

CMA breaks up assistive communication technology merger

In its final report, published today, the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) finds that the deal raises significant competition concerns in the supply of augmentative and assistive communication solutions, where Tobii and Smartbox are 2 of the UK's leading suppliers and compete closely.

The technologies supplied by Tobii and Smartbox help people with complex speech and language needs to communicate using specialised software and devices, such as joysticks, eye gaze cameras and speech-generating systems. These solutions are typically bought on behalf of those who need them by the NHS, charities and schools.

Following an in-depth Phase 2 investigation, a group of independent CMA panel members concluded that the loss of competition brought about by the deal could lead to reductions in the existing product range and quality, less new product development and higher prices.

The CMA has decided that the only effective way of addressing the loss of competition resulting from the merger is for Tobii to sell Smartbox to a new owner, which must be approved by the CMA.

Kip Meek, Chair of the independent inquiry group carrying out the investigation, said:

Competition plays a key role in driving improvements in product range and quality – making a real difference for the people who use these technologies to communicate. Competitive pricing also helps to make sure that public bodies aren't paying more than they should for these technologies.

Our investigation concluded that the loss in competition brought about by this deal could therefore have very serious effects – less choice, less product development and higher prices. Having carefully considered all options, we decided that only selling the entire Smartbox business would effectively address the concerns we found.

Further details are available on the [Tobii / Smartbox case page](#).

Notes to editors

1. The CMA is the UK's primary competition and consumer authority. It is an independent non-ministerial government department with responsibility for carrying out investigations into mergers, markets and the regulated industries and enforcing competition and consumer law. For CMA updates, follow us on Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn.

2. On 30 May 2019, the CMA [published its provisional findings and notice of possible remedies](#) and invited views.
3. The CMA's decisions in phase 2 merger inquiries are made by inquiry groups chosen from the CMA's independent panel members. The members of the inquiry group are: Kip Meek (Inquiry Chair), Susan Hankey, Ulrike Hotopp and Keith Richards. The CMA's panel members come from a variety of backgrounds, including economics, law, accountancy or business; the membership of an inquiry group usually reflects a mix of expertise and experience.