

To whom it may concern,

I am responding to the call for comments on the provisional findings of the CMA inquiry into the Tobii-Dynavox Smartbox merger in my capacity as CEO of Ace Centre, which is commissioned to provide NHSE specialised AAC services across the North west and Wessex & Thames Valley specialised commissioning regions. In addition, I am a member of the AAC Advisory Group that coordinates NHSE specialised AAC service development on behalf of NHS England. Whilst my comments are my own, I have been privileged to listen to the views and opinions of a wide number of people within the Specialised AAC service community, including my Ace Centre colleagues about the implications of this merger and the potential consequences of it being terminated.

I would like to express concern at the CMA process to date and the potential implications of denying the development of any future Tobii-Dynavox - Smartbox collaboration. A considerable amount of time has already been taken by the CMA from my senior management colleagues who have been required to respond – often at very short notice – to further and repeated requests for information and comments. This has distracted significantly from the work of delivering NHSE specialised AAC services that we are commissioned to provide. My perception of these two companies is that they have a track record in developing and delivering products and services that improve outcomes for people with complex communication needs, their families and professionals who work with them and their aim is to do this in a cost efficient way, which has been evidenced by the reduction in their product prices and expanding product ranges in recent years. I have no cause to doubt that this ethos and philosophy will change in the future. I do, however, have concerns about the damage that will be caused to people who need AAC in the event of this merger being prevented as this will leave considerable uncertainty for families, professionals and – from my perspective – for specialised AAC services too.

I would welcome consideration of the wider consequences of preventing this merger beyond anxiety of what might happen to prices and competitors in the short and longer term. In my opinion, the consequence of preventing this merger will not mean that the AAC field will return to its former status quo; instead, there is a risk that both companies, if separated will be forced to do exactly what your inquiry has sought to avoid.

Kind regards,

Anna Reeves DL

Ace Centre CEO