

Packaging merger raises competition concerns

The Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) has been investigating Liqui-Box's proposed takeover of DS Smith's rigid and flexible packaging business.

As part of its initial, Phase 1, investigation the CMA found that Liqui-Box and DS Smith are 2 of the 4 main companies in the UK, offering a specialist type of packaging called Bag-in Box to food, wine, dairy and drink suppliers.

If the deal is allowed to go ahead as planned, the CMA is concerned it could create insufficient competition in the supply of these products, leading to their customers potentially having less choice and paying higher prices, especially as there are very few large suppliers in the UK.

The CMA is also concerned that the reduction in competition could lead to lower quality products and/or a poorer service.

If the merging businesses are unable to address the CMA's concerns, the deal will be referred for an in-depth Phase 2 investigation to be carried out by a group of independent CMA panel members.

All information relating to the merger is available on [Liqui-Box/DS Smith inquiry page](#).

Detailed guide: UK Seafood Innovation Fund

How to apply for research and development funding from the UK Seafood Innovation Fund (SIF) scheme.

Extra-curricular activities, soft skills and social mobility

Children from the wealthiest backgrounds are 3 times more likely to take up music classes out of school hours than children from the poorest backgrounds. There is also a 20% participation gap in sport, a new report by the Social

Mobility Commission reveals today (Friday 19 July).

The report, '[An Unequal Playing Field](#)', shows huge disparities in children's participation rates across a wide range of extra-curricular activities depending on their social background. Children aged 10 to 15 from wealthier families are much more likely to take part in every type of activity especially music and sport.

The report looks at activities such as arts, music, sport, dance, voluntary work, and youth clubs. It shows that children's participation in extra-curricular activities depends on the schools they attend; the area they are growing up and their socio-economic background.

As household income rises so does increased participation. Those from better-off families are also more likely to engage in a greater number of out of school activities. Children from the poorest families are 3 times more likely to not participate in any extra-curricular activities compared to those from wealthier families.

Some classes are expensive but there are other barriers for the less affluent. In some areas there are access difficulties – schools don't provide the activities and local councils have cut back on their provisions for children and young people. Sometimes, however, children from disadvantaged backgrounds do not take part because they lack confidence or fear they will not fit in.

The University of Bath, who conducted the research, found that children who do participate in extra-curricular activities gain confidence and build up their social skills which is much sought after by employers. They are also more likely to aspire to go on to higher or further education.

Dame Martina Milburn, Chair of the Social Mobility Commission said:

It is shocking that so many children from poorer backgrounds never get the chance to join a football team, learn to dance or play music. The activity either costs too much, isn't available or children just feel they won't fit in. As a result they miss out on important benefits – a sense of belonging, increased confidence and social skills which are invaluable to employers. It is high time to level the playing field.

The commission sets out 4 key recommendations for the government, voluntary groups and schools. These are:

1. Introduce of a national extra-curricular bursary scheme for disadvantaged families
2. Provide of funding to develop and extend voluntary sector initiatives that allow access to activities
3. Increase the capacity of schools to provide extra-curricular activities and provision of extra information
4. Improve data collection and carrying out further research into soft

skills development

The research, commissioned by Damian Hinds, the Secretary of State for Education, also discloses wide geographical differences in extra-curricular provision and participation rates. Children in Northern Ireland for example, joined in most activities such as attending youth clubs whilst the North East has the lowest participation in music classes. There are also big variations in activity take-up by ethnicity. Around 4% of British Pakistani youth take music classes compared to 28% of British Indian and 20% of White British youth.

The main findings:

- nearly 3 times as many children from the highest income households take part in music activities (32%) compared to the lowest income households (11%)
- 64% of young people from the highest income households take part in sport compared to 46% of young people from the lowest incomes
- around 4% of British Pakistani youth take music classes, compared to 28% of British Indian and 20% of White British youth
- fewer young people in the North East of England take music classes than anywhere else – 9%, compared to 22% in the South East
- sport is by far the most popular extra-curricular activity with nearly 50% of youth taking part compared to only 8% doing art
- children from the poorest backgrounds are 3 times more likely to not take part in any of the extra-curricular activities examined compared to those from the wealthiest backgrounds

John Herriman, Chief Executive of Greenhouse Sports, a charity helping disadvantaged children through sport, said:

Extra-curricular activity is so important for young people, and can be especially advantageous in helping to improve the life-chances of those from disadvantaged backgrounds. It is the basis of our entire approach at Greenhouse Sports, where we deliver intensive sports coaching and mentoring.

Charlotte Hill, Chief Executive, #iwill Campaign said:

Great education leaders know that education is about more than grades. Taking part in volunteering and other activities is a great way for young people to develop their character, confidence and vital skills for the future.

The Social Mobility Commission is an advisory, non-departmental public body established under the Life Chances Act 2010, as modified by the Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016.

It has a duty to assess progress in improving social mobility in the UK and

to promote social mobility in England.

The commission includes:

- Dame Martina Milburn, Chair
- Alastair da Costa, Chair of Capital City College Group
- Farrah Storr, Editor-in-chief, Elle
- Harvey Matthewson, Aviation Activity Officer, Aerobility
- Jessica Oghenegweke, Broadcast and Digital Co-ordinator, The Roundhouse
- Jody Walker, Senior Vice President at TJX Europe (TK Maxx and Home Sense in the UK)
- Liz Williams, Group Director of Digital Society at BT
- Pippa Dunn, Founder of Broody, helping entrepreneurs and start ups
- Saeed Atcha, Founder and Chief Executive Officer of Xplode magazine
- Sam Friedman, Associate Professor in Sociology at London School of Economics
- Sammy Wright, Vice Principal of Southmoor Academy, Sunderland
- Sandra Wallace, Partner and Joint Managing Director UK and Europe, DLA Piper
- Steven Cooper, Chief Executive Officer C.Hoare & Co

The functions of the commission includes:

- monitoring progress on improving social mobility
- providing published advice to ministers on matters relating to social mobility
- undertaking social mobility advocacy

Press release: Smart boats could revolutionise UK fishing and seafood industries

Seafood Innovation Fund will reward cutting-edge innovation.

Smart boats could revolutionise UK fishing and seafood industries

The Environment Secretary Michael Gove has today delivered a boost for innovation in the UK fishing and seafood industries with the opening of a new

£10 million research and development fund.

The move paves the way for the potential use of artificial intelligence by fishermen and providing a potential double return on investment for the UK economy.

With the UK fishing industry contributing around £1.4 billion to our economy, employing over 24,000 people, there is huge opportunity for innovation to improve the technology available across the sector.

Unlike existing funding programmes, the [Seafood Innovation Fund](#) will focus on delivering longer-term, cutting-edge innovation.

UK businesses are already developing satellite technology and virtual watch rooms to track vessel movements, and integrating lighting into fishing nets to reduce unwanted catch and improve efficiency. But with the global fishing industry worth nearly £300 billion, this fund will encourage further technological development and unlock export opportunities around the world for UK technology pioneers.

Environment Secretary Michael Gove said:

This government is investing record amounts in research and development, with this £10 million fund further driving UK innovation.

As the UK establishes itself as an independent coastal state, the Seafood Innovation Fund will bring together our world-leading fishing, seafood, and technology industries to deliver more sustainable and productive fisheries for the future.

Dr Joanna Cox, Head of Policy at the [Institution of Engineering and Technology](#) said:

This fund is a 'call to action' for fishermen and engineers to work together to bring forward sustainable and productive solutions at scale to the industry's greatest challenges.

Technology continues to deliver transformational change across the food sector, for instance, boosting the UK farming sector through AI and robotics. We welcome the Secretary of State's announcement and urge the UK engineering community to apply the same pioneering zeal to positively impact the UK's seafood industries through this £10m Seafood Innovation Fund.

Opportunities for innovation will cover all parts of the seafood sector, from

catch techniques and fish feed to the management of fisheries. Possible examples of areas that could receive funding include:

- Minimising unwanted catches and monitoring catches – innovations to fishing gear to reduce environmental impact and better capturing of real-time catch data to avoid unwanted catches and sensitive species
- Sorting and processing of catch – automation of landed catch, improving animal welfare and leading to a higher survival rate for discarded fish
- Information for fisheries management – improved data available for fishing vessels and regulators to enable better decision making on the future management of fishing stocks.
- Advances in sustainable aquaculture – innovation around compensatory aquaculture whereby waste from one form of aquaculture provides a food source and nutrients for another type.

UK Government Minister Lord Duncan said:

The fishing and seafood sectors are vital to many of Scotland's communities and help to support thousands of jobs across the country. The UK Government's Seafood Innovation Fund is helping to support the industry with the technology needed to improve environmentally sustainable fishing practices while streamlining costs.

By contributing to research and development in the sector, the UK Government is looking after the industry's long term interests and supporting Scotland's economy.

Through the modern [Industrial Strategy](#), government is providing the biggest boost to research and development funding in UK history and has set the ambition to boost public and private investment in research and development to 2.4% of GDP by 2027.

The delivery of the fund, which will benefit companies in every corner of the UK, will be overseen by an Executive Board, including representatives from the Devolved Administrations in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland.

The fund, which was first announced in the 2018 Budget, will be delivered by the [Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science \(Cefas\)](#), the UK's world leader in marine science and technology, with oversight from Defra using money from the Chancellor's National Productivity Investment Fund.

Organisations are encouraged to bid for funding through the [Delta procurement portal](#).