Monthly Market Commentary – September 2018

In this month's commentary we highlight an article on Taking Money Out of an RESP and also include our thoughts on the markets.

Taking Money Out of an RESP

As the new school year begins, many students are preparing to take the next big step in their educational journey by heading off to university, college, or another continuing education program aligned with their interests and career aspirations. Fortunately, if you've planned ahead and contributed to a Registered Education Savings Plan ("RESP"), your child, grandchild, or another qualifying beneficiary of the plan, will have the means to fulfil their post-secondary education and can start to withdraw funds from the RESP.   Please see attached for the full article.

Equity Strategy

We believe our strategic overweight stance on U.S. stocks is appropriate when looking at recent economic momentum data across the globe. It really is a tale of two economies with the U.S. continuing to see economic acceleration and most other markets slowing. In China, a strong measure of how its economy is performing (the Caixin Purchasing Managers Index) hit a 14 month low while fixed asset investments are trending at their lowest levels on record. In the U.S. by contrast, an equally important measure of its economy (the Institute for Supply Management New Orders Index) unexpectedly reaccelerated back to 2017 peak levels and consumer confidence stands at an almost 18 year high, not insignificant for a $20 trillion economy where 70% is consumer spending. These changing macro dynamics are precisely why we have been increasing US exposure at the expense of Canadian companies in our portfolios. In essence we have been increasing the quality of companies by focusing on lowering cyclicality, improving revenue visibility and emphasizing dividend growth and rock solid balance sheets (the U.S. also has the added benefit of being a much more defensive equity market).

While it could be argued that there is a pending catch-up trade for the Canadian market, which has languished in performance in recent years relative to the US, we think better progress on NAFTA renegotiations will have to occur first, leaving the market in a likely holding pattern until that time. BMO Economics believes that it's looking less likely that Canada's negotiators will bend in a meaningful way, particularly on dispute resolution rules. Public perception of any agreement will be important ahead of next year's Federal Election.

Also hurting Canadian equities and the Canadian dollar is the aforementioned Chinese economic slowdown. This has had a negative impact on the price of many commodities, which of course, is strongly influential on the Canadian market given its economic sensitivity. Even improved oil prices aren't helping Canada as much as they should given the stubbornly wide Western Canadian Select oil price discount. As West Texas Intermediate (WTI) prices have increased, Western Canadian Select (WCS) oil is suffering due mostly to pipeline constraints in moving the commodity southwards to the US. The WCS discount to WTI is close to $30 (this is a better approximation of the price heavy oil producers in Western Canada actually receive). At the same time the Loonie has weakened, having a double impact on the relative performance of US equities vs. Canadian. Helping explain the weakening Canadian dollar is the trade uncertainty around NAFTA and U.S. short term rates that are currently higher, making the US a more attractive destination for capital flows.

On the fixed income front, we continue to selectively choose preferred shares rather than invest in individual bonds. We still expect higher interest rates from current levels and therefore would expect to see bonds struggle in that environment going forward. We continue to monitor the preferred share market and recently added to our weighting selling bond exposure and diversifying company and sector positioning within the preferred market.

As always, should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact us.

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This article provides information on how and when to withdraw funds from an RESP, as well as information on qualifying educational institutions and programs. Even if the RESP beneficiary decides not to continue their studies beyond high school, or elects to leave before completing their post-secondary school education, as the subscriber of the plan, you will still have to make decisions on how to withdraw the funds that have accumulated in the RESP.

Educational Assistance Payments

An Education Assistance Payment ("EAP") is a payment from an RESP that is used to finance the post-secondary education of an RESP beneficiary. An EAP consists of the growth on the principal contributions to the RESP, as well as the Canada Education Savings Grant ("CESG"), the Canada Learning Bond ("CLB"), and any other amounts paid under a designated provincial program. EAPs are reported on the beneficiary's T4A slip (Box 42) in each year that they attend a qualifying post-secondary program and receive EAPs from the RESP.

Educational Assistance Payments can be paid to the beneficiary of an RESP when:

- They are enrolled in a **qualifying educational program** at a qualifying post-secondary educational institution. This includes long-distance and online education courses – such as a correspondence course – that are provided by such institutions; or
- The beneficiary has reached the age of 16, and is enrolled in a specified educational program.

Qualifying vs. specified educational programs

A **qualifying educational program** is a full-time post-secondary school level program that runs for a minimum of three consecutive weeks, and requires the student to spend not less than 10 hours per week on program courses or curriculum work.

A **specified educational program** is a part-time program at the post-secondary school level that runs for a minimum of three consecutive weeks, and requires the student to spend not less than 12 hours per month on courses in the program.

Post-secondary educational institutions that offer qualifying and specified educational programs include:

- A university, college, CEGEP, trade school or another designated educational institution in Canada;
- An educational institution in Canada certified by Employment and Social Development Canada ("ESDC") as offering non-credit courses that develop or improve skills in an occupation; or
- A university, college, or other educational institution outside Canada that offers courses at the post-secondary school level, if the student was enrolled on a full-time basis in a course that runs for a minimum of 13 consecutive weeks. (Three weeks for full-time attendance at university programs.)

A beneficiary is entitled to receive EAPs for up to six months after ceasing enrolment in a post-secondary educational institution, as long as the payments being received would have qualified as EAPs had they been made immediately before the student's enrolment ceased.

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Limit on EAPs

For RESPs set up after 1998, the maximum EAP that can be made to a student upon qualifying to receive such payments depends on their enrolled educational program.

Qualifying educational programs

For the first 13 consecutive weeks of enrolment in a qualifying educational program, the maximum EAP is $5,000. After completing 13 consecutive weeks, there is no limit on the amount of the EAP, as long as the beneficiary continues to qualify to receive payments. If, at any time, there is a 12-month period in which the beneficiary is not enrolled in a qualifying educational program, the $5,000 maximum for the first 13 weeks of enrolment will again apply.

Specified educational program

The maximum EAP is $2,500 for the 13-week period, whether or not the student is enrolled in such a program throughout the 13-week period.

Accumulated Income Payments

An Accumulated Income Payment ("AIP") is a withdrawal of accumulated income from the RESP – usually by the subscriber – in situations where the beneficiary of the RESP does not attend a qualifying or specified educational program. The subscriber may withdraw the income that has accumulated in the RESP if the following conditions are met:

i. The subscriber is a Canadian resident;
ii. The RESP has existed for at least 10 years; and
iii. All beneficiaries under the plan are 21 years of age or older, and will not be pursuing a post-secondary education.

The accumulated income may be withdrawn by the subscriber without meeting the AIP conditions (ii) or (iii), if all of the RESP beneficiaries are deceased.

The Canada Revenue Agency may also allow an Accumulated Income Payment to the subscriber without meeting (ii) or (iii), if the beneficiary will be unable to pursue post-secondary studies due to a severe and prolonged mental impairment, or if the plan is being closed at the end of the 35th year after which it was originally set up.

When the accumulated income is returned to the subscriber, it is taxed in the subscriber's hands as ordinary income at their normal tax rate, plus an additional tax levy of 20 per cent (12% in Quebec). The income tax can be deferred and the 20 per cent tax avoided if the subscriber (excluding someone who became a subscriber as a result of the death of the original subscriber) has sufficient contribution room in their Registered Retirement Savings Plan ("RRSP"). Up to $50,000 of the accumulated income may be used to make a regular or Spousal RRSP contribution. As a result, if $50,000 of RRSP contribution room is available, only the growth in excess of $50,000 would be immediately taxed as income and assessed for the 20 per cent tax.

If the RESP beneficiary is also the beneficiary of a Registered Disability Savings Plan ("RDSP")[1] and has RDSP contribution room available, an AIP can be transferred on a tax-deferred basis to the beneficiary's RDSP, if certain conditions are met.

Post-Secondary Education Payments

If the beneficiary's education expenses exceed the amount available through an EAP, you may want to make a Post-Secondary Education Payment ("PSE") to supplement the EAP. A PSE represents a return of the original RESP contributions made by the subscriber, which can be withdrawn at any time, with no tax consequences. Generally, parents use the RESP contributions, along with EAPs, to pay for educational expenses. If the original beneficiary of the RESP does not pursue post-secondary studies, and another beneficiary is not named to replace the original beneficiary, all contributions to the RESP can be returned to the subscriber with no tax consequences. However, this may trigger a requirement to repay any CESGs remaining in the plan.

You may not want to be too hasty with respect to a decision to collapse an RESP, as it's possible that the beneficiary may return to school at a later date. It is also important to note that you can keep the RESP open for a maximum of 35 years. In addition, the Canada Education Savings Grant can be shared with other siblings if they have grant room available. Otherwise, it must be returned to the Government of Canada.

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The table below provides a summary of the three types of payments that can be received from an RESP.

RESP payments to a designated educational institution

Generally, any amount that is left in the plan after maximizing EAPs and returning the capital, and the conditions for an EAP or AIP are not met, the balance of the RESP can be paid (i.e., bestowed) to a designated educational institution in Canada.

Please contact your BMO financial professional for more information on how to make a withdrawal from your RESP.

RESP Payment Types

Type of Payment	Source of Withdrawal	Timing of Withdrawal	Who Receives Withdrawal	Taxation	Additional Information
Educational Assistance Payment ("EAP")	Income earned on growth, contributions and grants (CESG+CLB+other provincial incentives)	While beneficiary is attending a qualified educational program	Beneficiary or subscriber; to be used for the benefit of the beneficiary	Taxable to beneficiary (reported in Box 42 on T4A)	Qualifying educational programs - Limit of $5,000 within first 13 weeks of full-time enrolment. Specified educational programs - Limit of $2,500 within first 13 weeks of part-time enrolment.
Accumulated Income Payment ("AIP")	Income earned	When beneficiary no longer qualifies for an EAP	Subscriber	Taxable to subscriber (reported in Box 40 on T4A)	Applicable income tax is based on individual's total taxable income, plus an additional 20% tax (12% in Quebec is applied (calculated on Form T1172). Tax may be avoided if the subscriber has sufficient RRSP contribution room available (for amounts transferred up to $50,000).
Post-Secondary Education Payment ("PSE")/ Withdrawal of Contributions	Capital (i.e., money or securities directly contributed by the subscriber)	Anytime	Subscriber/beneficiary	Not taxable	If the beneficiary is not eligible for an EAP at the time of the withdrawal of contributions, this may trigger a requirement to repay CESG.

[1] Because BMO Nesbitt Burns is not an RDSP provider, we are unable to facilitate a direct transfer from a BMO Nesbitt Burns RESP to an RDSP.

BMO Wealth Management