

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing to you concerning the Tobii Dynavox (TD) and Smartbox (SB) merger.

My son, Charlie, lives with a complex disability (Angelman Syndrome) and as such he relies on Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC), more specifically he uses a language system called PODD. Over the past six years I have educated myself, my son, our family, and trained those in education settings to use this symbol-based language. I have extended that knowledge to assist many other families across the UK to support their young people to have access to a voice. That continued work was recognised earlier this year by Pearson and The Communication Trust as I received two of their Shine a Light industry awards; Communication Champion of the Year and overall winner of their Outstanding Achievement Award 2019.

My son has a complex learning disability and, like so many of his peers, he did not meet very many of the current NHS guidelines to gain access to a communication aid. He was denied the chance to meaningfully communicate, a basic human right.

Thankfully, we now have access to a global AAC market via app purchases and many people are able to self fund and use iPads that serve as dedicated speech generating devices. This has empowered families of those who were deemed 'unable' to now fully participate and contribute to their communities. And most importantly those people who live with complex bodies and needs, are able to have influence over their own lives.

This is where companies such as Tobii Dynavox and Smartbox provide a lifeline to families like mine, as we were able to give our son access to robust communication aids and immerse him in a language that he could observe and learn to use himself. He has a voice.

I entirely welcome the acquisition of SB by TD as this provides many positive solutions to the AAC community. One aspect of this merger would enormously benefit not just my family, but the PODD community on a global scale. My son uses Tobii Dynavox hardware as this suits his needs concerning a speech generating device, which has all of the features he needs for a robust device. Charlie's language (PODD) is also run on TD software, however, the platform (Compass) is due for upgrade. As a family with many demands on our time, dealing with just one company for our communication requirements is hugely beneficial. We were initially delighted about these two companies coming together, as SB would bring the Grid 3 software, which is compatible with PODD, and therefore provide the answer to the PODD community. Sadly now we are no further forward with those solutions, and many are now halted in their progression whilst we wait for further news following this investigation.

In my opinion, the nervousness surrounding price increase anticipation is unfounded. Nothing to me, based on my previous knowledge of the decision making at Tobii Dynavox, would suggest that the merger would lead to price increases. Given that Smartbox products are much more expensive, I would expect the opposite to occur. Tobii Dynavox have demonstrated their commitment to make a difference to the lives of AAC users many times over through their free training programmes, product trials and have the lowest priced

symbol based robust language system (Snap + Core First) available. I would not expect that commitment to change.

I continue to hope that there will be a positive marriage of these two innovative companies that bring benefit to so many vulnerable people in our society. We all wait with growing anticipation concerning your decision.

Sincerely,
Jules Whicher