

Guidelines on Commercial Activities in Schools

SCC Scottish
Consumer Council
Making all consumers matter



SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

in association with

CBI
THE VOICE OF BUSINESS
SCOTLAND

COSLA



ABOUT THE SCOTTISH CONSUMER COUNCIL

The Scottish Consumer Council (SCC) was set up by government in 1975. Our purpose is to promote the interests of consumers in Scotland, with particular regard to those people who experience disadvantage in society. While producers of goods and services are usually well-organised and articulate when protecting their own interests, individual consumers very often are not. The people whose interests we represent are consumers of all kinds: they may be patients, tenants, parents, solicitors' clients, public transport users, or simply shoppers in a supermarket.

Consumers benefit from efficient and effective services in the public and private sectors. Service-providers benefit from discriminating consumers. Balanced partnership between the two is essential and the SCC seeks to develop this partnership by:

- carrying out research into consumer issues and concerns;
- informing key policy and decision-makers about consumer concerns and issues;
- influencing key policy and decision-making processes;
- informing and raising awareness among consumers.

The SCC is part of the National Consumer Council (NCC) and is sponsored by the Department of Trade and Industry. The SCC's Chairman and Council members are appointed by the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry in consultation with the Secretary of State for Scotland. Future appointments will be in consultation with the First Minister. Martyn Evans, the SCC's Director, leads the staff team.

Please check our web site at www.scotconsumer.org.uk for news about our publications.

**Scottish Consumer Council
Royal Exchange House
100 Queen Street
Glasgow G1 3DN**

**Telephone 0141 226 5261
Facsimile 0141 221 0731
www.scotconsumer.org.uk**

**Written by Jennifer Wallace, Policy Manager
with assistance from Andrew Pulford, Researcher**

SCC would like to acknowledge the support of the Scottish Executive in compiling these guidelines and for providing funding for this publication.

We are also grateful to CoSLA and the CBI for supporting these guidelines.

Published March 2006

The SCC assesses the consumer perspective in any situation by analysing the position of consumers against a set of consumer principles.

These are:

ACCESS

Can consumers actually get the goods or services they need or want?

CHOICE

Can consumers affect the way the goods and services are provided through their own choice?

INFORMATION

Do consumers have the information they need, presented in the way they want, to make informed choices?

REDRESS

If something goes wrong, can it be put right?

SAFETY

Are standards as high as they can reasonably be?

FAIRNESS

Are consumers subject to arbitrary discrimination for reasons unconnected with their characteristics as consumers?

REPRESENTATION

If consumers cannot affect what is provided through their own choices, are there other effective means for their views to be represented?

We can often make our publications available in braille or large print, on audio tape or computer disk. Please contact us for details.

GUIDELINES ON COMMERCIAL ACTIVITIES IN SCHOOLS

In today's society, children experience a wide range of commercial advertising and marketing. The activities of commercial companies in schools can be seen as an extension of this and advertising and sponsorship are now common in Scottish schools. Commercial activity covers both advertising and sponsorship (where companies fund a project or event) and the types of activities carried out in schools take many forms including posters, logos on computers, reward schemes and vending machines. It would not be possible, or even desirable, to remove all advertising and marketing to children either within or outside of schools.

Commercial activities in schools can be positive, providing schools with funding, materials and equipment; it can also build links between the school and the business community. There are also examples of Fairtrade commercial activities that provide an alternative to companies that schools may feel are unethical in their practice. However, commercial activity in schools should be viewed cautiously as it carries risks; in some cases the company or product may be in conflict with the school ethos and educational aims, for example in promoting unhealthy food or drink; in other cases it may impact on the routine of schools, creating additional work.

Companies are also unlikely to provide 'something for nothing' – expanding into education allows them to market their products to children and by extension, to their parents. Despite these concerns, schools are likely to continue to accept commercial sponsorship that helps them to meet the objectives of their school and local authority Education Department. The advantages and disadvantages of allowing commercial activities in school therefore need to be weighed up on a case-by-case basis. These guidelines aim to provide a framework to help schools and education authorities do this.

A tailored whole-school policy can help make everyone aware of the issues and can be particularly helpful when schools have to make a decision about new sponsorship. We hope that these guidelines, and the checklist, will help more schools and local authorities to develop their own policies – to support consistent decision-making and develop confidence that the materials or activities are high-quality and appropriate.

TYPES OF COMMERCIAL ACTIVITIES IN SCHOOLS

Commercial activity in schools is the provision of goods and services to schools by profit-making companies. This refers to situations where companies are providing their goods or services to schools for free or at a reduced rate and does not include the normal purchasing of products carried out by schools (for example, buying computers or books). This definition also does not include activities that the school carries out for profit such as fundraisers or pupil enterprise initiatives.

Commercial companies' activities in our schools are wide-ranging, as a recent review carried out for the Scottish Executive found; each type of commercial activity described here includes an example from this research.

- **Advertising:** Publicly displayed materials promoting a particular company, good or service. These are conspicuous and include advertising on book covers, vending machines and posters in school halls and dining rooms.

A secondary school had benefited from the use of a minibus, sponsored by a fizzy drinks company and a national newspaper, which had their logos on it. The school's name had been entered for a competition by a member of the public who was not a local resident and had no connection to the school. The school had won and, after some deliberation, had decided to accept the prize – the use of the minibus for a year.

- **Sponsored Educational Materials:** The provision or funding of school resources by a company. Promotional messages may be subtle and resources provided may include free or low-cost teaching aids such as software, books and posters. Some of the material provided may be advert free while others may contain overt advertising. They may also include information designed to make consumers more inclined to choose their product.

A secondary school used materials provided by an insurance company, and a large national bank provided packs and visits relating to money management (the materials from the bank displayed the company logo prominently).

- **Sponsored Voucher Schemes:** Sponsored educational material includes voucher schemes in which people can collect points, vouchers or tokens by purchasing a company's products. Schools can then exchange the points, vouchers or tokens for items such as books, computers or for other benefits. As with Sponsored Educational Materials, these can either be branded or advert-free; however, voucher schemes also encourage people to buy products in advance of the school receiving resources. These types of indirect commercial activities appear to be on the increase.

Voucher schemes highlighted included those operated by leading supermarkets offering, for example, computer equipment and software, sports equipment and musical instruments. Also identified, but to a far less extent, was a scheme operated by a potato crisp manufacturer, and one by a leading confectionary firm, offering books in exchange for tokens on packets of crisps or bars of chocolate, as well as one operated by a washing powder manufacturer offering art and craft materials in exchange for vouchers.

- **Sponsored Events:** Financial or in-kind support for events such as fun days, open days, school discos and other similar activities. This is often provided by local companies or parents who have a small business creating community links. In some cases this support is provided without advertising requirements; in others, companies expect their logos or other advertising materials to be displayed.

In one secondary school local companies provided cash for buffets at school events (for example, careers evenings or awards ceremonies) – the company would then be referenced in any literature about the event.

- **Prizes and Reward Schemes:** Prizes given to pupils are often given free of charge by companies. Increasingly schools are also offering reward schemes to pupils (for example, cinema tickets or leisure passes to local facilities). As the company is always giving away its products, this is also a form of advertising.

One form of indirect advertising involved the donation of prizes by companies for school award ceremonies, or for raffles at school events (for example, a school fete). In several cases, it was reported that the company donating the prize would then be referenced in any printed literature about the ceremony or event, or in the school newsletter. However, a note of caution was sounded by one primary headteacher who highlighted the example of a local company which had donated what, at first sight, seemed to be a generous prize of almost £100. In the small print though, the literature describing the prize announced that the £100 was a discount off the total bill and, in order to benefit from that, a total spend of about £500 would be required.

COSTS AND BENEFITS OF COMMERCIAL ACTIVITIES

The Scottish Executive research highlighted a number of potential costs and benefits of commercial activities for schools, parents and pupils. This is not an exhaustive list and there may be other costs and benefits. The costs and benefits cover immediate impacts as well as those that are more medium to long-term, such as health benefits or implications.

	COSTS	BENEFITS
School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased burdens on staff/administrative time. • Compromising or conflicting values and/or policies. • The health of pupils through the sale or promotion of various products. • Over reliance on funding provided by companies. • Lack of choice in facilities or equipment provided. • The burden/cost of maintaining equipment donated. • Liability for promotion. • Being in breach of code of conduct or financial regulations (probity). • Parents perceiving a lack of funding in the local authority. • The need for the school to match donated/received funding. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased access to materials, equipment, prizes and trophies. • Potential enhancement of the curriculum or learning environment. • Financial benefits. • Improved partnerships and links with business. • Increased links and engagement with the local community. • The promotion of school ethos/identity and parental involvement. • Healthy vending machines can help keep children in school, rather than visiting local shops or vans.
Pupils and Parents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The health of pupils. • Pupils' overexposure to or representation of certain products. • Pressure on parents (pester power). • Exploitation of children. • Pressure on pupils to participate in voucher schemes or to buy products. • Financial costs. • Bullying. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased experience and understanding of the commercial sector, including enterprise skills/activity. • Enhanced facilities in the school. • Increased opportunities to access a broader range of equipment and experiences. • Health-related benefits (such as healthy products in vending machines). • Possible employment opportunities with local companies. • Enhanced identity (for example, by providing sports strips). • The encouragement of reading through increased book sales. • Provision of essential items (for example, school uniform) at a reasonable cost). • Increased parental involvement.

THE GUIDELINES

These guidelines identify good practice in commercial activities in schools. The guidelines are for school staff and commercial sponsors; a checklist for each is also included. The guidelines have been developed to cover arrangements between schools and commercial companies, however we recognise that many not-for-profit organisations also provide educational activities and materials, and the issues raised in this guidance may apply equally to them.

These guidelines have been designed to aid decision-making on potential commercial activities in schools, and are not intended to be used to halt any ongoing activity unless the guidelines suggest that there are serious concerns about the involvement. Head teachers should also bear in mind that they can negotiate with commercial companies to secure the most advantageous deal for the school or to eliminate any concerns highlighted by the guidelines.

It is important to note that not every principle will apply in every situation; this is a general framework and a level of flexibility will be necessary when applying them to a particular situation. For example, many of the guidelines relate to sponsored materials or advertising which may not apply to voucher or reward schemes. Similarly, if a commercial activity breaches one of the principles it may still be worth going ahead – the advantages may outweigh the disadvantages. What is important is that overall the materials or activities offer educational value and that the integrity of the school is maintained.

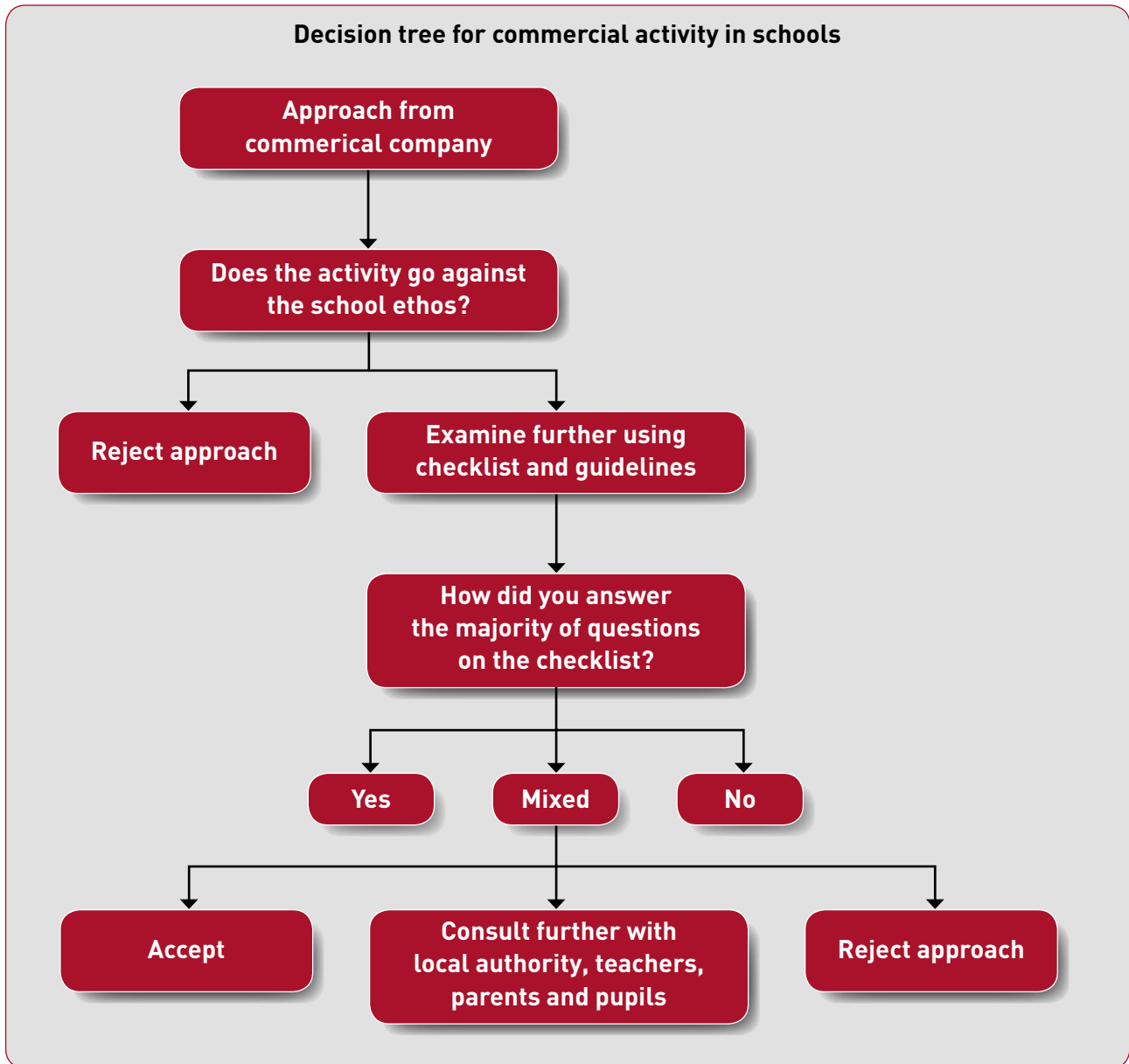
The decision to accept commercial sponsorship rests primarily with the headteacher. Even well-informed decisions will be subjective and depend on the delicate balance of different interests. The decision tree below shows the process that headteachers should go through when considering accepting commercial activity in their school.

If school staff, parents or pupils think that an advert is wrong and want it changed or withdrawn, or if they have entered a promotion that afterwards they thought was unfairly run and left them disappointed, they can complain to the Advertising Standards Authority (www.asa.org.uk). Headteachers may also be able to complain if they continue to receive mail from advertisers who they've already told not to contact the school.

1. Educational value and school ethos

Materials and activities should:

- Be relevant to the ages and abilities of the pupils who will use the materials or come into contact with the advertising;
- Be relevant to the Scottish education system and curriculum guidance;
- Conform to the Scottish Executive guidance on Nutrition in Schools and the underlying principles of Hungry for Success;
- Be used to allow for additional educational opportunities, not as a substitute for mainstream funding;
- Complement the general school ethos and any specific aims and values of the school, for example, health promoting schools, eco-schools, faith schools etc.;



- Enhance the teaching and learning of pupils; and
- Not encourage unsafe or unhealthy activities. No commercial activities should be undertaken with companies that promote alcohol or tobacco.

Schools should not accept commercial activities from companies or organisations:

- That have, or associate with those that have, extreme political, racial or religious views;
- That are known to have unethical production practices;
- Where the involvement would contradict the Council's Code of Conduct for Employees, or in the case of Elected Members, the Code of Conduct for Members; or
- Whose activities or products contradict the school or Council's educational aims and ethos.

2. Balance and objectivity

Materials and activities should:

- Give a balanced view of an issue and acknowledge the existence of alternative views;
- Use up-to-date and accurate information;
- Distinguish between factual statements and expressions of opinion; and
- Acknowledge the sponsor's market interests to help pupils and teachers identify where bias may be present.

Schools and commercial companies should:

- Have a written agreement outlining what each party expects to get out of the relationship.

3. Consultation and testing

Materials and activities should be developed:

- With advice from teachers and, where appropriate, parents, education professionals and others; and
- After testing for educational value with a range of pupils in the target group.

When making decisions on commercial activities, schools should consult with:

- Parents, through the parent representative body;
- Pupils, through the pupil representative body; and
- Staff members, including non-teaching staff, who will be affected by commercial activities.

4. Promotional messages and labelling

Materials and activities should not include:

- Messages that play on children's fears, loyalty or lack of experience;
- Purely promotional material;
- Claims that particular products or services are superior or inferior to others, unless they are based on documentary evidence and presented fairly and clearly;
- Illustrations or text that imply that particular products or suppliers are the only ones available in their class or group; or
- Merchandising slogans or logos (other than the logo used solely for sponsor identification). Sponsor identification is important to help identify promotional messages; however, logos are not always necessary, a small acknowledgement may suffice.

5. Sponsored gifts, awards, vouchers, schemes and other promotional marketing activities

These kinds of activities should:

- Not actively encourage children to pressure their parents to buy a specific company's products or services;
- Be marketed to parents who can voluntarily take part, not to children; and
- Be constructed so that as many schools as possible, whatever their size or location, can take part.

Voucher schemes should include clear information on:

- How the scheme works, for example the voucher exchange rate, any necessary extra cost, the minimum offer and the time limit for claiming any offer;
- The number of vouchers required to 'purchase' the products on offer;
- The retail value and a full description of any items on offer and, if they involve electrical or computer equipment, their range of compatibility; and
- The nutritional value of any food or drinks products involved in the scheme.

6. Unsolicited marketing activity

Sponsors and their agents should:

- Only send publicity leaflets/flyers to schools inviting them to apply for materials or to participate in promotional activities;
- Not leave or send samples of their products for pupils without the school's permission; and
- Not distribute or send unsolicited material of any kind directly to pupils.

Commercial companies sending materials should make sure that the materials and activities should be marked clearly with:

- The age groups for which they are intended;
- An indication of the subject curriculum areas for which they are intended;
- The sponsor's identity (name, department, address and phone number);
- The date of publication/release, a reference number, and where to get further information or copies (if different from above);
- A brief description of the pre-launch consultation and testing carried out for the materials/activities; and
- Where appropriate, their suitability for use in Scottish schools.

7. Avoiding stereotypes

Materials and activities should:

- Reflect and represent a multi-cultural society;
- Present a balanced view of the opportunities open to both sexes;
- Take account of diverse family types and relationships;
- Promote positive images of people with disabilities; and
- Avoid express or implied prejudice in relation to gender, class, disability, age, politics, sexual orientation and/or religion.

8. Advice, information and support

Schools should:

- Discuss any major commercial activity (which would bring a benefit of over £3,000 to the school in cash or kind) with the education authority; and
- Ask for advice from staff within the education authority or national bodies as to the educational benefit or commercial activities or materials.

9. Impacts on school resources

Schools should consider:

- The impact on staff time, for example of collecting vouchers or assessing the educational value of materials. This may not always outweigh the benefit to the school of taking part.
- Any possible financial implications. Any activity that results in a product that the school may sell for profit can result in liability for VAT. Financial advice should be sought.
- The ongoing costs of maintaining and equipment provided; this may exceed the benefit to the school of accepting the equipment.

CHECKLIST FOR SCHOOLS

When considering commercial activity in schools, a headteacher should consider the following questions:

- Do the materials or activities support both the curriculum guidelines and the ethos of the school?
- Do the materials or activities conform to the Scottish Executive Nutrition in Schools guidance, and the underlying principles of Hungry for Success?
- Are the materials/activities/products free of incentives to eat an unhealthy diet or take part in any unsafe/unhealthy activities?
- As far as you are aware, are the company's other activities broadly in line with the ethos of the school?
- Are the materials or activities accurate, up-to-date, unbiased and appropriate to the age and stage of the pupils?
- Is it clear who the commercial sponsor is?
- Is it clear why they want to distribute materials to or work in partnership with your school?
- Has the company piloted the materials/activities with pupils to ensure that they are appropriate?
- Have parents, pupils and staff been consulted on the materials/activities?
- Are logos as small as possible and do not dominate the materials?
- Are the materials/activities free from any suggestion that children should encourage their parents to buy the company's products?
- Are voucher schemes marketed to parents, who can make informed decisions, rather than children?
- Are the materials/activities free of stereotypes?
- Has the school discussed the proposed commercial activity with the education authority?
- Overall, does the educational benefit to the pupils outweigh the costs to the school, pupil and parents (as outlined on page 4)?

Does it measure up?

Not all questions will apply in all situations but as a rough guide: all YES answers, and the resource or activity probably meets our good practice guidelines. All NO answers and you should probably reject the offer. If your answers are a mixture of YES and NO, you may need more information, and further discussion with colleagues, parents and the education authority may help you to come to a decision.

CHECKLIST FOR COMMERCIAL COMPANIES

Commercial companies should consider the following as headteachers and local authorities may ask these questions of companies seeking involvement in schools:

- As far as you are aware, are your company's activities and products broadly in line with the principles and values of Scottish education?
- Are the materials/activities that you have produced suitable to the age and stage of the pupils they are being sent to?
- Are the materials/activities free from encouragement to engage in unsafe or unhealthy activities?
- Are the materials/activities free from overt encouragement to purchase your company's products?
- Have you taken care to ensure that materials/activities are up-to-date, accurate and give a balanced view of the issues?
- Have you been clear about what your company expects to get out of involvement with a school?
- Have materials/activities been piloted with pupils and discussed with educational professionals to ensure that they are relevant?
- Are any slogans or logos as small as possible to ensure that they do not dominate materials?
- Are materials/activities free from any suggestion that children should encourage their parents to buy your company's products?
- Do voucher schemes set out how the scheme works and how many vouchers are needed to buy the products/services on offer?
- Have you approached the school or educational authority first, instead of targeting children directly?
- Are your materials/activities clearly marked with information on what they aim to achieve, your company's contact details and their suitability for age and stage?
- Are the materials/activities free from any stereotypes?
- On balance, does the educational benefit provided to the school outweigh the costs to the school, pupil and parents (as outlined on page 4)?

Do your educational activities measure up?

Not all questions will apply in all situations but as a rough guide: all YES answers, and the resource or activity probably meets our good practice guidelines. All NO answers and you should reconsider the materials or activities you are offering schools. If your answers are a mixture of YES and NO, you may wish to discuss your offer further with education professionals, parents' groups and national bodies before proceeding further.

ABOUT THIS PROJECT

In 1996 the National Consumer Council (NCC) published a set of guidelines on sponsorship in schools following wide-spread concern that there had been a steep increase in sponsorship, advertising and marketing projects targeted at UK schools. In 2002 these were updated by the Consumers' Association, The Department for Education and Skills and ISBA (The Voice of British Advertisers). The Scottish Consumer Council (SCC) felt that Scottish guidelines on this topic would be of benefit to ensure the Scottish consumer interest is being addressed.

The guidelines are based:

- on a series of focus groups with parents, teachers and pupils;
- a consultation on existing guidelines; and
- a review of existing local authority guidelines.

SCC would like to thank all of those involved in this project, particularly those who took part in focus groups and those who took the time to respond to our consultation on the existing guidelines.

A full report of the research that underpinned these guidelines is available from:
www.scotconsumer.org.uk.



Scottish Consumer Council
Royal Exchange House
100 Queen Street, Glasgow, G1 3DN

Telephone: 0141 226 5261
Fax: 0141 221 0731
Email: scc@scotconsumer.org.uk

First published March 2006

