

## Thriving Communities Fund Frequently Asked Questions

Arts Council England, National Academy for Social Prescribing  
December 2020

The Thriving Communities Fund FAQs include questions about:

- Eligibility
- Partnerships
- Link workers
- Geography and place
- Intended audience/participants
- Project activity
- Match funding
- Decision-making

Please [read the guidance](#) and these accompanying FAQs before contacting customer services.

### Eligibility

1. Are companies limited by guarantee eligible to apply to the fund?

*Companies limited by guarantee are eligible to apply to the fund as lead applicant if they are also a charity. If they are not a charity, companies limited by guarantee could be named as a partner in the application but could not act as lead applicant.*

2. Are universities eligible to apply to the fund?

*As with companies limited by guarantee, to be eligible a university lead applicant should also be a registered charity. If they are not a charity, a university could be named as a partner in the application but could not act as lead applicant.*

*However, as the fund is intended to reach smaller local and community organisations, an application with a university lead would need to clearly demonstrate the way in which such organisations would benefit directly from the funding.*

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3. We are [insert organisation type], are we eligible to apply to the fund?

*If you are a voluntary, community, faith or social enterprise (VCFSE) organisation, you may act as lead applicant to the fund. These organisations may be registered charities, community interest companies, co-operative societies or community benefit societies. Organisations who are not within the VCFSE sector can be named as a partner in the application but should not be lead applicants. This includes, for example, local authority galleries and museums who do not have a separate charitable trust. Statutory bodies, such as GP surgeries, cannot be the lead applicant even if they are also constituted as one of the above organisation types. They can however be partners to an application.*

4. Are Arts Council National Portfolio Organisations eligible to apply to the fund?

*As above – yes, provided you are constituted as a registered charity, community interest company, co-operative society or community benefit society. If you receive NPO funding but are a local authority arts organisation not constituted as one of the above, you may act as a partner on an application but cannot be the lead applicant.*

5. Can local government departments (including museums, libraries, leisure services or parks) be a lead applicant?

*Local authorities are statutory bodies and therefore cannot be the lead applicants to Thriving Communities Fund applications, although individual local government-supported services constituted as a charity/delivered by a trust could be. A local authority could be one of the three core partners (including as the cultural partner in the form of arts, library or museum services) but not the lead applicant.*

*An organisation funded by the local authority, but separate from the local authority, could lead an application.*

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6. If we have an existing Arts Council grant, can we apply to the fund?

*Yes, but you cannot use monies from that grant as match funding.*

7. If an arts or culture organisation is the lead applicant to the Thriving Communities Fund, can they also have a Project Grants application being processed?

*Yes, though they should consider whether they have the capacity to deliver upon both projects if both are successful. Monies from the Project Grants application cannot be used as match funding.*

8. If an arts or culture organisation is a partner on the application to the Thriving Communities Fund, can they also have a Project Grants application being processed?

*Yes, though they should consider whether they have the capacity to deliver upon both projects if both are successful. As above, monies from the Project Grants application cannot be used as match funding.*

9. We are a department within an NHS organisation, not funded by NHS revenue but by grants and donations. Can we apply as a lead partner?

*If you are direct employees of a public sector NHS organisation, you can't be the lead applicant, but you could be a project partner. Please contact ACE Customer Services to discuss your specific circumstances if this is the case.*

10. We are a cultural organisation waiting to hear whether we have been successful in applying for a Cultural Recovery Fund grant/loan, or we have already been successful in applying for a CRF grant/loan. Are we eligible to apply or to be a partner on an application?

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*Yes, CRF recipients and applicants are eligible to apply to the Thriving Communities Fund whether or not they have received a decision on their application. However, CRF funding should not be used as match funding for this programme.*

11. Can an organisation make more than one application?

*Not as lead applicant, and we don't encourage place-based organisations being part of multiple bids from a given locality (rather, we would expect you to bring those proposals together). See elsewhere in these FAQs for guidance on national organisations.*

12. Does a Creative People and Places project count as a cultural partner if it's led by a non-cultural organisation?

*Yes, as long as the cultural partners to the project are part of the proposal.*

13. Do film and digital organisations count as the cultural partner for this fund?

*We can consider supporting film and digital media projects that reflect on and explore arts organisations' and museums' work and artists' practice in the artforms and disciplines we support, where they are intended to increase public awareness of and participation in arts and culture.*

## **Partnerships**

1. **How can I connect with partners in my area?**

*We encourage applicants to connect to local VCSFE infrastructure organisations, who may be able to help you build new partnerships. For further suggestions on navigating partnerships across culture, sport, nature and beyond, visit:*

<https://socialprescribingacademy.org.uk>

*If you are based in the London area London Arts and Health have created a tool to help partners link up. You can find out more information via the link below.*

<https://partnerup.org.uk>

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2. We are considering a partnership application to the Thriving Communities fund. We are a local authority cultural organisation with a charitable trust. As we are already engaged with social prescribing, we work with local charities and a GP surgery (a social enterprise). Would we be better off applying through the arts organisation's charitable trust or with one of the local charities as lead? Could the GP surgery be lead applicant, as they are a social enterprise, or would they need to register as a CIC or similar?

*Either the cultural organisation's charitable trust or one of the local charities could be the lead applicant to this fund. GP practices, even where constituted as social enterprises or another type of eligible organisation, are considered statutory health sector organisations for the purposes of this programme and therefore couldn't lead an application – but could be one of the other partners.*

3. The guidance states: "all applications must demonstrate a commitment to work with partner organisations from all of the above sectors in the course of the funded period". Can you clarify what this means?

*At the point of application, we expect applicants to demonstrate commitment from a minimum of three core partners, including one cultural partner (arts, museums or libraries). The lead applicant must be a voluntary, community, faith or social enterprise (VCSFE) organisations working in any of the following sectors:*

- *Arts, and culture, including libraries, museums and heritage*
- *Sport, leisure and physical activity organisations*
- *Financial wellbeing, advice, food and practical support*
- *Environment and nature-based organisations*
- *Non-statutory health and care organisations, working with social prescribing link workers*

*We also expect applicants to demonstrate how they plan to engage with partners across all five sectors over the course of the funded period. For example, your core partners might be a library, a local health charity and a community football organisation. You should demonstrate in your application how you would work*

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*across those three sectors as well as how you would engage and develop partnerships with environment/nature-based organisations and financial wellbeing/practical support organisations throughout your project.*

*In terms of the activities delivered, these can have a narrower focus (i.e., successful applicants would not be expected to deliver activity in every sector), but should still encompass more than one of the sectors (e.g. in the above example, there might be cultural activities delivered through the library and sports activity delivered by the community football organisation, both in partnership with the health charity, and then partnership building with a local nature reserve and Citizen's Advice Bureau).*

4. We are a trust or organisation with multiple departments working across different sectors. These include departments or bodies that work in the five sectors outlined in the guidance and therefore we already have the expertise required in-house. Can we apply, listing the different departments as partners?

*The fund is intended to support local-level delivery and partnership and capacity building in a place. It would not be appropriate to name different departments in one organisation as the core partners on the application, as this would not build cross-sector and cross-organisation partnership building. Partnerships should be made up of multiple, separate organisations.*

5. Can two core partners be from the same sector? For example, could there be two cultural organisations involved as core partners?

*While we would not prohibit applications with two core partners from the same sector, we would encourage applicants to consider whether this would offer the same breadth of partnership and activity as applications with three partners from different sectors. Applications from a partnership where two core partners are from the same sector should clearly address how they will ensure they engage across the five sectors and how they will deliver activity in at least two sectors. Of course,*

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*you are also able to apply with more than 3 core partners, which may offer additional scope for multiple partners from a single sector to be included whilst maintaining breadth of partnership.*

6. Could an individual practitioner from one of the five sectors count as a partner?

*No, partners should be organisations. However, you could work with individual practitioners as part of programme delivery.*

7. Can a VCFSE organisation be a partner on more than one application?

*Given that VCFSE organisations usually work at a local level, if they are involved in multiple conversations we would strongly encourage them to bring those potential partners together into a unified application. We don't encourage a single partner being involved in multiple bids from the same locality, and seek fewer, more unified bids rather than a greater number of fragmented ones from a given place (e.g., from a single local authority or clinical commissioning group area).*

8. Can large NHS trusts be partners on more than one bid?

*If NHS Trusts are involved in multiple conversations, we would strongly encourage them to bring those potential partners together into a unified application. We don't encourage a single partner being involved in multiple bids from the same locality, and seek fewer, more unified bids rather than a greater number of fragmented ones from a given place (e.g., from a single local authority or clinical commissioning group area).*

9. Can NHS organisations or departments be partners?

*Yes, NHS organisations can be partners (but not lead applicants), and multiple NHS organisations (e.g., a Primary Care Network, Clinical Commissioning Group and Integrated Care System) could be part of a single, larger partnership - though we'd also expect to see a balance of partners from other sectors (culture, sport, nature, community advice etc).*

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10. If you're a national organisation can you be a partner in more than one application?

*Yes, but we don't encourage involvement in multiple applications in the same region and are unlikely to fund multiple projects including a duplicate core partner.*

11. Can a third partner be a non-voluntary organisation if the other two partners are VCFSE organisations?

*Yes, potentially - please contact ACE Customer Services to discuss the specific type of organisation you have in mind.*

12. Our organisation is based outside England, but we do deliver community work in England. Are we eligible to apply if we're forming partnerships with other organisations in England?

*Potentially, but this is a highly place-based programme that is about creating sustainable partnerships in the participating locations; as such, you would have to strongly articulate in any application how you might achieve this. In general, 'out of area' organisations might be expected to be partners contributing specialist expertise or resources, rather than lead applicants.*

13. Does the cultural partner need to be one that only does culture or one that already includes culture in their delivery among other things?

*We'd expect them to be predominantly cultural e.g. arts organisations, museums, library services, but if uncertain please contact ACE customer services with the specifics of your query.*

14. What if you have no cultural groups in your area?

*If you strongly feel your area has no cultural organisations that could be potential partners, please contact ACE Customer Services to discuss this. A cultural partner is a mandatory requirement of the programme.*

15. We're not sure how to reach out to potential partners to work up a joint application. If working in partnership, does that mean we have to share the funds?



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*We cannot advise on the best way to develop a partnership application. We expect the funds sought in your proposal to be shared amongst the delivery partners for your project, e.g. to support them to deliver social prescribing activities or support for participants.*

### 16. How can a local authority support projects and bids in our area?

*We welcome local authorities as partners, though not as lead applicants. If a given council is involved in multiple conversations, we would strongly encourage them to bring those potential partners together into a unified application. We don't encourage a single partner being involved in multiple bids from the same locality, and seek fewer, more unified bids rather than a greater number of fragmented ones from a given place (e.g. from a single local authority or clinical commissioning group area).*

## **Link workers**

### 1. How can I connect with a link worker?

*There are a number of ways to connect to local link workers, including through making contact with your local Primary Care Networks, GP practices or Clinical Commissioning Group. You may also find it useful to look into the NASP website. <https://socialprescribingacademy.org.uk>*

### 2. What if a local social prescribing link worker isn't in place yet?

*If there isn't a local link worker appointed yet, we recommend that you make contact with the likely host/parent organisation, be that the Primary Care Network, a GPs practice or local charity (e.g. if posts are being advertised by those bodies but haven't been appointed yet). If social prescribing hasn't yet reached that level in your area, it may be that this isn't the right programme for that place at this point in time.*

### 3. How critical is the connection to Link workers at this stage?

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*A letter of support is a necessary condition of application. You may need to find more creative routes than emailing a single link worker – this could include contacting the GP practice, Primary Care Network or host charity directly. You may also seek to engage the local social prescribing development worker.*

4. Does the letter of support have to be specifically from the Social Prescribing Link Worker connected to a GP surgery?

*As long as the letter is from a link worker or link worker team, where they are based doesn't matter (e.g. hosted by a GP practice, Primary Care Network, independent charity, local library service etc).*

5. Can a link worker support more than one application?

*Link workers can support more than one application in their area if it's appropriate to do so (if there is more than one strong proposition, if there are different emphases between applications, for example), while encouraging partnership working between prospective projects.*

*We're also not asking link workers to be gate keepers – e.g. having to 'choose' which to support if there are multiple local bids that won't come together. A link worker could support multiple bids, in as straightforward a way as saying by letter or email 'I confirm that we will engage with this project if it is successful'.*

*At the same time, we're not encouraging anyone to 'blanket endorse' all comers; and if you are approached by organisations that weren't visible locally previously, and/or that lack a track record of partnership building and local delivery, you may want to consider whether they are well positioned to apply for a complex fund of this nature.*

*If on reflection there are local organisations who've expressed an interest in the fund but in your local judgement don't seem quite ready, you could always refer them to the Learning Together strand of the Thriving Communities Programme first. See here for further details:*

*<https://socialprescribingacademy.org.uk>*

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### **Geography and place**

1. What constitutes a 'place' for the purposes of this programme?

*We're not being prescriptive about this; we're asking people to bring together partners and deliver activity on a place level that is proportionate to the amount of funding received (what is feasible to deliver with the funds). We expect many applications will come at an 'intermediate' geographical area – e.g. local authority or Clinical Commissioning Group footprint; but, if you can demonstrate need and sufficient breadth of potential partners, they could be within a more localised area e.g. one or two Primary Care Network areas; a number of adjacent postcode areas. They could also potentially be on a larger footprint, if you can demonstrate that an effective project can be constructed that won't be too diffuse or disconnected at that level – e.g. sub-regional footprints like a combined mayoralty area; an Integrated Care System area; or even at a county level, e.g. if seeking to address lack of provision/health inequalities/isolation in rural areas.*

2. We are from a town that borders two counties. Can cross-border applications be supported?

*Yes, potentially (across borders between areas in England only). You and your partners should make the case to us as to why this is necessary/valuable/how it would be sustained etc.*

### **Intended audience/participants**

1. Some of our projects support the families and dependents of Armed Forces personnel and veterans. We have previously received Armed Forces Covenant funding. If we are eligible, can this population be included in our bid?

*Yes, veterans and families can feature within target groups of participants; but we ask you to ensure that this falls within the broader prioritisation of health inequalities and communities hit by the pandemic, as outlined within the guidance. Armed Forces Covenant Funding could also be a suitable source of match funding.*

2. Can we specify working with a particular demographic?

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*Yes, if that's appropriate for your proposed project.*

*The onus is on applicants to make the case for why their target audience is a valid one for the programme, on the basis of geography, demography, protected characteristics, socio-economic status or other criteria.*

3. Do all project participants need to come through social prescribing or can it be open to others too?

*We would welcome a mixture of participants who have been formally 'socially prescribed' by a link-worker, GP or other healthcare professional; community referral; and even self-referral.*

### **Project activity**

1. I am unclear on exactly what can be funded as part of this programme. Please can you clarify?

*Applicants should demonstrate how they will deliver place-based activity and develop place-based partnerships throughout the funding period. As such, we expect applicants to present budgets that best support these requirements, but do not have specific conditions about what that should entail as long as the costs are reasonable and proportionate to the activity outlined in the application. Capital costs cannot be supported.*

*Activity that cannot be funded is outlined [in the guidance](#).*

2. Should programme activity encompass all five sectors, i.e., deliver culture, sport, health, natural environment and financial/practical support activity?

*All applications should demonstrate how partnerships will be developed across the five sectors. In terms of the activities delivered, these can have a narrower focus (i.e., successful applicants would not be expected to deliver activity in every*

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*sector), but should still encompass more than one of the sectors, e.g., culture and sport, natural environment and finance, etc.*

### 3. Can we deliver existing activity through the fund?

*Given the timescales and the amount of money on offer, we don't expect every proposal to be creating partnerships from scratch - so, for the partnership component - it could be new activity, or it could be an existing local network/partnership that is looking to widen the number of organisations and the range of sectors represented. For the social prescribing activities, we can't fund activity that starts before 15 March 2021. Accordingly, your project could create brand new activity, or it could feature the additional commissioning of a proven activity that already exists in a locality but scaled up; targeted in a different postcode or postcodes; or additionally tailored to a target participant demographic group, and/or to a specific local healthcare challenge, particularly where this is in response to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.*

### 4. Can the funding be used to cover the cost of staffing for the project?

*Yes, assuming that staffing is specific and time-limited to the project. For example, salaries for coordination posts for the duration of the project would be appropriate, as would sessional fees for practitioners delivering activity. Funding could not be used to cover existing organisational capacity assigned to the project – e.g., an existing social prescribing post in a health organisation assigned to work on the Thriving Communities project could not be covered by TCF funding. Existing salary costs covered by your organisation could be included as support in kind. It would also be acceptable to use TCF funding to cover additional project-based work by existing staff (e.g., paying a part-time staff member for an additional day of work, or for sessional delivery that is not part of their existing role).*

### 5. Can I apply to purchase equipment as part of the project?

*Yes, assuming this is appropriate for the activity described e.g., for cultural or sports activity. We would not expect the funding to be used for significant*

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*equipment purchase (such as IT equipment or vehicles), nor for capital or renovation costs.*

6. Can applicants commission services (such as digital solutions) from the commercial sector?

*Yes, potentially - you should make the case for why this would add value to your project.*

7. Our activities are currently remote because of COVID. Do you anticipate that COVID will continue to impact on how this programme plays out during its 12-month duration?

*This seems likely in the early stages at least (with delivery commencing March 2021), but it may be that partnership building and planning encompass the majority of activity in initial months. Planning for a flexible offer that can adapt to the vagaries of the ongoing pandemic seems sensible. Developing 'hybrid offers' that encompass in-person and remotely accessed activities and support may also remain necessary.*

8. As the project is only 12 months, could you just focus on developing a model with one sector that can then be replicated across the other sectors after that 12 months?

*No, the partnership element of the programme should attempt to engage all listed sectors (though this could be staggered over the 12 months); whilst the activity strand should contain at least more than one different type of delivery (e.g. culture and sport; community advice and nature, etc).*

9. Should activity/services be free at the point of access?

*It is acceptable to include income such as micro-payments for participation in your proposal, but this should be carefully weighed against the fund's prioritisation of*

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*participant groups that may already face barriers to accessing services. Whilst keeping services free at the point of access, it may also be possible to draw upon patient-connected payments e.g. personalised health budgets to cover some delivery costs.*

### Match Funding

1. Does the 20% match funding have to be cash?

*Yes, it does; this can be drawn from a wide range of potential sources, as detailed in the guidance. If you can offer more than 20% cash match, this will also be welcome and may strengthen your application. You can also include proposals of in-kind match contributions to demonstrate the full scope and scale of your project, but this must be in addition to, rather than instead of, the 20% cash match requirement.*

2. Does the cash match funding have to be 'new' or can it be money we have already (as long as it's linked to the project)?

*Organisations can use existing funds as cash match. However, other sources of Arts Council England funding cannot be used as match funding, nor can funding from the Cultural Recovery Fund. Organisations in receipt of Arts Council funding **can** provide cash match with funding from other income streams e.g. commercial income, trusts and foundations. Funding from other lottery funders is also acceptable.*

3. Should the cash match funding be confirmed, or can it be committed but not secured?

*We expect a minimum of 20% cash match to be confirmed at the point of application.*

4. Can the cash match come from project partners or should it come from external sources?

*The only stipulations about the cash match funding is that it consists of a minimum 20% project costs and that it does not come from other Arts Council sources. Cash*

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*match can be secured from a range of external sources, including statutory organisations, and/or from the project partners.*

### 5. Where do you suggest looking for match funding?

*Sources of cash match funding could include: NHS partners (Clinical Commissioning Groups, Primary Care Networks, Integrated Care Systems), local government, other trusts and foundations, philanthropy or corporate social responsibility, other lottery funders, or a wide range of other possibilities.*

### 6. If you have more than one CCG in your area what's your advice in terms of approaching them for funding support?

*This is entirely at the judgement of applicants. If you think it could be valuable to engage both to create a viable project that adds value to the local community and becomes sustainable over time, that is acceptable to include in your funding application. If it makes more sense to focus on developing the partnership with one of the CCGs, that's also fine.*

## **Application process**

### 1. Will there be an evaluation framework and support?

*The programme questions ask you to consider how you will measure and articulate impact locally. It is likely that ACE/NASP will ask successful applicants to gather some consistent data across the whole programme. We will also commission an overarching evaluation.*

### 2. Do you need to have your bid ready before you register on the portal?

*No, we encourage you to register on the portal at the earliest possible stage, even if your bid won't be ready until near the deadline.*



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3. Can ACE help co-ordinate interested local partners - if they hear of interest from different organisations too?

*We're doing this where we can – as are the other programme partners – but we don't have capacity to do large-scale formal brokerage.*

### **Decision-making**

1. How will the final decisions be made?

*The decision-making process involves not only ACE and NASP, but also Sport England, Natural England, NHS England, DCMS, the Money and Pensions Service, and NHS Charities Together. The final selection of successful applicants will be agreed by a balancing panel encompassing all these partners and ratified by ACE.*

2. How many grants overall are you looking to award/ in each region?

*We anticipate making around 30 awards nationally (perhaps more; the minimum we can make is 28, if all apply for the maximum £50k).*

*As the guidance states, we would like to see as even a distribution as possible across the 7 NHS England regions, but won't restrict ourselves to a rigid commitment of exactly equal distribution; variation may arise due to quality or volume of applications in different places, and/or a desire to see breadth and balance of types of activity, groups focused on, etc.*

3. Will you prioritise projects that use mostly volunteers?

*We expect to fund a range of projects encompassing a variety of activity, some of which will be delivered by paid professionals, some of which may be led by volunteers. However, we are looking to challenge the assumption made in some quarters that social prescribing activities should be contributed for free - rather, we seek to create a broad consensus that ensures that the activities needed by*

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*communities in a given location are adequately resourced, whilst also strongly respecting the role that more or less formally constituted voluntary groups and volunteer-led activities play at a local level.*

### **Other**

1. What does VCFSE stand for?

*The voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise (VCFSE) sector is an important partner for statutory health and social care agencies and plays a key role in improving health, well-being and care outcomes.*

2. Will there be another round?

*There is just one round planned at present. NASP, ACE and the other partners all share a long-term commitment to supporting the continued successful development of social prescribing.*

3. Do ACE/NASP have plans to support funded activities beyond the 12-month period of the grants?

*This fund will only support 12 months of activity, but one of the things we seek from projects is to explore the longer-term sustainability of the partnerships brought together; and also, of the durability of resourcing for delivery of local social prescribing activities in your area in the future.*

4. Would you connect people locally at application review stage, if there are two good applications from the same area?

*This is just an application stage programme, so unfortunately this form of brokerage isn't possible.*

5. I missed the webinar, was this recorded and do you have any more scheduled?

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*If you were not able to attend the 23.11.20 webinar or would like to pass it on to your colleagues, it is available to [watch now](#). There is also a recording of the Culture, Health and Wellbeing Alliance Webinar from 4.12.20 available here. Visit the NASP website for further details of other webinars:*

*<https://socialprescribingacademy.org.uk>*

If, after [reading the guidance](#) and these FAQs, you have questions which remain unanswered, please contact Arts Council England's Customer Services team: [enquiries@artscouncil.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@artscouncil.org.uk).

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