

Risk factors

A number of factors (risk factors) affect Prudential's operating results and financial condition and, accordingly, the trading price of its shares. The risk factors mentioned below should not be regarded as a complete and comprehensive statement of all potential risks and uncertainties. The information given is as of the date of this document, is not updated, and any forward looking statements are made subject to the reservations specified below under 'Forward Looking Statements'.

Prudential's approaches to managing risks are explained in the 'Business review' section under 'Risk and capital management'.

Risks relating to Prudential's business

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Prudential's businesses are inherently subject to market fluctuations and general economic conditions. Uncertainty or negative trends in international economic and investment climates could adversely affect Prudential's business and profitability. Since 2008 Prudential has had to operate against a challenging background of periods of unprecedented volatility in global capital and equity markets, interest rates and liquidity, and widespread economic uncertainty. Government interest rates have also fallen to historic lows in the US and UK. These factors have, at times during this period, had a material adverse effect on Prudential's business and profitability.

In the future, the adverse effects of such factors would be felt principally through the following items:

- Investment impairments or reduced investment returns, which could impair Prudential's ability to write significant volumes of new business and would have a negative impact on its assets under management and profit;
- Higher credit defaults and wider credit and liquidity spreads resulting in realised and unrealised credit losses;
- Prudential in the normal course of business enters into a variety of transactions with counterparties, including derivative transactions. Failure of any of these counterparties to discharge their obligations, or where adequate collateral is not in place, could have an adverse impact on Prudential's results; and
- Estimates of the value of financial instruments being difficult because in certain illiquid or closed markets, determining the value at which financial instruments can be realised is highly subjective. Processes to ascertain value and estimates of value require substantial elements of judgement, assumptions and estimates (which may change over time). Increased illiquidity also adds to uncertainty over the accessibility of financial resources and may reduce capital resources as valuations decline.

Global financial markets have experienced, and continue to experience, significant volatility brought on, in particular, by concerns over European and US sovereign debt, as well as concerns about a general slowing of global demand reflecting an increasing lack of confidence among consumers, companies and governments. Upheavals in the financial markets may affect general levels of economic activity, employment and customer behaviour. For example, insurers may experience an elevated incidence of claims, lapses, or surrenders of policies, and some policyholders may choose to defer or stop paying insurance premiums. The demand for insurance products may also be adversely affected. If sustained, this environment is likely to have a negative impact on the insurance sector over time and may consequently have a negative impact on Prudential's business and profitability. New challenges related to market fluctuations and general economic conditions may continue to emerge.

For some non-unit-linked investment products, in particular those written in some of the Group's Asian operations, it may not be possible to hold assets which will provide cash flows to match exactly those relating to policyholder liabilities. This is particularly true in those countries where bond markets are not developed and in certain markets where regulated surrender values are set with reference to the interest rate environment prevailing at the time of policy issue. This results in a mismatch due to the duration and uncertainty of the liability cash flows and the lack of sufficient assets of a suitable duration. While this residual asset/liability mismatch risk can be managed, it cannot be eliminated. Where interest rates in these markets remain lower than interest rates used to calculate surrender values over a sustained period, this could have an adverse impact on Prudential's reported profit.

In the US, fluctuations in prevailing interest rates can affect results from Jackson, which has a significant spread-based business, with the majority of its assets invested in fixed income securities. In particular, fixed annuities and stable value products written by Jackson expose Prudential to the risk that changes in interest rates, which are not fully reflected in the interest rates credited to customers, will reduce spread. The spread is the difference between the rate of return Jackson is able to earn on the assets backing the policyholders' liabilities and the amounts that are credited to policyholders in the form of benefit increases, subject to minimum crediting rates.

Declines in spread from these products or other spread businesses that Jackson conducts could have a material impact on its businesses or results of operations. Jackson also writes a significant amount of variable annuities that offer capital or income protection guarantees. There could be market circumstances where the derivatives that it enters into to hedge its market risks may not fully offset its losses, and any cost of the guarantees that remain unhedged will also affect Prudential's results.

A significant part of the profit from Prudential's UK insurance operations is related to bonuses for policyholders declared on with-profits products, which are broadly based on historical and current rates of return on equity, real estate and fixed income securities, as well as Prudential's expectations of future investment returns.

Prudential is subject to the risk of potential sovereign debt credit deterioration owing to the amounts of sovereign debt obligations held in its investment portfolio

Prudential is subject to the risk of potential sovereign debt credit deterioration and default. During 2011 and 2012, this risk has heightened, particularly in relation to European and US sovereign debt. Investing in such instruments creates exposure to the direct or indirect consequences of political, social or economic changes (including changes in governments, heads of states or monarchs) in the countries in which the issuers are located and the creditworthiness of the sovereign. Investment in sovereign debt obligations involves risks not present in debt obligations of corporate issuers. In addition, the issuer of the debt or the governmental authorities that control the repayment of the debt may be unable or unwilling to repay principal or pay interest when due in accordance with the terms of such debt, and Prudential may have limited recourse to compel payment in the event of a default. A sovereign debtor's willingness or ability to repay principal and to pay interest in a timely manner may be affected by, among other factors, its cash flow situation, its relations with its central bank, the extent of its foreign currency reserves, the availability of sufficient foreign exchange on the date a payment is due, the relative size of the debt service burden to the economy as a whole, the sovereign debtor's policy toward local and international lenders, and the political constraints to which the sovereign debtor may be subject. Periods of economic uncertainty may affect the volatility of market prices of sovereign debt to a greater extent than the volatility inherent in debt obligations of other types of issues. If a sovereign were to default on its obligations, this could have a material adverse effect on Prudential's financial condition and results of operations.

Prudential is subject to the risk of exchange rate fluctuations owing to the geographical diversity of its businesses

Due to their geographical diversity, Prudential's businesses are subject to the risk of exchange rate fluctuations. Prudential's operations in the US and Asia, which represent a significant proportion of operating profit and shareholders' funds, generally write policies and invest in assets denominated in local currency. Although this practice limits the effect of exchange rate fluctuations on local operating results, it can lead to significant fluctuations in Prudential's consolidated financial statements upon translation of results into pounds sterling. The currency exposure relating to the translation of reported earnings is not currently separately managed. The impact of gains or losses on currency translations is recorded as a component of shareholders' funds within other comprehensive income. Consequently, this could impact on Prudential's gearing ratios (defined as debt over debt plus shareholders' funds).

Prudential conducts its businesses subject to regulation and associated regulatory risks, including the effects of changes in the laws, regulations, policies and interpretations and any accounting standards in the markets in which it operates

Changes in government policy, legislation (including tax) or regulatory interpretation applying to companies in the financial services and insurance industries in any of the markets in which Prudential operates, which in some circumstances may be applied retrospectively, may adversely affect Prudential's product range, distribution channels, capital requirements and, consequently, reported results and financing requirements. Also, regulators in jurisdictions in which Prudential operates may change the level of capital required to be held by individual businesses or could introduce possible changes in the regulatory framework for pension arrangements and policies, the regulation of selling practices and solvency requirements. Furthermore, as a result of the recent interventions by governments in response to global economic conditions, it is widely expected that there will be a substantial increase in government regulation and supervision of the financial services industry, including the possibility of higher capital requirements, restrictions on certain types of transaction structure and enhanced supervisory powers.

Current EU directives, including the EU Insurance Groups Directive ('IGD'), require European financial services groups to demonstrate net aggregate surplus capital in excess of solvency requirements at the group level in respect of shareholder-owned entities. The test is a continuous requirement, so that Prudential needs to maintain a somewhat higher amount of regulatory capital at the group level than otherwise necessary in respect of some of its individual businesses to accommodate, for example, short-term movements in global foreign exchange rates, interest rates, deterioration in credit quality and equity markets. The EU is also developing a new solvency framework for insurance companies, referred to as 'Solvency II'. The new approach will be based on the concept of three pillars – minimum capital requirements, supervisory review of firms' assessment of risk, and enhanced disclosure requirements – and will cover valuations, the treatment of insurance groups, the definition of capital and the overall level of capital requirements. A key aspect of Solvency II is that the assessment of risks and capital requirements will be aligned more closely with economic capital methodologies, and may allow Prudential to make use of its internal economic capital models, if approved by the Financial Services Authority (FSA) or other relevant supervisory authority. The Solvency II Directive was formally approved by the Economic and Financial Affairs Council in November 2009. The European Parliament is currently discussing the Omnibus II Directive which, once approved, will amend the Solvency II Directive. In addition, the European Commission is continuing to develop the detailed rules that will complement the high-level principles of the Directive, referred to as 'implementing measures'. The Omnibus II Directive is expected to be finalised during 2012, with the implementing measures expected to be finalised later in 2012. There is significant uncertainty regarding the final outcome of this process. As a result there is a risk that the effect of the measures finally adopted could be adverse for Prudential, including potentially a significant increase in capital required to support its business and that Prudential may be placed at a competitive disadvantage to other European and non-European financial services groups.

Risk factors

Various jurisdictions in which Prudential operates have created investor compensation schemes that require mandatory contributions from market participants in some instances in the event of a failure of a market participant. As a major participant in the majority of its chosen markets, circumstances could arise where Prudential, along with other companies, may be required to make such contributions.

The Group's accounts are prepared in accordance with current International Financial Reporting Standards ('IFRS') applicable to the insurance industry. The International Accounting Standards Board ('IASB') introduced a framework that it described as Phase I, which permitted insurers to continue to use the statutory basis of accounting for insurance assets and liabilities that existed in their jurisdictions prior to January 2005. In July 2010, the IASB published an Exposure Draft for its Phase II on insurance accounting, which would introduce significant changes to the statutory reporting of insurance entities that prepare accounts according to IFRS. The IASB continues its deliberation on the exposure draft principles but it remains uncertain whether the proposals in the Exposure Draft will become the final IASB standard and when changes might take effect.

Any changes or modification of IFRS accounting policies may require a change in the future results or a restatement of reported results.

European Embedded Value ('EEV') basis results are published as supplementary information by Prudential using principles issued by the European CFO (Chief Financial Officers) Forum. The EEV basis is a value-based reporting method for Prudential's long-term business which is used by market analysts, and which underpins a significant part of the key performance indicators used by Prudential's management for both internal and external reporting purposes.

The resolution of several issues affecting the financial services industry could have a negative impact on Prudential's reported results or on its relations with current and potential customers

Prudential is, and in the future may be, subject to legal and regulatory actions in the ordinary course of its business, both in the UK and internationally. These actions could involve a review of business sold in the past under acceptable market practices at the time, such as the requirement in the UK to provide redress to certain past purchasers of pension and mortgage endowment policies, changes to the tax regime affecting products and regulatory reviews on products sold and industry practices, including, in the latter case, businesses it has closed.

Regulators particularly, but not exclusively, in the US and the UK are moving towards a regime based on principles-based regulation which brings an element of uncertainty. These regulators are increasingly interested in the approach that product providers use to select third party distributors and to monitor the appropriateness of sales made by them. In some cases, product providers can be held responsible for the deficiencies of third-party distributors.

In the US, federal and state regulators have focused on, and continue to devote substantial attention to, the mutual fund, fixed index annuity and insurance product industries. This focus includes new regulations in respect of the suitability of sales of certain products. As a result of publicity relating to widespread perceptions of industry abuses, there have been numerous regulatory inquiries and proposals for legislative and regulatory reforms.

In Asia, regulatory regimes are developing at different speeds, driven by a combination of global factors and local considerations. There is a risk that new requirements are introduced that challenge current practices, or are retrospectively applied to sales made prior to their introduction.

Litigation, disputes and regulatory investigations may adversely affect Prudential's profitability and financial condition

Prudential is, and may be in the future, subject to legal actions, disputes and regulatory investigations in the ordinary course of its insurance, investment management and other business operations. These legal actions, disputes and investigations may relate to aspects of Prudential's businesses and operations that are specific to Prudential, or that are common to companies that operate in Prudential's markets. Legal actions and disputes may arise under contracts, regulations (including tax) or from a course of conduct taken by Prudential, and may be class actions. Although Prudential believes that it has adequately provided in all material aspects for the costs of litigation and regulatory matters, no assurance can be provided that such provisions are sufficient. Given the large or indeterminate amounts of damages sometimes sought, and the inherent unpredictability of litigation and disputes, it is possible that an adverse outcome could, from time to time, have an adverse effect on Prudential's results of operations or cash flows.

Prudential's businesses are conducted in highly competitive environments with developing demographic trends and continued profitability depends on management's ability to respond to these pressures and trends

The markets for financial services in the UK, US and Asia are highly competitive, with several factors affecting Prudential's ability to sell its products and continued profitability, including price and yields offered, financial strength and ratings, range of product lines and product quality, brand strength and name recognition, investment management performance, historical bonus levels, developing demographic trends and customer appetite for certain savings products. In some of its markets, Prudential faces competitors that are larger, have greater financial resources or a greater market share, offer a broader range of products or have higher bonus rates or claims-paying ratios. Further, heightened competition for talented and skilled employees and agents with local experience, particularly in Asia, may limit Prudential's potential to grow its business as quickly as planned.

In Asia, the Group's principal regional competitors are international financial companies, including Allianz, AXA, ING, AIA and Manulife. In a number of markets, local companies have a very significant market presence.

Within the UK, Prudential's principal competitors in the life market include many of the major retail financial services companies including, in particular, Aviva, Legal & General, Lloyds Banking Group and Standard Life.

Jackson's competitors in the US include major stock and mutual insurance companies, mutual fund organisations, banks and other financial services companies such as AIG, AXA Financial Inc., Hartford Life Inc., Prudential Financial, Lincoln National, MetLife and TIAA-CREF.

Prudential believes competition will intensify across all regions in response to consumer demand, technological advances, the impact of consolidation, regulatory actions and other factors. Prudential's ability to generate an appropriate return depends significantly upon its capacity to anticipate and respond appropriately to these competitive pressures.

Downgrades in Prudential's financial strength and credit ratings could significantly impact its competitive position and hurt its relationships with creditors or trading counterparties

Prudential's financial strength and credit ratings, which are used by the market to measure its ability to meet policyholder obligations, are an important factor affecting public confidence in most of Prudential's products, and as a result its competitiveness.

Downgrades in Prudential's ratings, as a result of, for example, decreased profitability, increased costs, increased indebtedness or other concerns, could have an adverse effect on its ability to market products; retain current policyholders; and on the Group's financial flexibility. In addition, the interest rates Prudential pays on its borrowings are affected by its debt credit ratings, which are in place to measure the Group's ability to meet its contractual obligations.

Prudential's long-term senior debt is rated as A2 by Moody's, A+ by Standard & Poor's and A by Fitch. These ratings have a stable outlook.

Prudential's short-term debt is rated as P-1 by Moody's, A-1 by Standard & Poor's and F1 by Fitch.

The Prudential Assurance Company Limited's financial strength is rated Aa2 by Moody's, AA by Standard & Poor's and AA by Fitch. These ratings have a stable outlook.

Jackson's financial strength is rated AA by Standard & Poor's and Fitch, A1 by Moody's, and A+ by AM Best. These ratings have a stable outlook.

In addition, changes in methodologies and criteria used by rating agencies could result in downgrades that do not reflect changes in the general economic conditions, or Prudential's financial condition.

Adverse experience in the operational risks inherent in Prudential's business could have a negative impact on its results of operations

Operational risks are present in all of Prudential's businesses, including the risk of direct or indirect loss resulting from inadequate or failed internal and external processes, systems and human error or from external events. Prudential's business is dependent on processing a large number of complex transactions across numerous and diverse products, and is subject to a number of different legal and regulatory regimes. In addition, Prudential outsources several operations, including a significant part of its UK back office and customer-facing functions as well as a number of IT functions, resulting in reliance upon the operational processing performance of its outsourcing partners.

Further, because of the long-term nature of much of the Group's business, accurate records have to be maintained for significant periods. Prudential's systems and processes incorporate controls which are designed to manage and mitigate the operational risks associated with its activities. For example, any weakness in the administration systems or actuarial reserving processes could have an impact on its results of operations during the effective period. Prudential has not experienced or identified any operational risks in its systems or processes during 2011, which have subsequently caused, or are expected to cause, a significant negative impact on its results of operations.

Adverse experience against the assumptions used in pricing products and reporting business results could significantly affect Prudential's results of operations

Prudential needs to make assumptions about a number of factors in determining the pricing of its products and setting reserves, and for reporting its capital levels and the results of its long-term business operations. For example, the assumption that Prudential makes about future expected levels of mortality is particularly relevant for its UK annuity business. In exchange for a premium equal to the capital value of their accumulated pension fund, pension annuity policyholders receive a guaranteed payment, usually monthly, for as long as they are alive. Prudential conducts rigorous research into longevity risk, using data from its substantial annuitant portfolio. As part of its pension annuity pricing and reserving policy, Prudential's UK business assumes that current rates of mortality continuously improve over time at levels based on adjusted data from the Continuous Mortality Investigations (CMI), as published by the Institute and Faculty of Actuaries. If mortality improvement rates significantly exceed the improvement assumed, Prudential's results of operations could be adversely affected.

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A further example is the assumption that Prudential makes about future expected levels of the rates of early termination of products by its customers (persistency). This is particularly relevant to its lines of business other than its UK annuity business. Prudential's persistency assumptions reflect recent past experience for each relevant line of business. Any expected deterioration in future persistency is also reflected in the assumption. If actual levels of future persistency are significantly lower than assumed (that is, policy termination rates are significantly higher than assumed), the Group's results of operations could be adversely affected.

Another example is the impact of epidemics and other effects that cause a large number of deaths. Significant influenza epidemics have occurred three times in the last century, but the likelihood, timing, or the severity of future epidemics cannot be predicted. The effectiveness of external parties, including governmental and non-governmental organisations, in combating the spread and severity of any epidemics could have a material impact on the Group's loss experience.

In common with other industry participants, the profitability of the Group's businesses depends on a mix of factors including mortality and morbidity trends, policy surrender rates, investment performance and impairments, unit cost of administration and new business acquisition expense.

As a holding company, Prudential is dependent upon its subsidiaries to cover operating expenses and dividend payments.

The Group's insurance and investment management operations are generally conducted through direct and indirect subsidiaries.

As a holding company, Prudential's principal sources of funds are remittances from subsidiaries, shareholder-backed funds, the shareholder transfer from long-term funds and any amounts that may be raised through the issuance of equity, debt and commercial paper. Certain of the subsidiaries are restricted by applicable insurance, foreign exchange and tax laws, rules and regulations that can limit the payment of dividends, which in some circumstances could limit the ability to pay dividends to shareholders, or to make available funds held in certain subsidiaries to cover operating expenses of other members of the Group.

Prudential operates in a number of markets through joint ventures and other arrangements with third parties (including in China and India), involving certain risks that Prudential does not face with respect to its consolidated subsidiaries

Prudential operates, and in certain markets is required by local regulation to operate, through joint ventures (including in China and India). For the Group's joint venture operations, management control is exercised jointly with the venture participants. The level of control exercisable by the Group depends on the terms of the joint venture agreements, in particular, the allocation of control among, and continued co-operation between, the joint venture participants. Prudential may also face financial or other exposure in the event that any of its joint venture partners fails to meet its obligations under the joint venture, or encounters financial difficulty. In addition, a significant proportion of the Group's product distribution is carried out through arrangements with third parties not controlled by Prudential and is dependent upon continuation of these relationships. A temporary or permanent disruption to these distribution arrangements could adversely affect the results of operations of Prudential.

Prudential's Articles of Association contain an exclusive jurisdiction provision

Under Prudential's Articles of Association, certain legal proceedings may only be brought in the courts of England and Wales. This applies to legal proceedings by a shareholder (in its capacity as such) against Prudential and/or its directors and/or its professional service providers. It also applies to legal proceedings between Prudential and its directors and/or Prudential and Prudential's professional service providers that arise in connection with legal proceedings between the shareholder and such professional service provider. This provision could make it difficult for US and other non-UK shareholders to enforce their shareholder rights.

Changes in tax legislation may result in adverse tax consequences

Tax rules, including those relating to the insurance industry, and their interpretation, may change, possibly with retrospective effect, in any of the jurisdictions in which Prudential operates. Significant tax disputes with tax authorities, and any change in the tax status of any member of the Group or in taxation legislation or its scope or interpretation could affect Prudential's financial condition and results of operations.