# Honeywell’s £1.8 billion Johnson Matthey buy highlights rising US interest in UK tech assets



American industrial conglomerate Honeywell has reached an agreement to acquire the catalyst technologies segment of Johnson Matthey for £1.8 billion in an all-cash deal. This strategic acquisition aligns with Honeywell's ongoing transformation strategy, spearheaded by CEO Vimal Kapur, centring on automation and energy solutions. The catalyst unit, which is anticipated to generate around £613 million in annual revenue, will be integrated into Honeywell’s automation business, allowing for synergies in their operational capabilities.

This acquisition is part of a broader trend where American firms are increasingly targeting mid-cap companies based in the UK. Recent examples include American Axle's £1.2 billion purchase of Dowlais and DoorDash’s £2.9 billion acquisition of Delivery Hero. Such moves highlight a growing appetite among US investors for UK assets, particularly in sectors where technological innovation and sustainability are paramount.

Meanwhile, in Switzerland, Swatch Group is grappling with internal strife as US investor Steven Wood of GreenWood Investors failed in his bid to secure a board seat during the company's annual meeting. Despite holding a modest 0.5% stake, Wood's advocacy for a heightened focus on Swatch's luxury brands like Breguet and Blancpain met stiff opposition from the influential Hayek family, which controls around 44% of the voting rights. The company has faced significant challenges, with profits declining dramatically over recent years—from over 1.6 billion Swiss francs in 2013 to just 219 million francs in 2024 due to waning demand in crucial markets like China.

In a vote that saw 79.2% of shareholders reject his bid, Wood garnered substantial support from over 60% of bearer shareholders, illustrating a disconnect between minority shareholders and the controlling Hayek family. Activist investing in Switzerland remains rare, yet Wood's efforts have highlighted growing shareholder dissatisfaction and the potential for change in corporate governance at Swatch.

Back in the United States, there are rumblings in the private capital space as the Trump administration contemplates breaking down barriers for private equity investments within 401(k) retirement plans. In a move that has been delayed and debated, an executive order could pave the way for private equity to tap into these retirement funds, which manage trillions of dollars in assets. Supporters, including CEOs from leading private equity firms, argue that these investments could yield higher returns suited to the long-term nature of retirement savings. However, considerable caution is warranted, given concerns over liquidity, fees, and transparency, particularly in light of a push from Biden's administration to curtail such expansions.

In a separate but related narrative, Elliott Management emerged triumphant in its bid for two seats on the board of Phillips 66, following a multiyear campaign focused on improving the company's performance. While the hedge fund's efforts didn’t result in all of its preferred candidates entering the boardroom, the campaign signalled a significant testament to Elliott’s enduring influence. Despite the challenges faced by activist investors in recent years, their ability to effect change continues to be a pivotal aspect of modern corporate governance.

In contrast to the turmoil and corporate manoeuvring seen in the finance and manufacturing sectors, the tech world is witnessing intriguing developments. British designer Jony Ive, known for his pivotal role at Apple, has re-emerged with a significant partnership with OpenAI, taking his startup io into the fold for an eye-watering $6.4 billion. This collaboration promises to blend cutting-edge design with artificial intelligence, positioning Ive central to future innovations, possibly even putting him in competition with his former employer. As Apple scrambles to integrate AI capabilities into its products, including a partnership with OpenAI to enhance Siri, the stakes appear increasingly high in the race for technological supremacy.

The convergence of these stories reflects a dynamic corporate landscape characterised by strategic acquisitions, shareholder activism, and technological innovation, wherein ongoing transformations will continue to shape the trajectory of several key industries.

**Reference Map**

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7. Paragraph 7: [[6]](https://www.honeywell.com/us/en/press/2022/12/johnson-matthey-and-honeywell-partner-to-advance-lower-carbon-hydrogen-solutions), [[7]](https://www.soci.org/news/2024/11/sustainable-fuels-johnson-matthey-and--honeywell-uop-collaborate)
8. Paragraph 8: [[2]](https://www.ft.com/content/c150ad9f-8e1e-48ba-bd49-f75fb41b58b8)
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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.ft.com/content/60c2143d-1951-4dd2-bedd-744f96faa40f> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.ft.com/content/c150ad9f-8e1e-48ba-bd49-f75fb41b58b8> - Honeywell is nearing a £1.8bn all-cash acquisition of Johnson Matthey's catalyst technologies unit. This move aligns with Honeywell's strategic focus on automation and energy, as part of a broader transformation led by CEO Vimal Kapur. The catalyst unit, projected to generate £613 million in annual revenue, will be integrated into Honeywell’s automation unit. This acquisition continues a trend of American firms acquiring UK mid-cap companies, following recent takeovers like American Axle's £1.2bn purchase of Dowlais and DoorDash’s £2.9bn acquisition of Deliveroo.
3. <https://www.reuters.com/sustainability/swatch-family-hayek-faces-test-investor-presses-join-board-2025-05-21/> - Swatch Group is facing internal challenges as U.S. investor Steven Wood of GreenWood Investors attempts to join its board during the company's annual general meeting. Wood, whose firm holds a modest 0.5% stake, advocates for greater focus on Swatch’s luxury brands like Breguet and Blancpain. However, he faces stiff resistance from the Hayek family, which controls approximately 44% of the voting rights. Proxy advisers have urged shareholders to reject Swatch's current supervisory board over concerns about independence. Despite a history of success under CEO Nick Hayek and Chairwoman Nayla Hayek, the company has seen a downturn, with profits plummeting from over 1.6 billion Swiss francs in 2013 to 219 million francs in 2024. Sales declined 15% last year, particularly due to waning demand in China. In contrast, competitor Richemont has shown resilience. Swatch shares have dropped roughly 10% in 2025 and are heavily shorted. Although Wood’s chances appear slim, rising shareholder discontent could pressure leadership to consider organizational changes, despite Hayek’s resistance and previous suggestions of taking the company private.
4. <https://www.ft.com/content/02b28317-ccc5-4266-a5f3-14d888e5a36e> - Activist investor Steven Wood, founder of GreenWood Investors, failed to secure a board seat at Swatch Group during the company's annual meeting, largely due to opposition from the influential Hayek family. Swatch, which owns brands such as Omega and Longines, has faced declining performance, with shares dropping 25% over the past year and net profits plummeting 75% in 2024. Despite losing the vote—79.2% of shareholders opposed his bid—Wood garnered support from over 60% of Swatch's bearer shareholders, who have limited voting rights compared to the more powerful registered shares held mainly by the Hayek family. The Hayeks control 25% of Swatch’s shares and 44% of the voting rights, with Nick Hayek Jr. and Nayla Hayek serving as CEO and chair, respectively. Wood criticized the voting process, citing confusing procedures and unclear instructions. He expressed a commitment to represent minority shareholders and plans to explore calling an extraordinary general meeting, which requires 5% shareholder support. Proxy advisers ISS and Glass Lewis had flagged governance concerns and recommended voting against the current board. Some long-time shareholders echoed Wood’s sentiments, calling for change in company leadership and governance.
5. <https://www.ft.com/content/6560f7c1-6674-47f8-a47d-0454eab4dc79> - Steven Wood, founder of GreenWood Investors and a minority shareholder in Swatch Group, is campaigning for a seat on Swatch’s board, accusing the Hayek family of prioritizing their own interests over those of other investors. The Hayek family, who control 44% of voting rights despite owning only 25% of shares, have led the Swiss watchmaker—known for brands like Omega and Longines—for decades. Wood criticizes the company’s underperformance, including a 75% decline in net profits to SFr219 million last year, and calls Swatch’s current undervaluation a "once in a lifetime" opportunity. Seeking to represent holders of bearer shares, which make up 55% of the company’s capital, Wood argues that minority shareholder rights are being ignored. His campaign highlights Swatch’s opaque governance and dual-class share structure. While Swatch has opposed his election, Swiss proxy group Ethos supports it, though ISS has advised against it. If blocked at the upcoming May 21 AGM, Wood may call for an extraordinary meeting to seek election by bearer shareholders alone. Wood's bid represents a rare instance of shareholder activism in Switzerland.
6. <https://www.honeywell.com/us/en/press/2022/12/johnson-matthey-and-honeywell-partner-to-advance-lower-carbon-hydrogen-solutions> - Honeywell and Johnson Matthey announced a partnership to deploy low-carbon hydrogen solutions. The collaboration combines Johnson Matthey's LCH™ technology with Honeywell's carbon capture technology to produce lower carbon intensity hydrogen (blue hydrogen) at scale. This integrated solution aims to enable direct process emissions to be less than 0.1 kgCO₂/kgH₂ by capturing carbon rates above 99%, providing eligibility for production tax credits within the U.S. Inflation Reduction Act. The partnership also integrates Honeywell's advanced solvent CO₂ capture and hydrogen solutions into Johnson Matthey's CLEANPACE™ offering for decarbonizing existing synthesis (syngas) gas plants, allowing for CO₂ to be captured, transported, and stored at a lower cost through greater efficiency.
7. <https://www.soci.org/news/2024/11/sustainable-fuels-johnson-matthey-and--honeywell-uop-collaborate> - Johnson Matthey and Honeywell UOP are collaborating to advance sustainable fuels. The partnership combines Johnson Matthey and BP's co-developed FT CANS™ technology with Honeywell's FT Unicracking™ technology to refine the final fuel to a 'drop-in' sustainable aviation fuel (SAF). This process is set to be used by DG Fuels for a planned FT CANS SAF facility in Louisiana, USA, with a capacity of 600,000 tonnes per year. Additionally, the methanol route integrates Honeywell UOP's eFining™ technology with Johnson Matthey's e-methanol technologies to provide an end-to-end solution for methanol to jet fuel production. The collaboration aims to expand feedstock options for SAF production to include waste biomass and municipal solid waste, addressing challenges in the aviation industry's supply of traditional SAF feedstocks.