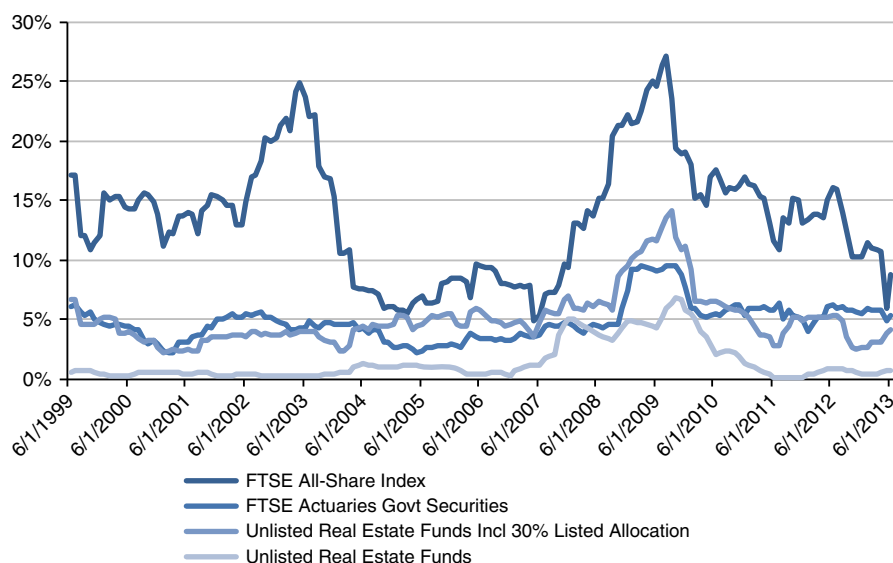


Figure 5.
Real estate and other
asset classes rolling
12 month total return
volatility

funds which differentiates it from prior work which has typically utilised single country index data.

The study has answered a number of specific issues relating to the integration of a global listed real estate portfolio with a UK unlisted portfolio. In terms of delivered performance, an investor in the UK DC Real Estate Fund would have experienced material return enhancement relative to a pure unlisted solution. Over the past 15 years (to 30 June 2013) a 30 per cent listed real estate allocation provided a total return enhancement of 19 per cent (c. 1 per cent p.a. annualised) to unlisted real estate portfolios. Over the past 10 years this was 43 per cent (c. 2 per cent p.a. annualised) and over five years the enhancement was c. 4 per cent p.a. annualised, amounting to +390 per cent in absolute terms.

The “price” of this enhanced performance and improved liquidity profile is, unsurprisingly, higher portfolio volatility. However, because of the improved returns, the impact on the sharpe ratio i.e. measured risk adjusted returns is less significant. The study also found that there was an additional 4 per cent tracking error cost relative to the direct UK real estate market when including 30 per cent listed allocations. We believe that this is surprisingly small given that the listed element comprises global rather than purely UK stocks. We also find that c. 1.2 per cent tracking error arises for a well-diversified unlisted portfolio highlighting that pure IPD index performance is unachievable using a basket of available diversified unlisted real estate funds.

There is a clear need for further work in this area, given growing requirements for more liquid exposures in real estate and other real asset portfolios. This study analyzes one specific solution which has been adopted in the UK market. Further work should focus on studying the “optimal” real estate portfolio allocations to both domestic and global unlisted and listed exposures. The results of this are likely to vary on the investor jurisdiction being considered. More sophisticated risk and resulting risk-return measures should also be utilised.

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