DIAGEO PLC
Form 6-K
February 09, 2012

UNITED STATES

SECURITIES AND EXCHANGE COMMISSION

WASHINGTON, DC 20549

FORM 6-K

REPORT OF FOREIGN PRIVATE ISSUER

PURSUANT TO RULE 13a-16 OR 15d-16 OF THE

SECURITIES EXCHANGE ACT OF 1934

9 February 2012

Commission File Number: 001-10691

DIAGEO plc

(*Translation of registrant's name into English*)

Lakeside Drive, Park Royal, London NW10 7HQ

(*Address of principal executive offices*)

Indicate by check mark whether the registrant files or will file annual reports under cover Form 20-F or Form 40-F.

Form 20-F x Form 40-F ¨

Indicate by check mark whether the registrant is submitting the Form 6-K in paper as permitted by Regulation S-T Rule 101(b)(1): ¨

Indicate by check mark whether the registrant is submitting the Form 6-K in paper as permitted by Regulation S-T Rule 101(b)(7): ¨

THIS REPORT ON FORM 6-K SHALL BE DEEMED TO BE FILED AND INCORPORATED BY REFERENCE IN THE REGISTRATION STATEMENTS ON FORM F-3 (FILE NO. 333-179426) AND REGISTRATION STATEMENTS ON FORM S-8 (FILE NOS. 333-162490 AND 333-169934) AND TO BE A PART THEREOF FROM THE DATE ON WHICH THIS REPORT IS FURNISHED, TO THE EXTENT NOT SUPERSEDED BY DOCUMENTS OR REPORTS SUBSEQUENTLY FILED OR FURNISHED.

Half year results, six months ended 31 December 2011

Strong performance driven by our brands, our markets and our people

Results summary

- 3% volume growth. Price increases together with mix benefits drove 7% organic net sales growth
- 9% organic operating profit increase
- 4 percentage points of price/mix drove organic gross margin improvement of 70 basis points
- Marketing was up 10% on an organic basis with 20% growth in emerging markets and 8% growth in North America
- Delivered overhead savings in Western Europe and reduced corporate costs
- Organic operating margin expansion of 60 basis points
- eps pre-exceptional items up 16% to 55.9 pence per share
- Interim dividend increased by 7% to 16.60 pence per share

Paul Walsh, Chief Executive of Diageo, commenting on the

six months ended 31 December 2011

“Diageo has delivered a solid and well balanced first half performance with 9% operating profit growth and 60 basis points of operating margin expansion.

This is the result of the investments we have made to build our brands, deepen our routes to market in the faster growing markets of the world, enhance our leadership in US spirits and create an integrated organisation in Western Europe. In an uncertain economic environment we have again demonstrated the benefits of our geographic diversity and brand range.

Our emerging market business grew net sales 18% and operating profit 23% and now accounts for almost 40% of our business. Our performance improved in our developed markets business and we delivered top line growth and operating margin expansion while marketing as a percent of net sales increased.

Globally Johnnie Walker grew 15%, Smirnoff returned to growth, Guinness grew 5% and our reserve brand portfolio grew 25%. Our strategic brands grew 8% and the strongest performing categories were scotch, up 14% and vodka, up 13% while our beer brands delivered 7% organic net sales growth.

We are cautious as to the consumer and economic trends we will face in 2012 but these first half results have positioned us well and they have demonstrated that Diageo has the brands, the routes to market and the people to deliver our medium term guidance. The increase of 7% in the interim dividend signals our confidence that we are making a strong business stronger."

Key financials:

		2012 H1	2011 H1	Organic growth %	Reported growth %
Volume	m	84.1	79.0	3	6
Net sales	£million	5,757	5,320	7	8
Marketing spend	£million	896	813	10	10
Operating profit before exceptional items	£million	1,866	1,727	9	8
Operating profit	£million	1,842	1,718		7
Tax rate before exceptional items		18.1 %	21.8 %		
Reported tax rate		45.2 %	21.8 %		
Profit attributable to parent company's equity shareholders	£million	953	1,194		(20)
Free cash flow	£million	533	775		
Basic eps	pence	38.2	47.9		(20)
eps pre-exceptional items	pence	55.9	48.2		16
Recommended half year dividend	pence	16.6	15.5		7

- As required by *IFRS 3 (Revised)*, operating profit pre exceptional items for the period included directly attributable transaction and integration costs of £39 million (2010 – £6 million) in respect of business acquisitions.

- The tax rate before exceptional items for the six months ended 31 December 2011 was 18.1% compared with 21.8% in the six months ended 31 December 2010. The reported tax rate, which includes exceptional tax, was 45.2% in the six months ended 31 December 2011 compared with 21.8% in the six months ended 31 December 2010. During the period tax authority negotiations were concluded resulting in a favourable change to the taxation basis of certain intangible assets. This has reduced the ongoing tax rate to approximately 18% but resulted in the loss of future tax amortisation deductions giving rise to an exceptional write off of the related deferred tax assets of £524 million. This write off was a non cash item.

Organic growth by region:

	Volume %	Net sales %	Marketing spend %	Operating profit %
North America	-	5	8	6
Europe	-	-	4	3
Africa	7	12	13	20
Latin America	14	23	25	19
Asia Pacific	5	10	10	20

Exchange rate movement

	Total £million
On net sales	(42)
On operating profit before exceptional items	(30)

The adverse impact of £42 million on net sales was driven by weakening African currencies, primarily the Kenyan shilling, Nigerian naira and the South African rand and the weaker US dollar offset by the appreciation of the euro. The adverse £30 million impact on operating profit before exceptional items was largely attributable to the weaker African currencies and the adverse transaction exchange rate movements in the US dollar.

Exchange rate movements for the year ending 30 June 2012 are expected to have no material impact on either operating profit or net finance charge. This guidance excludes the impact of IAS 21 and 39.

Definitions

Unless otherwise stated in this announcement:

- volume is in millions of equivalent units
- net sales are sales after deducting excise duties
- percentage movements are organic movements
- commentary refers to organic movements
- share refers to value share

See page 33 for additional information for shareholders and an explanation of non-GAAP measures.

BUSINESS REVIEW

Half year results, six months ended 31 December 2011

North America

Ivan Menezes, President, Diageo North America, commenting on the six months ended 31 December 2011, said:

"I am pleased by the performance of our business in North America and encouraged as the economy continues to show mixed signs of recovery. Innovation together with increased sales of our premium and super premium brands drove price/mix improvement. We have strengthened our brand equities with significantly increased marketing investment, up 50 basis points to 15% of net sales and redoubled our efforts to capture the opportunities with multi-cultural consumers and the on trade. The operational changes we made going into the year have driven operating margin improvement as we focused our business on efficient growth."

Key financials £m:

	2011 H1	FX	Acquisitions and disposals	Organic movement	2012 H1	Reported movement
Net sales	1,827	(9)	(20)	82	1,880	3%
Marketing spend	270	(2)	-	22	290	7%
Operating profit before exceptional items	735	(3)	(3)	41	770	5%
Exceptional items	-				(2)	
Operating profit	735				768	

Key markets and categories:

	Volume* %	Organic net sales %	Reported net sales %
North America	-	5	3
United States	-	4	3
Canada	1	3	4
Spirits**	-	6	5
Beer	-	3	2
Wine	1	(1)	(16)

The strategic brands**:

	Volume* %	Organic net sales %	Reported net sales %
Johnnie Walker	11	19	18
Smirnoff	4	6	5
Baileys	3	5	5
Captain Morgan	3	4	3
Jose Cuervo	(10)	(11)	(12)
Tanqueray	6	6	5
Crown Royal	(3)	(3)	(3)
Ketel One	9	10	9

Ready to drink	(2)	-	-	Buchanan's	22	28	27
				Cîroc	44	49	48
				Guinness	8	9	9

* Organic equals reported movement for volume, except for wine where reported movement was (10%) due to disposals in the prior period

** Spirits brands excluding ready to drink

- Strategic brands grew volume, which together with selective price increases drove the positive price/mix and net sales growth of 5%. The value segment was more affected by muted consumer confidence which impacted Diageo's value brands, primarily Gordon's and Popov vodkas. Momentum improved behind Smirnoff and Captain Morgan following the success of the new marketing campaigns for the brands. Johnnie Walker performed well following the launch of Johnnie Walker Double Black with increased marketing spend. Jose Cuervo's performance was impacted by distributor destocking and a weak category performance and Crown Royal's shipments reflected the lapping of the introduction of Crown Royal Black last year, while depletions increased.
- The launch of Guinness Black Lager into the growing discovery beer segment, together with the growth of Guinness kegs, Parrot Bay pouches and Jeremiah Weed ready to drink, offset weakness in Smirnoff ready to drink.
- The wine business is no longer managed as a separate unit and performance improved in a challenging wine category and led to a 1 percentage point of share gain. While volume increased, net sales declined 1%, as the intensity of price competition offset a decline in trade investment.
- In Canada price increases across core brands drove net sales, up 3%. These price increases were supported by increased marketing spend, up 11%, focused on the strategic brands, with the Crown Royal ice hockey sponsorship, a new Guinness television campaign, the "Captain Morgan's Island" programme and the Smirnoff "Nightlife Exchange Project".

- Marketing spend was up behind innovation with the launch of Guinness Black Lager, Cîroc Peach and Johnnie Walker Double Black which delivered share gains for the brands. In addition, spend increased behind the multi-cultural consumer opportunity, principally behind Ketel One vodka and Buchanan's and both those brands gained share.
- Improved mix, price increases and reduced overheads as a percentage of net sales increased operating margin.

Europe

Andrew Morgan, President, Diageo Europe, commenting on the six months ended 31 December 2011, said:

"Through the structural changes we have made, Diageo Europe has created an organisation which is focused on winning with customers and consumers in Western Europe and capturing the opportunities of the faster growing markets. The economic environment, particularly in Southern Europe, has impacted our performance in Western Europe, while in the emerging markets of Europe we have delivered strong growth. There were a number of solid individual brand performances, especially in our reserve brands and improved net sales per case in key countries such as Great Britain. We have now integrated our businesses in Turkey leading to strong growth as Diageo's international brands now go through the broader Mey İçki distribution network. A sharper focus on our customers and consumers, and our more efficient operating model has increased operating margin."

Key financials £m:

	2011 H1	FX	Acquisitions and disposals	Organic movement	2012 H1	Reported movement
Net sales	1,489	15	119	2	1,625	9 %
Marketing spend	230	1	8	9	248	8 %
Operating profit before exceptional items	484	2	41	15	542	12 %
Exceptional items	-				(4)	
Operating profit	484				538	

Key markets and categories:

	Volume* %	Organic net sales %	Reported net sales %
Europe	-	-	9

The strategic brands**:

	Volume* %	Organic net sales %	Reported net sales %
Johnnie Walker	7	6	7
Smirnoff	3	8	8

Western Europe	(2)	(3)	(2)	Baileys	(9)	(6)	(5)
Russia and Eastern Europe	17	21	20	J B	3	1	3
Turkey	64	114	1,364	Captain Morgan	25	16	18
				Guinness	(5)	(2)	(2)
Spirits**	1	3	16				
Beer	(5)	(1)	-				
Wine	(1)	(10)	(7)				
Ready to drink	(8)	(6)	(5)				

* Organic equals reported movement for volume except for; total volume 10%, spirits 14%, wine 1% and Turkey 1,371% reflecting the acquisition of Mey İçki and sale of Gilbeys in the previous period

** Spirits brands excluding ready to drink

- The performance of Diageo's business in **Western Europe** reflected the variation in the economies by country. The stronger economies of Germany and France delivered double digit net sales growth. In the weaker economies of Spain, Greece and Ireland, net sales declined. In Great Britain net sales also declined in line with a strategy to reduce the depth of promotions, that delivered 4 percentage points of positive price/mix. Overall volume performance was flattered by the sales buy-in in France ahead of an excise increase in January 2012 and the lapping of a destock in Spain in 2010.
- Smirnoff delivered 8% net sales growth, driven by Great Britain and Germany. Additionally Captain Morgan grew strongly and the reserve brands portfolio performed well, particularly The Singleton which gained significant share in a number of countries.

- With each market growing double digit net sales, strong performance in **Russia and Eastern Europe** was driven by scotch, with Johnnie Walker net sales up 22%, and White Horse, the number one whisky in Russia, up 15% on the back of the first ever image campaign for the brand. The Singleton also performed well, more than doubling its net sales, and is now the fastest growing single malt in Russia. Increased distribution, on trade consumer programmes and successful digital activities drove 54% net sales growth on Bushmills which is now the fastest growing Irish whiskey brand in Russia. In other categories, growth was driven by Baileys and Captain Morgan with net sales up 13% and 40% respectively.
- In **Turkey** the acquisition of Mey İçki was completed in August and the sales and marketing activities of Diageo's brands are now integrated into Mey İçki. In the prior period imports into Turkey were limited by the customs dispute, which has been resolved and was reflected in strong sales of Diageo's brands in the half.

Africa

Nick Blazquez, President, Diageo Africa, commenting on the six months ended 31 December 2011, said:

"Diageo's superior routes to market and leading brands have again driven strong net sales growth in Africa. We significantly increased our investments behind our brands, notably the successful Guinness football platform and our core local brands Tusker and Harp. Our flagship brand Guinness grew strongly, however softness in the Nigerian beer market in recent months impacted our performance there. Our investments in capacity expansion have increased beer sales in the formerly constrained markets of Nigeria and Uganda, and the recently announced Meta Abo Brewery acquisition in Ethiopia and the full integration of Serengeti Breweries in Tanzania demonstrate our continued commitment to strengthening our presence in the region. Operating margin improved on the back of continued focus on supply efficiencies and pricing. Momentum in spirits is building, with net sales up 18%, and I am particularly delighted with the performance of Johnnie Walker which increased net sales by 32% and is spearheading the growth of premium scotch in Africa."

Key financials £m:

	2011 H1	FX	Acquisitions and disposals	Organic movement	2012 H1	Reported movement
Net sales	689	(53)	16	79	731	6 %
Marketing spend	73	(5)	2	9	79	8 %
Operating profit before exceptional items	176	(14)	1	33	196	11 %
Exceptional items	-				(2)	
Operating profit	176				194	

Key markets and categories:

The strategic brands**:

	Volume* %	Organic net sales %	Reported net sales %		Volume* %	Organic net sales %	Reported net sales %
Africa	7	12	6	Johnnie Walker	35	32	27
				Smirnoff	23	20	11
Nigeria	6	8	3	Baileys	9	12	7
East Africa	10	26	17	Guinness	8	10	4
Africa Regional Markets	9	18	13				
South Africa	5	2	(6)				
Spirits**	11	18	10				
Beer	7	13	7				
Ready to drink	(17)	(10)	(16)				

* Organic equals reported movement for volume except for; Africa 10%, East Africa 18% and beer 11% reflecting the acquisition of Serengeti Breweries

** Spirits brands excluding ready to drink

- In **Nigeria** 6% volume growth was driven by Harp and Johnnie Walker. Price increases across most brands led to positive price/mix. Marketing spend increased significantly driven by digital activations for Guinness and the successful launch of Harp Lime. Last year's route to market improvements drove very strong growth of Diageo's spirits business with net sales up 95%, albeit off a low base.

- In **East Africa** strong double digit net sales growth was driven by Senator, Tusker and spirits. The performance of Senator benefited from investment in incremental kegs and net sales of the brand grew 43%. Tusker net sales were up 23% following the launch of innovative new packaging and Tusker Lite, and investment in the "Tusker Refresh your Roots" campaign. Total spirits net sales grew over 50% driven by the growth of new Kenya Cane in glass bottles and increased sales focus on international spirits Johnnie Walker and Smirnoff.
- Performance in **Africa Regional Markets** which includes Cameroon, Ghana and Ethiopia, was driven by performance in Ghana and Cameroon where net sales were up 23% and 16% respectively. Marketing spend increased 16% across the region, with the successful "Guinness Football Challenge" underpinning strong Guinness brand equity. Diageo agreed the acquisition of the Meta Abo brewery and continued to establish its spirits presence in Angola.
- Volume growth in **South Africa** of 5% was driven by the strong performance of spirits, in particular Johnnie Walker and Smirnoff with both benefitting from improved routes to market. An increased focus on Johnnie Walker with the "Step Up" and "Walk with Giants" campaigns, drove exceptional performance on Johnnie Walker Red Label, which outperformed its category and gained over 2 percentage points of volume share. Migration of Smirnoff ready to drink single serve production to Namibia Breweries Limited, coupled with weaker consumer trends led to a significant decline in ready to drink net sales. The brandhouse venture again gained share in both beer and spirits.

Latin America and Caribbean

Randy Millian, President, Diageo Latin America, commenting on the six months ended 31 December 2011, said:

"Our first half delivery in Latin America and Caribbean has been exceptional, with net sales up 23%. This was primarily driven by scotch and we gained share in Brazil, Venezuela, Mexico and Colombia where Johnnie Walker, Buchanan's and Old Parr have all performed well. We have also expanded our non-scotch franchise with double digit growth in vodka, rum and liqueurs. We increased our investment in marketing and routes to market as the consumer dynamics remain extremely attractive and we are uniquely positioned to capture opportunities in the region."

Key financials £m:

	2011 H1	FX	Acquisitions and disposals	Organic movement		2012 H1	Reported movement
Net sales	568	(8)	-	127		687	21 %
Marketing spend	84	-	-	21		105	25 %
Operating profit before exceptional items	218	(2)	(2)	42		256	17 %
Exceptional items	-				Total Hypothetical Coupons	$0	

In Scenario 2, the hypothetical closing level of each underlier increases and decreases by varying amounts on each hypothetical coupon observation date. Because in each case the hypothetical closing level of at least one underlier on the related coupon observation date is less than its coupon trigger level, you will not receive a coupon payment on the applicable hypothetical coupon payment date. Since this occurs on every hypothetical coupon observation date, the overall return you earn on your notes will be less than zero. Therefore, the total of the hypothetical coupons in Scenario 2 is $0.

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Scenario 3

Hypothetical Coupon Observation Date	Hypothetical Closing Level of the Russell 2000® Index (as Percentage of Initial Underlier Level)	Hypothetical Closing Level of the S&P 500® Index (as Percentage of Initial Underlier Level)	Hypothetical Coupon
First	110%	115%	$31.25
		Total Hypothetical Coupons	$31.25

In Scenario 3, the hypothetical closing level of each underlier is greater than its coupon trigger level on the first hypothetical coupon observation date. Further, we also exercise our early redemption right with respect to a redemption on the first coupon payment date (which is also the first hypothetical date with respect to which we could exercise such right). Therefore, on the first coupon payment date (the redemption date), in addition to the hypothetical coupon of $31.25, you will receive an amount in cash equal to $1,000 for each $1,000 face amount of your notes.

Hypothetical Payment at Maturity

If the notes are not redeemed, the cash settlement amount we would deliver for each $1,000 face amount of your notes on the stated maturity date will depend on the performance of the lesser performing underlier on the determination date, as shown in the table below. The table below assumes that the notes have not been redeemed, does not include the final coupon, if any, and reflects hypothetical cash settlement amounts that you could receive on the stated maturity date. If the final underlier level of the lesser performing underlier (as a percentage of the initial underlier level) is less than its coupon trigger level, you will not be paid a final coupon at maturity.

The levels in the left column of the table below represent hypothetical final underlier levels of the lesser performing underlier and are expressed as percentages of the initial underlier level of the lesser performing underlier. The amounts in the right column represent the hypothetical cash settlement amounts, based on the corresponding hypothetical final underlier level of the lesser performing underlier (expressed as a percentage of the initial underlier level of the lesser performing underlier), and are expressed as percentages of the face amount of a note (rounded to the nearest one-thousandth of a percent). Thus, a hypothetical cash settlement amount of 100.000% means that the value of the cash payment that we would deliver for each $1,000 of the outstanding face amount of the offered notes on the stated maturity date would equal 100.000% of the face amount of a note, based on the corresponding hypothetical final underlier level of the lesser performing underlier (expressed as a percentage of the initial underlier level of the lesser performing underlier) and the assumptions noted above.

The Notes Have Not Been Redeemed

Hypothetical Final Underlier Level of the Lesser Performing Underlier (as Percentage of Initial Underlier Level)	Hypothetical Cash Settlement Amount (as Percentage of Face Amount)
175.000%	100.000%*
150.000%	100.000%*
125.000%	100.000%*
100.000%	100.000%*
80.000%	100.000%*
70.000%	100.000%*
55.000%	100.000%*
54.999%	54.999%
50.000%	50.000%
35.000%	35.000%
25.000%	25.000%
10.000%	10.000%
0.000%	0.000%

*Does not include the final coupon

If, for example, the notes have not been redeemed and the final underlier level of the lesser performing underlier were determined to be 25.000% of its initial underlier level, the cash settlement amount that we would deliver on your notes at maturity would be 25.000% of the face amount of your notes, as shown in the table above. As a result, if you purchased your notes on the original issue date at the face amount and held them to the stated maturity date, you would lose 75.000% of your investment (if you purchased your notes at a premium to face amount you would lose a correspondingly higher percentage of your

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investment). In addition, if the final underlier level of the lesser performing underlier were determined to be 175.000% of its initial underlier level, the cash settlement amount that we would deliver on your notes at maturity would be limited to 100.000% of each $1,000 face amount of your notes, as shown in the table above. As a result, if you held your notes to the stated maturity date, you would not benefit from any increase in the final underlier level over the initial underlier level.

The cash settlement amounts shown above are entirely hypothetical; they are based on market prices for the underlier stocks that may not be achieved on the determination date and on assumptions that may prove to be erroneous. The actual market value of your notes on the stated maturity date or at any other time, including any time you may wish to sell your notes, may bear little relation to the hypothetical cash settlement amounts shown above, and these amounts should not be viewed as an indication of the financial return on an investment in the offered notes. The hypothetical cash settlement amounts on notes held to the stated maturity date in the examples above assume you purchased your notes at their face amount and have not been adjusted to reflect the actual issue price you pay for your notes. The return on your investment (whether positive or negative) in your notes will be affected by the amount you pay for your notes. If you purchase your notes for a price other than the face amount, the return on your investment will differ from, and may be significantly lower than, the hypothetical returns suggested by the above examples. Please read "Additional Risk Factors Specific to the Notes — The Market Value of Your Notes May Be Influenced by Many Unpredictable Factors" on page S-3 of the accompanying general terms supplement no. 1,734.

Payments on the notes are economically equivalent to the amounts that would be paid on a combination of other instruments. For example, payments on the notes are economically equivalent to a combination of an interest-bearing bond bought by the holder and one or more options entered into between the holder and us (with one or more implicit option premiums paid over time). The discussion in this paragraph does not modify or affect the terms of the notes or the U.S. federal income tax treatment of the notes, as described elsewhere in this pricing supplement.

We cannot predict the actual closing levels of the underliers on any day, the final underlier levels of the underliers or what the market value of your notes will be on any particular trading day, nor can we predict the relationship between the closing levels of the underliers and the market value of your notes at any time prior to the stated maturity date. The actual coupon payment, if any, that a holder of the notes will receive on each coupon payment date, the actual amount that you will receive at maturity, if any, and the rate of return on the offered notes will depend on whether or not the notes are redeemed and the actual closing levels of the underliers and the actual final underlier levels determined by the calculation agent as described above. Moreover, the assumptions on which the hypothetical examples are based may turn out to be inaccurate. Consequently, the coupon to be paid in respect of your notes, if any, and the cash amount to be paid in respect of your notes on the stated maturity date, if any, may be very different from the information reflected in the examples above.

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ADDITIONAL RISK FACTORS SPECIFIC TO YOUR NOTES

An investment in your notes is subject to the risks described below, as well as the risks and considerations described in the accompanying prospectus, in the accompanying prospectus supplement and under "Additional Risk Factors Specific to the Notes" in the accompanying general terms supplement no. 1,734. You should carefully review these risks and considerations as well as the terms of the notes described herein and in the accompanying prospectus, the accompanying prospectus supplement and the accompanying general terms supplement no. 1,734. Your notes are a riskier investment than ordinary debt securities. Also, your notes are not equivalent to investing directly in the underlier stocks, i.e., with respect to an underlier to which your notes are linked, the stocks comprising such underlier. You should carefully consider whether the offered notes are suited to your particular circumstances.

The Estimated Value of Your Notes At the Time the Terms of Your Notes Are Set On the Trade Date (as Determined By Reference to Pricing Models Used By GS&Co.) Is Less Than the Original Issue Price Of Your Notes

The original issue price for your notes exceeds the estimated value of your notes as of the time the terms of your notes are set on the trade date, as determined by reference to GS&Co.'s pricing models and taking into account our credit spreads. Such estimated value on the trade date is set forth above under "Estimated Value of Your Notes"; after the trade date, the estimated value as determined by reference to these models will be affected by changes in market conditions, the creditworthiness of GS Finance Corp., as issuer, the creditworthiness of The Goldman Sachs Group, Inc., as guarantor, and other relevant factors. The price at which GS&Co. would initially buy or sell your notes (if GS&Co. makes a market, which it is not obligated to do), and the value that GS&Co. will initially use for account statements and otherwise, also exceeds the estimated value of your notes as determined by reference to these models. As agreed by GS&Co. and the distribution participants, this excess (i.e., the additional amount described under "Estimated Value of Your Notes") will decline to zero on a straight line basis over the period from the date hereof through the applicable date set forth above under "Estimated Value of Your Notes". Thereafter, if GS&Co. buys or sells your notes it will do so at prices that reflect the estimated value determined by reference to such pricing models at that time. The price at which GS&Co. will buy or sell your notes at any time also will reflect its then current bid and ask spread for similar sized trades of structured notes.

In estimating the value of your notes as of the time the terms of your notes are set on the trade date, as disclosed above under "Estimated Value of Your Notes", GS&Co.'s pricing models consider certain variables, including principally our credit spreads, interest rates (forecasted, current and historical rates), volatility, price-sensitivity analysis and the time to maturity of the notes. These pricing models are proprietary and rely in part on certain assumptions about future events, which may prove to be incorrect. As a result, the actual value you would receive if you sold your notes in the secondary market, if any, to others may differ, perhaps materially, from the estimated value of your notes determined by reference to our models due to, among other things, any differences in pricing models or assumptions used by others. See "Additional Risk Factors Specific to the Notes — The Market Value of Your Notes May Be Influenced by Many Unpredictable Factors" on page S-3 of the accompanying general terms supplement no. 1,734.

The difference between the estimated value of your notes as of the time the terms of your notes are set on the trade date and the original issue price is a result of certain factors, including principally the underwriting discount and commissions, the expenses incurred in creating, documenting and marketing the notes, and an estimate of the difference between the amounts we pay to GS&Co. and the amounts GS&Co. pays to us in connection with your notes. We pay to GS&Co. amounts based on what we would pay to holders of a non-structured note with a similar maturity. In return for such payment, GS&Co. pays to us the amounts we owe under your notes.

In addition to the factors discussed above, the value and quoted price of your notes at any time will reflect many factors and cannot be predicted. If GS&Co. makes a market in the notes, the price quoted by GS&Co. would reflect any changes in market conditions and other relevant factors, including any deterioration in our creditworthiness or perceived creditworthiness or the creditworthiness or perceived creditworthiness of The Goldman Sachs Group, Inc. These changes may adversely affect the value of your notes, including the price you may receive for your notes in any market making transaction. To the extent that GS&Co. makes a market

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in the notes, the quoted price will reflect the estimated value determined by reference to GS&Co.'s pricing models at that time, plus or minus its then current bid and ask spread for similar sized trades of structured notes (and subject to the declining excess amount described above).

Furthermore, if you sell your notes, you will likely be charged a commission for secondary market transactions, or the price will likely reflect a dealer discount. This commission or discount will further reduce the proceeds you would receive for your notes in a secondary market sale.

There is no assurance that GS&Co. or any other party will be willing to purchase your notes at any price and, in this regard, GS&Co. is not obligated to make a market in the notes. See "— Your Notes May Not Have an Active Trading Market" below.

The Underwriting Discount and Commissions, Including the Structuring Fee and Marketing Fee, and Other Expenses, Result in Less Favorable Economic Terms of the Notes and Could Adversely Affect Any Secondary Market Price for the Notes

The economic terms of the notes, as well as the difference between the estimated value of your notes as of the time the terms of your notes are set on the trade date and the original issue price, take into consideration, among other expenses, the underwriting discount and commissions, including the structuring fee and marketing fee, paid in connection with the notes. Therefore, the economic terms of the notes are less favorable to you than they would have been if these expenses had not been paid or had been lower. Further, the price, if any, at which GS&Co. will buy or sell your notes (if GS&Co. makes a market, which it is not obligated to do) at any time will reflect, among other things, the economic terms of the notes. Therefore, the secondary market price for the notes could also be adversely affected by the underwriting discount and commissions, including the structuring fee and marketing fee, and other expenses paid in connection with the notes. See "The Estimated Value of Your Notes At the Time the Terms of Your Notes Are Set On the Trade Date (as Determined By Reference to Pricing Models Used By GS&Co.) Is Less Than the Original Issue Price Of Your Notes" above.

The Notes Are Subject to the Credit Risk of the Issuer and the Guarantor

Although the coupons (if any) and return on the notes will be based on the performance of each underlier, the payment of any amount due on the notes is subject to the credit risk of GS Finance Corp., as issuer of the notes, and the credit risk of The Goldman Sachs Group, Inc., as guarantor of the notes. The notes are our unsecured obligations. Investors are dependent on our ability to pay all amounts due on the notes, and therefore investors are subject to our credit risk and to changes in the market's view of our creditworthiness. Similarly, investors are dependent on the ability of The Goldman Sachs Group, Inc., as guarantor of the notes, to pay all amounts due on the notes, and therefore are also subject to its credit risk and to changes in the market's view of its creditworthiness. See "Description of the Notes We May Offer — Information About Our Medium-Term Notes, Series E Program — How the Notes Rank Against Other Debt" on page S-4 of the accompanying prospectus supplement and "Description of Debt Securities We May Offer – Guarantee by The Goldman Sachs Group, Inc." on page 42 of the accompanying prospectus.

You May Lose Your Entire Investment in the Notes

You can lose your entire investment in the notes. Subject to our redemption right, the cash settlement amount on your notes, if any, on the stated maturity date will be based on the performance of the lesser performing of the underliers as measured from their initial underlier levels to their closing levels on the determination date. If the final underlier level of the lesser performing underlier for your notes is less than its trigger buffer level, you will have a loss for each $1,000 of the face amount of your notes equal to the product of the lesser performing underlier return times $1,000. Thus, you may lose your entire investment in the notes, which would include any premium to face amount you paid when you purchased the notes.

Also, the market price of your notes prior to the stated maturity date may be significantly lower than the purchase price you pay for your notes. Consequently, if you sell your notes before the stated maturity date, you may receive far less than the amount of your investment in the notes.

The Return on Your Notes May Change Significantly Despite Only a Small Change in the Level of the Lesser Performing Underlier

If your notes are not redeemed and the final underlier level of the lesser performing underlier is less than its trigger buffer level, you will receive less than the face amount of your notes and you could lose all or a

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substantial portion of your investment in the notes. This means that while a decrease in the final underlier level of the lesser performing underlier to its trigger buffer level will not result in a loss of principal on the notes, a decrease in the final underlier level of the lesser performing underlier to less than its trigger buffer level will result in a loss of a significant portion of the face amount of the notes despite only a small change in the level of the lesser performing underlier.

You May Not Receive a Coupon on Any Coupon Payment Date

If the closing level of any underlier on the related coupon observation date is less than its coupon trigger level, you will not receive a coupon payment on the applicable coupon payment date. If this occurs on every coupon observation date, the overall return you earn on your notes will be less than zero and such return will be less than you would have earned by investing in a note that bears interest at the prevailing market rate.

You will only receive a coupon on a coupon payment date if the closing level of each underlier on the related coupon observation date is greater than or equal to its coupon trigger level. You should be aware that, with respect to any prior coupon observation dates that did not result in the payment of a coupon, you will not be compensated for any opportunity cost implied by inflation and other factors relating to the time value of money. Further, there is no guarantee that you will receive any coupon payment with respect to the notes at any time and you may lose your entire investment in the notes.

We Are Able to Redeem Your Notes at Our Option

On each coupon payment date commencing in June 2019 and ending in June 2023, we will be permitted to redeem your notes at our option. Even if we do not exercise our option to redeem your notes, our ability to do so may adversely affect the value of your notes. It is our sole option whether to redeem your notes prior to maturity and we may or may not exercise this option for any reason. Because of this redemption option, the term of your notes could be reduced.

The Coupon Does Not Reflect the Actual Performance of the Underliers from the Trade Date to Any Coupon Observation Date or from Coupon Observation Date to Coupon Observation Date

The coupon for each quarterly coupon payment date is different from, and may be less than, a coupon determined based on the percentage difference of the closing levels of the underliers between the trade date and any coupon observation date or between two coupon observation dates. Accordingly, the coupons, if any, on the notes may be less than the return you could earn on another instrument linked to the underliers that pays coupons based on the performance of the underliers from the trade date to any coupon observation date or from coupon observation date to coupon observation date.

The Cash Settlement Amount Will Be Based Solely on the Lesser Performing Underlier

If the notes are not redeemed by us, the cash settlement amount will be based on the lesser performing underlier without regard to the performance of the other underlier. As a result, you could lose all or some of your initial investment if the lesser performing underlier return is negative, even if there is an increase in the level of the other underlier. This could be the case even if the other underlier increased by an amount greater than the decrease in the lesser performing underlier.

If You Purchase Your Notes at a Premium to Face Amount, the Return on Your Investment Will Be Lower Than the Return on Notes Purchased at Face Amount and the Impact of Certain Key Terms of the Notes Will Be Negatively Affected

The cash settlement amount you will be paid for your notes on the stated maturity date, if any, or the amount we will pay you upon any early redemption of your notes will not be adjusted based on the issue price you pay for the notes. If you purchase notes at a price that differs from the face amount of the notes, then the return on your investment in such notes held to the stated maturity date or date of early redemption will differ from, and may be substantially less than, the return on notes purchased at face amount. If you purchase your notes at a premium to face amount and hold them to the stated maturity date or date of early redemption, the return on your investment in the notes will be lower than it would have been had you purchased the notes at face amount or a discount to face amount.

You Have No Shareholder Rights or Rights to Receive Any Underlier Stock

Investing in your notes will not make you a holder of any of the underlier stocks. Neither you nor any other holder or owner of your notes will have any rights with respect to the underlier stocks, including any voting

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rights, any right to receive dividends or other distributions, any rights to make a claim against the underlier stocks or any other rights of a holder of the underlier stocks. Your notes will be paid in cash, as will any coupon payments, and you will have no right to receive delivery of any underlier stocks.

Your Notes May Not Have an Active Trading Market

Your notes will not be listed or displayed on any securities exchange or included in any interdealer market quotation system, and there may be little or no secondary market for your notes. Even if a secondary market for your notes develops, it may not provide significant liquidity and we expect that transaction costs in any secondary market would be high. As a result, the difference between bid and asked prices for your notes in any secondary market could be substantial.

We May Sell an Additional Aggregate Face Amount of the Notes at a Different Issue Price

At our sole option, we may decide to sell an additional aggregate face amount of the notes subsequent to the date of this pricing supplement. The issue price of the notes in the subsequent sale may differ substantially (higher or lower) from the issue price you paid as provided on the cover of this pricing supplement.

The Tax Consequences of an Investment in Your Notes Are Uncertain

The tax consequences of an investment in your notes are uncertain, both as to the timing and character of any inclusion in income in respect of your notes.

The Internal Revenue Service announced on December 7, 2007 that it is considering issuing guidance regarding the tax treatment of an instrument such as your notes, and any such guidance could adversely affect the value and the tax treatment of your notes. Among other things, the Internal Revenue Service may decide to require the holders to accrue ordinary income on a current basis and recognize ordinary income on payment at maturity, and could subject non-U.S. investors to withholding tax. Furthermore, in 2007, legislation was introduced in Congress that, if enacted, would have required holders that acquired instruments such as your notes after the bill was enacted to accrue interest income over the term of such instruments. It is not possible to predict whether a similar or identical bill will be enacted in the future, or whether any such bill would affect the tax treatment of your notes. We describe these developments in more detail under "Supplemental Discussion of Federal Income Tax Consequences – United States Holders – Possible Change in Law" below. You should consult your tax advisor about this matter. Except to the extent otherwise provided by law, GS Finance Corp. intends to continue treating the notes for U.S. federal income tax purposes in accordance with the treatment described under "Supplemental Discussion of Federal Income Tax Consequences" on page PS-21 below unless and until such time as Congress, the Treasury Department or the Internal Revenue Service determine that some other treatment is more appropriate. Please also consult your tax advisor concerning the U.S. federal income tax and any other applicable tax consequences to you of owning your notes in your particular circumstances.

Foreign Account Tax Compliance Act (FATCA) Withholding May Apply to Payments on Your Notes, Including as a Result of the Failure of the Bank or Broker Through Which You Hold the Notes to Provide Information to Tax Authorities

Please see the discussion under "United States Taxation — Taxation of Debt Securities — Foreign Account Tax Compliance Act (FATCA) Withholding" in the accompanying prospectus for a description of the applicability of FATCA to payments made on your notes.

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THE UNDERLIERS

The Russell 2000® Index

The Russell 2000® Index measures the composite price performance of stocks of 2,000 companies incorporated in the U.S., its territories and certain "benefit-driven incorporation countries."

As of December 17, 2018, the 2,000 companies included in the Russell 2000® Index were divided into nine Russell Global Sectors. The Russell Global Sectors include (with the approximate percentage currently included in such sectors indicated in parentheses):Consumer Discretionary (14.57%), Consumer Staples (2.39%), Financial Services (23.87%), Health Care (14.15%), Materials & Processing (5.92%), Other Energy (3.63%), Producer Durables (13.15%), Technology (12.41%) and Utilities (4.83%). (Sector designations are determined by the underlier sponsor using criteria it has selected or developed. Index sponsors may use very different standards for determining sector designations. In addition, many companies operate in a number of sectors, but are listed in only one sector and the basis on which that sector is selected may also differ. As a result, sector comparisons between underliers with different underlier sponsors may reflect differences in methodology as well as actual differences in the sector composition of the underliers.)

In addition to the exclusions discussed under "Exclusions from the Russell 2000® Index" on page S-62 of the accompanying general terms supplement no. 1,734, a company with 5% or less of its voting rights in the hands of unrestricted shareholders is no longer eligible for inclusion in the Russell 2000® Index. Existing constituents of the Russell 2000® Index that do not currently have more than 5% of the company's voting rights in the hands of unrestricted shareholders have until the September 2022 review to meet this requirement.

The above information supplements the description of the underlier found in the accompanying general terms supplement no. 1,734. This information was derived from information prepared by the underlier sponsor, however, the percentages we have listed above are approximate and may not match the information available on the underlier sponsor's website due to subsequent corporate actions or other activity relating to a particular stock. For more details about the underlier, the underlier sponsor and license agreement between the underlier sponsor and the issuer, see "The Underliers — Russell 2000® Index" on page S-61 of the accompanying general terms supplement no. 1,734.

The Russell 2000® Index is a trademark of Russell Investment Group ("Russell") and has been licensed for use by GS Finance Corp. The securities are not sponsored, endorsed, sold or promoted by Russell, and Russell makes no representation regarding the advisability of investing in the securities.

The S&P 500® Index

The S&P 500® Index includes a representative sample of 500 leading companies in leading industries of the U.S. economy. The S&P 500® Index is calculated, maintained and published by S&P Dow Jones Indices LLC ("S&P"). As of July 31, 2017, companies with multiple share class lines are no longer eligible for inclusion in the S&P 500® Index. Constituents of the S&P 500® Index prior to July 31, 2017 with multiple share class lines will be grandfathered in and continue to be included in the S&P 500® Index. If an S&P 500® Index constituent reorganizes into a multiple share class line structure, that company will be reviewed for continued inclusion in the S&P 500® Index at the discretion of the S&P Index Committee. Also as of July 31, 2017, the criteria employed by S&P for purposes of making additions to the S&P 500® Index were changed as follows:

- with respect to the "U.S. company" criterion, (i) the IEX was added as an "eligible exchange" for the primary listing of the relevant company's common stock and (ii) the former "corporate governance structure consistent with U.S. practice" requirement was removed; and
- with respect to constituents of the S&P MidCap 400® Index and the S&P SmallCap 600® Index that are being considered for addition to the S&P 500® Index, the financial viability, public float and/or

liquidity eligibility criteria no longer need to be met if the S&P Index Committee decides that such an addition will enhance the representativeness of the S&P 500® Index as a market benchmark.

As of December 17, 2018, the 500 companies included in the S&P 500® Index were divided into eleven Global Industry Classification Sectors. The Global Industry Classification Sectors include (with the approximate percentage currently included in such sectors indicated in parentheses): Communication Services (10.12%), Consumer Discretionary (9.83%), Consumer Staples (7.57%), Energy (5.50%), Financials (13.19%), Health Care (15.48%), Industrials (9.21%), Information Technology (20.16%), Materials (2.61%), Real Estate (2.98%) and Utilities (3.36%). (Sector designations are determined by the underlier sponsor using criteria it has selected or developed. Index sponsors may use very different standards for determining sector designations. In addition, many companies operate in a number of sectors, but are listed in only one sector and the basis on which that sector is selected may also differ. As a result, sector comparisons between indices with different index sponsors may reflect differences in methodology as well as actual differences in the sector composition of the indices.) As of the close of business on September 21, 2018, S&P and MSCI, Inc. updated the Global Industry Classification Sector structure. Among other things, the update broadened the Telecommunications Services sector and renamed it the Communication Services sector. The renamed sector includes the previously existing Telecommunication Services Industry group, as well as the Media Industry group, which was moved from the Consumer Discretionary sector and renamed the Media & Entertainment Industry group. The Media & Entertainment Industry group contains three industries: Media, Entertainment and Interactive Media & Services. The Media industry continues to consist of the Advertising, Broadcasting, Cable & Satellite and Publishing sub-industries. The Entertainment industry contains the Movies & Entertainment sub-industry (which includes online entertainment streaming companies in addition to companies previously classified in such industry prior to September 21, 2018) and the Interactive Home Entertainment sub-industry (which includes companies previously classified in the Home Entertainment Software sub-industry prior to September 21, 2018 (when the Home Entertainment Software sub-industry was a sub-industry in the Information Technology sector)), as well as producers of interactive gaming products, including mobile gaming applications). The Interactive Media & Services industry and sub-industry includes companies engaged in content and information creation or distribution through proprietary platforms, where revenues are derived primarily through pay-per-click advertisements, and includes search engines, social media and networking platforms, online classifieds and online review companies. The Global Industry Classification Sector structure changes are effective for the S&P 500® Index as of the open of business on September 24, 2018 to coincide with the September 2018 quarterly rebalancing.

The above information supplements the description of the S&P 500® Index found in the accompanying general terms supplement no. 1,734. This information was derived from information prepared by the underlier sponsor, however, the percentages we have listed above are approximate and may not match the information available on the underlier sponsor's website due to subsequent corporate actions or other activity relating to a particular stock. For more details about the S&P 500® Index, the underlier sponsor and license agreement between the underlier sponsor and the issuer, see "The Underliers — S&P 500® Index" on page S-40 of the accompanying general terms supplement no. 1,734.

The S&P 500® Index is a product of S&P Dow Jones Indices LLC, and has been licensed for use by GS Finance Corp. ("Goldman"). Standard & Poor's® and S&P® are registered trademarks of Standard & Poor's Financial Services LLC; Dow Jones® is a registered trademark of Dow Jones Trademark Holdings LLC ("Dow Jones") and these trademarks have been licensed for use by S&P Dow Jones Indices LLC and sublicensed for certain purposes by Goldman. Goldman's notes are not sponsored, endorsed, sold or promoted by S&P Dow Jones Indices LLC, Dow Jones, Standard & Poor's Financial Services LLC or any of their respective affiliates and neither S&P Dow Jones Indices LLC, Dow Jones, Standard & Poor's Financial Services LLC or any of their respective affiliates make any representation regarding the advisability of investing in such notes.

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Historical Closing Levels of the Underliers

The closing levels of the underliers have fluctuated in the past and may, in the future, experience significant fluctuations. Any historical upward or downward trend in the closing level of any underlier during the period shown below is not an indication that such underlier is more or less likely to increase or decrease at any time during the life of your notes.

You should not take the historical closing levels of an underlier as an indication of the future performance of an underlier. We cannot give you any assurance that the future performance of any underlier or the underlier stocks will result in you receiving any coupon payments or receiving the outstanding face amount of your notes on the stated maturity date.

Neither we nor any of our affiliates make any representation to you as to the performance of the underliers. Before investing in the offered notes, you should consult publicly available information to determine the relevant underlier levels between the date of this pricing supplement and the date of your purchase of the offered notes. The actual performance of an underlier over the life of the offered notes, as well as the cash settlement amount at maturity may bear little relation to the historical levels shown below.

The graphs below show the daily historical closing levels of each underlier from December 21, 2008 through December 21, 2018. We obtained the levels in the graphs below from Bloomberg Financial Services, without independent verification. Although the official closing levels of the Russell 2000® Index are published to six decimal places by the underlier sponsor, Bloomberg Financial Services reports the levels of the Russell 2000® Index to fewer decimal places.

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Historical Performance of the Russell 2000® Index

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Historical Performance of the S&P 500® Index

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SUPPLEMENTAL DISCUSSION OF FEDERAL INCOME TAX CONSEQUENCES

The following section supplements the discussion of U.S. federal income taxation in the accompanying prospectus. The following section is the opinion of Sidley Austin llp, counsel to GS Finance Corp. and The Goldman Sachs Group, Inc. In addition, it is the opinion of Sidley Austin llp that the characterization of the notes for U.S. federal income tax purposes that will be required under the terms of the notes, as discussed below, is a reasonable interpretation of current law.

This section does not apply to you if you are a member of a class of holders subject to special rules, such as:

- a dealer in securities or currencies;
- a trader in securities that elects to use a mark-to-market method of accounting for your securities holdings;
- a bank;
- a life insurance company;
- a regulated investment company;
- an accrual method taxpayer subject to special tax accounting rules as a result of its use of financial statements;
- a tax exempt organization;
- a partnership;
- a person that owns a note as a hedge or that is hedged against interest rate risks;
- a person that owns a note as part of a straddle or conversion transaction for tax purposes; or
- a United States holder (as defined below) whose functional currency for tax purposes is not the U.S. dollar.

Although this section is based on the U.S. Internal Revenue Code of 1986, as amended, its legislative history, existing and proposed regulations under the Internal Revenue Code, published rulings and court decisions, all as currently in effect, no statutory, judicial or administrative authority directly discusses how your notes should be treated for U.S. federal income tax purposes, and as a result, the U.S. federal income tax consequences of your investment in your notes are uncertain. Moreover, these laws are subject to change, possibly on a retroactive basis.

You should consult your tax advisor concerning the U.S. federal income tax and other tax consequences of your investment in the notes, including the application of state, local or other tax laws and the possible effects of changes in federal or other tax laws.

United States Holders

This section applies to you only if you are a United States holder that holds your notes as a capital asset for tax purposes. You are a United States holder if you are a beneficial owner of a note and you are:

- a citizen or resident of the United States;
- a domestic corporation;
- an estate whose income is subject to U.S. federal income tax regardless of its source; or
- a trust if a United States court can exercise primary supervision over the trust’s administration and one or more United States persons are authorized to control all substantial decisions of the trust.

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Tax Treatment. You will be obligated pursuant to the terms of the notes — in the absence of a change in law, an administrative determination or a judicial ruling to the contrary — to characterize your notes for all tax purposes as income-bearing pre-paid derivative contracts in respect of the underliers. Except as otherwise stated below, the discussion below assumes that the notes will be so treated.

Coupon payments that you receive should be included in ordinary income at the time you receive the payment or when the payment accrues, in accordance with your regular method of accounting for U.S. federal income tax purposes.

Upon the sale, exchange, redemption or maturity of your notes, you should recognize capital gain or loss equal to the difference between the amount realized on the sale, exchange, redemption or maturity (excluding any amounts attributable to accrued and unpaid coupon payments, which will be taxable as described above) and your tax basis in your notes. Your tax basis in your notes will generally be equal to the amount that you paid for the notes. Such capital gain or loss should generally be short-term capital gain or loss if you hold the notes for one year or less, and should be long-term capital gain or loss if you hold the notes for more than one year. Short-term capital gains are generally subject to tax at the marginal tax rates applicable to ordinary income.

No statutory, judicial or administrative authority directly discusses how your notes should be treated for U.S. federal income tax purposes. As a result, the U.S. federal income tax consequences of your investment in the notes are uncertain and alternative characterizations are possible. Accordingly, we urge you to consult your tax advisor in determining the tax consequences of an investment in your notes in your particular circumstances, including the application of state, local or other tax laws and the possible effects of changes in federal or other tax laws.

Alternative Treatments. There is no judicial or administrative authority discussing how your notes should be treated for U.S. federal income tax purposes. Therefore, the Internal Revenue Service might assert that a treatment other than that described above is more appropriate. For example, the Internal Revenue Service could treat your notes as a single debt instrument subject to special rules governing contingent payment debt instruments.

Under those rules, the amount of interest you are required to take into account for each accrual period would be determined by constructing a projected payment schedule for the notes and applying rules similar to those for accruing original issue discount on a hypothetical noncontingent debt instrument with that projected payment schedule. This method is applied by first determining the comparable yield — i.e., the yield at which we would issue a noncontingent fixed rate debt instrument with terms and conditions similar to your notes — and then determining a payment schedule as of the applicable original issue date that would produce the comparable yield. These rules may have the effect of requiring you to include interest in income in respect of your notes prior to your receipt of cash attributable to that income.

If the rules governing contingent payment debt instruments apply, any income you recognize upon the sale, exchange, redemption or maturity of your notes would be treated as ordinary interest income. Any loss you recognize at that time would be treated as ordinary loss to the extent of interest you included as income in the current or previous taxable years in respect of your notes, and, thereafter, as capital loss.

If the rules governing contingent payment debt instruments apply, special rules would apply to persons who purchase a note at other than the adjusted issue price as determined for tax purposes.

It is possible that the Internal Revenue Service could assert that your notes should generally be characterized as described above, except that (1) the gain you recognize upon the sale, exchange, redemption or maturity of your notes should be treated as ordinary income or (2) you should not include the coupon payments in income as you receive them but instead you should reduce your basis in your notes by the amount of coupon payments that you receive. It is also possible that the Internal Revenue Service could seek to characterize your notes in a manner that results in tax consequences to you different from those described above.

It is also possible that the Internal Revenue Service could seek to characterize your notes as notional principal contracts. It is also possible that the coupon payments would not be treated as either ordinary income or interest for U.S. federal income tax purposes, but instead would be treated in some other manner.

You should consult your tax advisor as to possible alternative characterizations of your notes for U.S.

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federal income tax purposes.

Possible Change in Law

In 2007, legislation was introduced in Congress that, if enacted, would have required holders that acquired instruments such as your notes after the bill was enacted to accrue interest income over the term of such instruments. It is not possible to predict whether a similar or identical bill will be enacted in the future, or whether any such bill would affect the tax treatment of your notes.

In addition, on December 7, 2007, the Internal Revenue Service released a notice stating that the Internal Revenue Service and the Treasury Department are actively considering issuing guidance regarding the proper U.S. federal income tax treatment of an instrument such as the offered notes including whether the holders should be required to accrue ordinary income on a current basis and whether gain or loss should be ordinary or capital. It is not possible to determine what guidance they will ultimately issue, if any. It is possible, however, that under such guidance, holders of the notes will ultimately be required to accrue income currently and this could be applied on a retroactive basis. The Internal Revenue Service and the Treasury Department are also considering other relevant issues, including whether foreign holders of such instruments should be subject to withholding tax on any deemed income accruals, and whether the special "constructive ownership rules" of Section 1260 of the Internal Revenue Code might be applied to such instruments. Except to the extent otherwise provided by law, GS Finance Corp. intends to continue treating the notes for U.S. federal income tax purposes in accordance with the treatment described above unless and until such time as Congress, the Treasury Department or the Internal Revenue Service determine that some other treatment is more appropriate.

It is impossible to predict what any such legislation or administrative or regulatory guidance might provide, and whether the effective date of any legislation or guidance will affect notes that were issued before the date that such legislation or guidance is issued. You are urged to consult your tax advisor as to the possibility that any legislative or administrative action may adversely affect the tax treatment of your notes.

United States Alien Holders

This section applies to you only if you are a United States alien holder. You are a United States alien holder if you are the beneficial owner of the notes and are, for U.S. federal income tax purposes:

- a nonresident alien individual;
- a foreign corporation; or
- an estate or trust that in either case is not subject to U.S. federal income tax on a net income basis on income or gain from the notes.

Because the U.S. federal income tax treatment (including the applicability of withholding) of the coupon payments on the notes is uncertain, in the absence of further guidance, we intend to withhold on the coupon payments made to you at a 30% rate or at a lower rate specified by an applicable income tax treaty under an "other income" or similar provision. We will not make payments of any additional amounts. To claim a reduced treaty rate for withholding, you generally must provide a valid Internal Revenue Service Form W-8BEN, Internal Revenue Service Form W-8BEN-E, or an acceptable substitute form upon which you certify, under penalty of perjury, your status as a U.S. alien holder and your entitlement to the lower treaty rate. Payments will be made to you at a reduced treaty rate of withholding only if such reduced treaty rate would apply to any possible characterization of the payments (including, for example, if the coupon payments were characterized as contract fees). Withholding also may not apply to coupon payments made to you if: (i) the coupon payments are "effectively connected" with your conduct of a trade or business in the United States and are includable in your gross income for U.S. federal income tax purposes, (ii) the coupon payments are attributable to a permanent establishment that you maintain in the United States, if required by an applicable tax treaty, and (iii) you comply with the requisite certification requirements (generally, by providing an Internal Revenue Service Form W-8ECI). If you are eligible for a reduced rate of United States withholding tax, you may obtain a refund of any amounts withheld in excess of that rate by filing a refund claim with the Internal Revenue Service.

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"Effectively connected" payments includable in your United States gross income are generally taxed at rates applicable to United States citizens, resident aliens, and domestic corporations; if you are a corporate United States alien holder, "effectively connected" payments may be subject to an additional "branch profits tax" under certain circumstances.
You will also be subject to generally applicable information reporting and backup withholding requirements with respect to payments on your notes and, notwithstanding that we do not intend to treat the notes as debt for tax purposes, we intend to backup withhold on such payments with respect to your notes unless you comply with the requirements necessary to avoid backup withholding on debt instruments (in which case you will not be subject to such backup withholding) as set forth under "United States Taxation – Taxation of Debt Securities – United States Alien Holders" in the accompanying prospectus.
Furthermore, on December 7, 2007, the Internal Revenue Service released Notice 2008-2 soliciting comments from the public on various issues, including whether instruments such as your notes should be subject to withholding. It is therefore possible that rules will be issued in the future, possibly with retroactive effects, that would cause payments on your notes to be subject to withholding, even if you comply with certification requirements as to your foreign status.
As discussed above, alternative characterizations of the notes for U.S. federal income tax purposes are possible. Should an alternative characterization of the notes, by reason of a change or clarification of the law, by regulation or otherwise, cause payments with respect to the notes to become subject to withholding tax, we will withhold tax at the applicable statutory rate and we will not make payments of any additional amounts. Prospective United States alien holders of the notes should consult their tax advisors in this regard.
In addition, the Treasury Department has issued regulations under which amounts paid or deemed paid on certain financial instruments ("871(m) financial instruments") that are treated as attributable to U.S.-source dividends could be treated, in whole or in part depending on the circumstances, as a "dividend equivalent" payment that is subject to tax at a rate of 30% (or a lower rate under an applicable treaty), which in the case of any coupon payments and any amounts you receive upon the sale, exchange, redemption or maturity of your notes, could be collected via withholding. If these regulations were to apply to the notes, we may be required to withhold such taxes if any U.S.-source dividends are paid on the stocks included in the underliers during the term of the notes. We could also require you to make certifications (e.g., an applicable Internal Revenue Service Form W-8) prior to any coupon payment or the maturity of the notes in order to avoid or minimize withholding obligations, and we could withhold accordingly (subject to your potential right to claim a refund from the Internal Revenue Service) if such certifications were not received or were not satisfactory. If withholding was required, we would not be required to pay any additional amounts with respect to amounts so withheld. These regulations generally will apply to 871(m) financial instruments (or a combination of financial instruments treated as having been entered into in connection with each other) issued (or significantly modified and treated as retired and reissued) on or after January 1, 2021, but will also apply to certain 871(m) financial instruments (or a combination of financial instruments treated as having been entered into in connection with each other) that have a delta (as defined in the applicable Treasury regulations) of one and are issued (or significantly modified and treated as retired and reissued) on or after January 1, 2017. In addition, these regulations will not apply to financial instruments that reference a "qualified index" (as defined in the regulations). We have determined that, as of the issue date of your notes, your notes will not be subject to withholding under these rules. In certain limited circumstances, however, you should be aware that it is possible for United States alien holders to be liable for tax under these rules with respect to a combination of transactions treated as having been entered into in connection with each other even when no withholding is required. You should consult your tax advisor concerning these regulations, subsequent official guidance and regarding any other possible alternative characterizations of your notes for U.S. federal income tax purposes.

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Foreign Account Tax Compliance Act (FATCA) Withholding

Pursuant to Treasury regulations, Foreign Account Tax Compliance Act (FATCA) withholding (as described in "United States Taxation—Taxation of Debt Securities—Foreign Account Tax Compliance Act (FATCA) Withholding" in the accompanying prospectus) will generally apply to obligations that are issued on or after July 1, 2014; therefore, the notes will generally be subject to the FATCA withholding rules.

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SUPPLEMENTAL PLAN OF DISTRIBUTION; CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

See “Supplemental Plan of Distribution” on page S-96 of the accompanying general terms supplement no. 1,734 and “Plan of Distribution — Conflicts of Interest” on page 94 of the accompanying prospectus; GS Finance Corp. estimates that its share of the total offering expenses, excluding underwriting discounts and commissions, will be approximately $15,000.

GS Finance Corp. has agreed to sell to GS&Co., and GS&Co. has agreed to purchase from GS Finance Corp., the aggregate face amount of the offered notes specified on the front cover of this pricing supplement. GS&Co. proposes initially to offer the notes to the public at the original issue price set forth on the cover page of this pricing supplement, and to certain securities dealers at such price less a concession not in excess of 2% of the face amount. In addition to the concession, any such securities dealer will receive from us a structuring fee of 0.49% of the face amount of each such note.

GS&Co. has engaged Incapital LLC to provide certain marketing services from time to time relating to notes of this series. Incapital LLC will receive a fee of 0.5% of the face amount of each note offered hereby from us in connection with such service.

GS&Co. is an affiliate of GS Finance Corp. and The Goldman Sachs Group, Inc. and, as such, will have a “conflict of interest” in this offering of notes within the meaning of Financial Industry Regulatory Authority, Inc. (FINRA) Rule 5121. Consequently, this offering of notes will be conducted in compliance with the provisions of FINRA Rule 5121. GS&Co. will not be permitted to sell notes in this offering to an account over which it exercises discretionary authority without the prior specific written approval of the account holder.

We will deliver the notes against payment therefor in New York, New York on December 31, 2018. Under Rule 15c6-1 of the Securities Exchange Act of 1934, trades in the secondary market generally are required to settle in two business days, unless the parties to any such trade expressly agree otherwise. Accordingly, purchasers who wish to trade notes on any date prior to two business days before delivery will be required to specify alternative settlement arrangements to prevent a failed settlement.

We have been advised by GS&Co. that it intends to make a market in the notes. However, neither GS&Co. nor any of our other affiliates that makes a market is obligated to do so and any of them may stop doing so at any time without notice. No assurance can be given as to the liquidity or trading market for the notes.

The notes will not be listed on any securities exchange or interdealer quotation system.

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VALIDITY OF THE NOTES AND GUARANTEE

In the opinion of Sidley Austin llp, as counsel to GS Finance Corp. and The Goldman Sachs Group, Inc., when the notes offered by this pricing supplement have been executed and issued by GS Finance Corp., the related guarantee offered by this pricing supplement has been executed and issued by The Goldman Sachs Group, Inc., and such notes have been authenticated by the trustee pursuant to the indenture, and such notes and the guarantee have been delivered against payment as contemplated herein, (a) such notes will be valid and binding obligations of GS Finance Corp., enforceable in accordance with their terms, subject to applicable bankruptcy, insolvency and similar laws affecting creditors' rights generally, concepts of reasonableness and equitable principles of general applicability (including, without limitation, concepts of good faith, fair dealing and the lack of bad faith), provided that such counsel expresses no opinion as to the effect of fraudulent conveyance, fraudulent transfer or similar provision of applicable law on the conclusions expressed above and (b) such related guarantee will be a valid and binding obligation of The Goldman Sachs Group, Inc., enforceable in accordance with its terms, subject to applicable bankruptcy, insolvency and similar laws affecting creditors' rights generally, concepts of reasonableness and equitable principles of general applicability (including, without limitation, concepts of good faith, fair dealing and the lack of bad faith), provided that such counsel expresses no opinion as to the effect of fraudulent conveyance, fraudulent transfer or similar provision of applicable law on the conclusions expressed above. This opinion is given as of the date hereof and is limited to the laws of the State of New York and the General Corporation Law of the State of Delaware as in effect on the date hereof. In addition, this opinion is subject to customary assumptions about the trustee’s authorization, execution and delivery of the indenture and the genuineness of signatures and certain factual matters, all as stated in the letter of such counsel dated July 10, 2017, which has been filed as Exhibit 5.6 to the registration statement on Form S-3 filed with the Securities and Exchange Commission by GS Finance Corp. and The Goldman Sachs Group, Inc. on July 10, 2017.

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We have not authorized anyone to provide any information or to make any representations other than those contained or incorporated by reference in this pricing supplement, the accompanying general terms supplement no. 1,734, the accompanying prospectus supplement or the accompanying prospectus. We take no responsibility for, and can provide no assurance as to the reliability of, any other information that others may give you. This pricing supplement, the accompanying general terms supplement no. 1,734, the accompanying prospectus supplement and the accompanying prospectus is an offer to sell only the notes offered hereby, but only under circumstances and in jurisdictions where it is lawful to do so. The information contained in this pricing supplement, the accompanying general terms supplement no. 1,734, the accompanying prospectus supplement and the accompanying prospectus is current only as of the respective dates of such documents.

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$5,321,000

GS Finance Corp.

Callable Contingent Coupon Index-Linked Notes due 2023

guaranteed by
The Goldman Sachs Group, Inc.

Goldman Sachs & Co. LLC