

The global M&A powerhouse Barclays is building

Edward Russell-Walling finds out why these are central to the UK investment bank's future

Barclays has been honing its global mergers and acquisitions capability – something it believes is indispensable to the future of its investment bank. In the past year, its M&A unit's global and regional leadership has been refreshed and its Europe, Middle East and Africa team has doubled in size. It has also advised on some notably large and complex deals.

The aim is to build a best-in-class M&A business. "We continue to invest to strengthen Barclays' position as a durable, consistent, top global M&A practice," says Andrew Woeber, Barclays global head of M&A.

A recent appointment himself, having taken up the post in April, Woeber was previously a partner at US advisory boutique Centerview. A lawyer by training, he has also had senior roles at advisory firm Greenhill & Co and at Morgan Stanley.

In September 2024, Stephen Pick joined the bank as head of M&A for Emea. Pick had previously covered European M&A at Credit Suisse, with an earlier stint at Deutsche Bank. Since July 2025, the bank has also had a new head of M&A for Asia-Pacific in Ee-Ching Tay, who was already head of Barclays investment banking for south-east Asia – a role she retains. Before that, she was head of south-east Asian M&A for JPMorgan.

Bidding war

One of the team's more noteworthy mandates in recent years was as financial adviser to US Steel, alongside Goldman Sachs and Evercore, on the steelmaker's \$14.9bn all-cash acquisition by Nippon Steel. Following a bidding war, the two steelmakers agreed terms at the end of 2023, provoking indignant opposition from then-President Joe Biden, together with trade unions and other politicians.

Barclays' work on the drawn-out transaction was led by Dan Grabos, head of Americas M&A and co-head of industrials M&A. Earlier, on his watch, Barclays was exclusive financial adviser to US Steel on its structured acquisition of Big River Steel between 2019 and 2021.

"We expected pressure from trade unions and politicians, but the level of publicity the Nippon Steel deal would get was unprecedented," Grabos says. "It took on a life of its own."

What followed was an 18-month battle for regulatory and shareholder approval. The deal, which finally closed in June this year, included multiple undertakings and investment commitments from Nippon Steel and a golden share for the US government. "The price reflected a premium of 142 per cent, which is one of the largest-ever for an industrial transaction over \$10bn," Grabos says.

In a similar spirit, US fuel distributor Sunoco has promised to maintain a Canadian headquarters and local investment as part of its agreed \$9.1bn offer for Canada's largest independent fuel distributor, Parkland. With Barclays and RBC Capital Markets as financial advisers to Sunoco, the deal is expected to close before the end of the year.

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Head of Americas M&A and co-head of industrials M&A, Barclays

Barclays was also a lender on the cross-border deal to create the largest independent fuel distributor in the Americas. "This is a transformational transaction and the timing was right," Grabos insists. "Sunoco has had its eye on the target for a while, but it wanted to move more quickly because of the environment." Canada-US relations under President Donald Trump clearly had an influence.

Barclays was also exclusive financial adviser to US motorcycle manufacturer Harley-Davidson on its agreement to sell over \$5bn of its US and Canada retail loans to KKR and Pimco at a premium to par. Under the agreement, Harley-Davidson Financial Services will continue to sell around two-thirds of the loans it originates to these strategic partners for the next five years. Each will acquire 4.9 per cent of HDFS at a "compelling" 1.75x price to post-transaction book value.

Proxy fight

Earlier this year, Barclays had co-advised Harley-Davidson in a proxy fight to dislodge three directors launched by H Partners, one of the company's largest shareholders. "We were able to successfully defeat that," Grabos notes. "In parallel, we advised on finding a partner for the financial services business."

This entailed weaving together advice from the bank's industrials and financial institutions group teams. "We are particularly strong when we collaborate across products and geographies," Woeber claims.

A case in point was Stonepeak's purchase of a \$1.3bn stake in Singapore-based Princeton Digital Group, where Barclays was sole financial adviser to the US acquirer.

"PDG is a leading data centre platforms in Asia-Pacific," Tay explains. "Stonepeak, a US-headquartered infrastructure investment firm, is an important global client for Barclays."

Tay notes that while the current environment of macro uncertainty poses challenges for financial sponsors to underwrite growth in traditional acquisitions, data centres are benefiting from structural tailwinds. "This is an infrastructure asset class, underpinned by long-term cash flows. As a result, it tends to attract heightened activity in times of volatility," she says. Woeber reckons the deal speaks to Barclays' strengths in financial sponsors and the data centre sector.

Barclays was financial adviser on the maiden acquisition of Rosebank



High flyer: in the global M&A rankings for the first half of 2025, Barclays was among the top six banks by deal value, according to Dealogic

Industries, a London-listed acquisition vehicle set up by turnaround specialists last year. It paid \$1.9bn to buy Electrical Components International, a large US maker of wire harnesses and controls, from US private equity group Cerberus.

After talks started in February, the deal fell apart due to “tariff volatility” before coming back in June. “It was a test case of how quickly some deals were able to come back,” Pick says. Barclays was a joint underwriter for \$900mn in new debt facilities and a £1.14bn equity raise to fund the acquisition.

The team had a key role in what Pick describes as one of the largest M&A transactions in Emea since 2022, according to Reuters’s database. It was financial adviser to OMV, the Austrian energy and chemicals company, on the combination of its unlisted polyolefin interests with those of the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company.

The newly formed company, Borouge Group International, will be headquartered in Austria, and is also set to acquire Canada’s Nova Chemicals for an enterprise value of \$13.4bn. The result will be the world’s fourth-largest polyolefin company with some \$17bn in revenues. Barclays advised OMV on the Nova acquisition.

“This was well over a year in the making,” Pick says. “Unlisted mergers are often the most complicated types of deal, given there is no reference price.”

Barclays was financial adviser to

private equity investor Advent in the second-largest consumer deal announced in Emea this year to date according to Reuters’s database. Advent acquired a majority stake in Essential Home from British multinational consumer goods company Reckitt at an enterprise value of up to \$4.8bn. This followed a strategic review by Reckitt of its product portfolio.

High valuations

Woeber notes that while private equity remains active in M&A, corporate buyers have an edge at the moment. “High valuations enable them to use their stock in acquisitions,” he says. He points out that, in 2025 year-to-date, 29 per cent of deals are over \$10bn in size, compared with 18 per cent for the same period in 2024. According to Dealogic there has been a noticeable shift towards the use of stock in acquisitions, up from 18 per cent in the second quarter of 2024 to 23 per cent in the second quarter of 2025.

Borrowing has become more expensive, while forward-looking equity price multiples have risen. “That’s making the cost of equity and cost of debt graphs converge,” he says. “Private equity has a higher cost of debt, but the same cost of equity, because it still has to provide returns for LPs.”

Only corporates could have achieved the tax-efficient merger of interests achieved by Waters and BD Sciences

with their diagnostic solutions businesses, Woeber reasons. Using a tax-efficient Reverse Morris Trust and valued at \$17.5bn, this was one of the largest life sciences tools and diagnostics deals to date according to Dealogic. Barclays was the exclusive M&A adviser and financing lead arranger and bookrunner. The deal should close next year.

In the global M&A rankings for the first half of 2025, Barclays was among the top six banks by deal value, according to Dealogic. The outlook for M&A in general remains positive in spite of any current volatility, according to Woeber. “Corporates and sponsors will look past near-term volatility to pursue what drives their five- and 10-year plans,” he thinks.

The view from the team is that there will be no let-up in the US, where corporates want to do larger, more strategic deals. In Europe, the appetite for public-to-private deals continues to strengthen. In Asia, while Chinese M&A volumes peaked a couple of years ago, rising activity in Japan is taking up some of the slack.

“We are seeing a strong volume of outbound transactions from Japan, as well as inbound interest,” Tay observes. With financing costs still relatively low, many Japanese corporates are looking abroad for acquisitions to drive growth. “India and Australia are also key markets, and particularly active both inbound and outbound.” ■