



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

Foster Care Associates - East Midlands

**160 Upper New Walk
Leicester
Leicestershire
LE1 7QA**

Lead Inspector
Trisha Gibbs

Announced Inspection
24, 25 and 29 May 2006 09:00

The Commission for Social Care Inspection aims to:

- Put the people who use social care first
- Improve services and stamp out bad practice
- Be an expert voice on social care
- Practise what we preach in our own organisation

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This is a report of an inspection to assess whether services are meeting the needs of people who use them. The legal basis for conducting inspections is the Care Standards Act 2000 and the relevant National Minimum Standards for this establishment are those for *Fostering Services*. They can be found at www.dh.gov.uk or obtained from The Stationery Office (TSO) PO Box 29, St Crispins, Duke Street, Norwich, NR3 1GN. Tel: 0870 600 5522. Online ordering: www.tso.co.uk/bookshop

Every Child Matters, outlined the government's vision for children's services and formed the basis of the Children Act 2004. It provides a framework for inspection so that children's services should be judged on their contribution to the outcomes considered essential to wellbeing in childhood and later life. Those outcomes are:

- Being healthy
- Staying safe
- Enjoying and achieving
- Making a contribution; and
- Achieving economic wellbeing.

In response, the Commission for Social Care Inspection has re-ordered the national minimum standards for children's services under the five outcomes, for reporting purposes. A further section has been created under 'Management' to cover those issues that will potentially impact on all the outcomes above.

Copies of *Every Child Matters* and *The Children Act 2004* are available from The Stationery Office as above

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SERVICE INFORMATION

Name of service	Foster Care Associates - East Midlands
Address	160 Upper New Walk Leicester Leicestershire LE1 7QA
Telephone number	0116 2854833
Fax number	0116 2854834
Email address	contactus@thefca.co.uk
Provider Web address	www.thefca.co.uk
Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)	Foster Care Associates Ltd
Name of registered manager (if applicable)	Mr Steven George Blackwood
Type of registration	Fostering Agencies

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

1. No additional conditions of registration apply.

Date of last inspection 11th April 2005

Brief Description of the Service:

Foster Care Associates is a Nationwide Fostering Agency.

Foster Care Associates East Midlands consists of a regional office in Leicester and three additional offices in Peterborough, Nottingham, and most recently, Derby.

Within each office there is a Team Manager, plus a team of Supervising Social Workers, Resource Workers and Administrative staff. Resource workers occasionally work across the region.

The Director/Registered Manager of the service is based at the head office in Leicester.

Placement referrals and Fostering Panels are coordinated at the Leicester office. Foster Care East Midlands offers a range of family placements including emergency, short term, assessment, long term and parent and child. At the time of the Inspection the Agency was supporting 86 fostering households and 95 children and young people.

The Agency facilitates the recruitment, assessment and approval of foster carers and provides all related training and support. Supervising Social Workers and Resource Workers support placements, and work closely with children in placement, and carer's children. The Foster Care Associates East Midlands staff team includes Educational Liaison Officers and Therapists

The Foster Care Associates Prospectus quotes placement charges as ranging from £886.06-£1,667.26 per week.

SUMMARY

This is an overview of what the inspector found during the inspection.

Prior to this Inspection a range of pre Inspection documentation submitted by Foster Care Associates East Midland was fully assessed by the Inspector. Information provided in the pre Inspection documentation in addition to the following methodology has informed this report and the judgements made.

On this occasion two Inspectors undertook most of the Inspection at the Peterborough office.

Five children and their carers were tracked through the close inspection of their case files. Two children were visited in their foster home and one at school. Inspectors met with a group of carers during a training session and also spoke to Supervising Social Workers, Team Managers and the Educational Liaison Officer. Some feedback was provided from Placing Social Workers through questionnaires.

Policies and Procedures, the Carer's Handbook and other documents were made available and referred to throughout the Inspection.

At the time of writing this report over 50 questionnaires had been returned from Carers, Placing Social Workers and Children. Almost all made very positive comments about the Agency. Children commented. 'My foster carers are the best I have ever had'. 'I am happy living with my carers and I love them'. 'I am safe and happy'. 'My thoughts and opinions are always taken into consideration'.

The 12 questionnaires returned by Placing Social Workers made reference to the 'very good' or 'excellent' service provided by FCA East Midlands and some gave examples of individual achievements with children placed. 'Everyone as a team works together to promote good outcomes'. 'I have had great support in identifying a school for the child'. 'I find this Agency excellent'. 'This is by far the best service I have experienced they make every effort to ensure that the child remains at the centre at all times'.

An Inspector attended the Agency's Fostering Panel, and spoke to Panel members and the Panel Chair.

What the service does well:

Foster Care Associates East Midlands provides a child centred service, and evidences a very high level of meaningful consultation and communication with children and young people. The Agency listens to children, and actively encourages them to represent their feelings and wishes.

Foster Care Associates East Midlands promotes an inclusive team working approach when working with children, carers and staff. Newsletters and information materials are age appropriate and colourful and children contribute to these. Activities and events are made available throughout the year and especially through holiday periods, for the whole family.

Foster Care Associates East Midlands provides a commendable level of supervision, training and support to their carers and staff.

Foster Care Associates East Midlands utilises the excellent range of comprehensive recording tools, pro formas, and checklists provided by Foster Care Associates. Foster Care Associates comprehensive Policies and Procedures and other documentation are regularly reviewed, revised and updated by the Agency's Quality Assurance section and directly references the Fostering National Minimum Standards and Regulations.

Foster Care Associates East Midlands provides focussed educational support for all children placed, and intensive educational support where this is necessary. Dedicated Education Liaison Officers work with children, carers and schools with the aim of achieving the best possible outcomes for children placed.

Foster Care Associates East Midlands makes available qualified Therapists to undertake Therapeutic Assessment and Therapy work with some children and young people. This is a valuable resource.

Foster care Associates operates a well-managed and professional Fostering Panel. The excellent Panel document has been updated.

What has improved since the last inspection?

The Agency has produced a new Policy and Practice Guidance on the Photographing and Filming of Looked After Children. Other Safety related Policies have been introduced or updated.

Foster Care Associates actively monitor placement stability and provides written information about this.

Carers have been issued with an updated Carer Handbook.

Foster Care Associates East Midlands has introduced a Placement Review Panel, convened on a monthly basis with the aim of preventing placement breakdowns and improving communication with Local Authorities. New placements are automatically discussed at this Panel in addition to others presenting with challenges, and also those where good outcomes have been achieved.

What they could do better:

The Agency should ensure that copies of placement specific Safe Care Policies are maintained on carer files.

Please contact the provider for advice of actions taken in response to this inspection.

The report of this inspection is available from enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk or by contacting your local CSCI office.

DETAILS OF INSPECTOR FINDINGS

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Being Healthy

The intended outcome for this Standard is:

- The fostering service promotes the health and development of children.(NMS 12)

The Commission considers Standard 12 the key standard to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

JUDGEMENT – we looked at the outcome for Standard:

12

Quality in this outcome area is **excellent**. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

The Health and development of children and young people is positively promoted and given very good attention by the Agency and carers.

EVIDENCE:

The Agency has provided for each child placed, a separate Health Passport booklet for carers to complete and this is transferred with the child when they move. The Health Passports have been updated and carers sign to confirm receipt of these.

The Health Passport captures valuable Medical and Health information that could be important to children in the future.

Inspectors noted very good reference to children's Health in carer recording and monthly summaries. The Health needs of children tracked were very well met. Appropriate routine appointments were maintained and specialist input provided where identified. Two young people tracked were receiving therapy from one of the Agency's qualified Therapists. Inspectors noted that the Agency has a dedicated Medical Consent form that is signed at time of placement. This is commendable.

One young person told the Inspector that he enjoyed the healthy lifestyle provided by his carers. He enjoyed especially, outside activities with his foster father.

Good Health related training is routinely provided to carers and this enables them to have a good awareness of their Healthcare responsibilities to children placed.

Inspectors noted that in three children's files looked at there was incomplete LAC documentation that should have been provided at the time of placement. This can provide important Medical history. Inspectors advised on how the Agency should address this, however the Manager confirmed that there is now a system in place to ensure LAC documentation is received at time of placement.

Staying Safe

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

- Any persons carrying on or managing the service are suitable. (NMS 3)
- The fostering service provides suitable foster carers.(NMS 6)
- The service matches children to carers appropriately.(NMS 8)
- The fostering service protects each child or young person from abuse and neglect.(NMS 9)
- The people who work in or for the fostering service are suitable to work with children and young people.(NMS 15)
- Fostering panels are organised efficiently and effectively.(NMS 30)

The Commission considers Standards 3, 6, 8, 9, 15 and 30 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for the following Standard(s):

3, 9, 8, 9, 15, and 30

Quality in this outcome area is **excellent**. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

The Agency provides very good support, training, and guidance to carers, to assist them to provide children with safe placements, and matches children to placement with care.

EVIDENCE:

Inspectors noted an excellent range of checks in place for the recruitment of both carers and staff.

Carers were observed during a training session, to have a very good awareness of day-to-day Safe Care issues. This was also evident from the carer records on file. One carer visited spoke with clarity about how she provided a safe environment for the two children placed with her, both of whom had significant emotional needs as a result of their childhood experiences. A copy of a child specific Safe Care Policy in relation to one of these children was made available to the Inspectors by the supervising social worker. Carer supervision records included routine discussions about Safe Care. Although there was consistently good evidence that Safe Care was

prioritised within all placements tracked, through supervision, contact records, reviews, meetings etc, copies of child specific Safe Care Policies, dated and signed were not seen on file. A recommendation with regard to this has been made under Standard 24 Children's Records.

Good training on First Aid, Safe Care and Child Protection is routinely provided for carers, much of this linking in with NVQ awards. The Agency is also providing training for all staff this year on Every Child Matters, Child Protection and Health and Safety.

Excellent paperwork was seen on file, supporting an Outwood Bound holiday for children, including their full essential information, risk profiles, bedroom risk assessments and running records for the duration of the holiday.

Inspectors observed the Agency has in place for all placements a very good Risk Assessment profile, and suggested that where high-risk behaviours are identified, that the Agency's Action Plan in response to that risk should be attached to this profile.

In each child's file there is a separate section dedicated to the Matching of that child to its placement. This includes a commendable Matching Checklist. All children tracked were appropriately placed and consulted about their placement. Children contribute to the excellent Young Person's Profile maintained at the front of file, and are encouraged to write about themselves. Excellent Placement Agreements were seen on file, detailing responsibilities of all individuals. Respite Placements are subject to the same Matching and Placement Agreement processes.

There was evidence that, where possible, good planning and introduction processes were taking place prior to children moving into placement.

The Agency has a dedicated regional Panel Manager who oversees and advises the whole operation of the Fostering Panel operation. The Manager supports the agency's commitment to vigorous Form F Assessment quality checks, pre approval training and rigorous Panel systems. Fostering Panels take place in the regional office at Leicester.

The Inspector observed the Agency's Fostering Panel and interviewed the Panel Chair who confirmed that the Panel provides feedback on the quality of Form F Assessments. He observed a 'very good standard of Assessment'. He has attended training events including one solely for Panel Chairs. The Fostering Panel receives regular updates about the performance of the Agency, including placement statistics. On the day the Inspector attended the Panel, research material was provided to the Panel members detailing the impact of gambling behaviours, following an Application where some gambling activity had been an issue and the Panel needed to know more about how this could impact on family life. This is commendable. The Panel were observed by the Inspector

to deal with authority when faced with a difficult situation with regard to an Application.

Three staff files were looked at, two of these were new appointments and the third an internal promotion. Full and comprehensive recruitment checks were in evidence, and references followed up appropriately.

Enjoying and Achieving

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

- The fostering service values diversity.(NMS 7)
- The fostering service promotes educational achievement.(NMS 13)
- When foster care is provided as a short-term break for a child, the arrangements recognise that the parents remain the main carers for the child.(NMS 31)

The Commission considers Standards 7, 13, and 31 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for the following standard(s):

7, 13

Quality in this outcome area is **excellent**. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

The Agency provides an excellent level of support and delegated resources to promote both the positive identity and the educational achievement of children and young people.

EVIDENCE:

Inspectors noted the many positive initiatives provided by the Agency to promote equality and to meet the diverse needs of children and young people. Black identity is celebrated through an annual Black History Month, Black Children's Forum, and through the recruitment of a range of carers to meet different cultural and religious needs. At the time of the Inspection 18 fostering households were non-white. Staff are recruited from diverse backgrounds and the Agency provides a local and national Black Workers forum.

All carers are given an Approval Status in relation to the ethnicity of children for whom they can provide placements. While acknowledging the good practice principles behind this procedure, Inspectors noted as a result of cases tracked, that this could be restrictive. The Agency confirmed that this practice is currently under review.

There were examples of some of the children tracked appearing to be inappropriately culturally matched with carers, however there was excellent evidence available to demonstrate that these placements were in line with the children's wishes, and that their needs were being fully met. One young person had been appropriately matched with carers, but had strongly represented a wish not to have his cultural and religious needs prioritised. Records indicated that the Agency dealt with this situation in a considered manner and had ultimately respected the young person's wishes. Inspectors spoke to the young person in question who is making very positive progress in his new placement. In a similar placement situation with another child, Inspectors were impressed with the work of the supervising social worker in managing to balance the child's wishes while looking at longer-term implications. In all placements tracked Inspectors were satisfied that the Agency routinely gave consideration to the children's assessed needs.

Agency documentation makes continual reference to Diversity and Equal Opportunities, and states all that training for carers includes equality and diversity within its stated objectives.

Foster Care Associates East Midlands places a commendable level of commitment and resources to achieving positive outcomes for children in their education, whatever their starting point is. A second Educational Liaison Officer has now been appointed. The Education Liaison Service holds the Leading Aspect Ward for Education. Among other pieces of commendable work the ELO's attend a range of meetings in order to advocate for and support children's school placements, and have recently been working with carers in the promotion of Out of School Hours Learning, encouraging carers to support children to access out of school learning activities. This is commendable. Within an impressive folder summarising the year's educational achievements, data was made available to Inspectors to demonstrate positive individual achievements of children at all levels of their education.

Carers are provided with a detailed excellent Education Handbook and with training sessions in key areas of the education system to support this.

All children placed have a separate Education Record File. These were looked at in respect of children tracked, and contained contact records, Personal Education Plans, Statements of Education Needs, minutes of reviews and meetings etc. One young person had changed school with very good and appropriate support from the Agency and her carer, when the Local Authority opposed this. Another young person seen by Inspectors prior to a review at his school commented how much he appreciated the support he was being given by carers and the Agency. He had made significant achievements in a very short period of time and was very pleased about this.

The Agency invests in the provision of a very good range of activities, sports events and holiday breaks for all children, carers and their families. Carers

and children said how much these were enjoyed. Information about forthcoming events are detailed in colourful newsletters and literature. Children in questionnaires said they enjoyed horse riding, ice-skating, dancing, playing snooker, hip-hop dancing and playing the drums.

Making a Positive Contribution

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

- The fostering service promotes contact arrangements for the child or young person. (NMS 10)
- The fostering service promotes consultation.(NMS 11)

The Commission considers Standards 10 and 11 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for the following standard(s):

Quality in this outcome area is **excellent**. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

The Agency works creatively with children and young people to ensure that they are consistently consulted in a meaningful manner, and to ensure that their views and wishes are listened to and acted upon.

EVIDENCE:

In all cases tracked there was very good evidence that children's rights and children's wishes are given positive attention. There were example where plans had been changed in order to respond to children's wishes. Another case was noted where one child had received excellent support from advocates and interpreters. From the time of placement (and if possible prior to placement) children are consulted. They complete within the Young Person's Profile, a section about 'The Real Me' and this details what the child thinks that carers and the Agency should know about them as an individual. An impressive range of children's support groups are available, including the Silent Voices group, that meets four times a year where children over nine can talk about what it is like being fostered. All children tracked were noted to be consulted about, and to attend their reviews if they wished and if this was in their best interests.

Children contribute, through paintings, poetry and letters, to newsletters, and FCA literature. Carers recently wrote their expressions of appreciation to

children placed with them, within a 'Thanks or Well Done' feature in the regional FCA newsletter. E.g. 'Well done B for trying hard at school especially with your science grades etc' or 'Thank you L, you help and care for the animals in the home'. Inspectors noted many examples of ways in which the Agency works consistently hard with children and young people, to promote a positive self-image and to consult in a way that is meaningful to them.

The Children's Charter For Choice (written by the Children and Young People's National Forum) details the rights and opportunities they wish to have in key areas of their care experiences. This is commendable.

Carers seen during the Inspection also gave examples of how they encouraged children to make choices. Within their core curriculum training they attend a Consultation and Communication course and are provided with written material outlining their key tasks in doing this.

Where children and young people were attending for Contact in cases tracked during Inspection, this was managed in an efficient manner and appropriately recorded.

Achieving Economic Wellbeing

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

- The fostering service prepares young people for adulthood.(NMS 14)
- The fostering service pays carers an allowance and agreed expenses as specified.(NMS 29)

JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for the following standard(s):

29

Quality in this outcome area is **good**. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

Carers are aware of their financial obligations to children and young people in placement, and are given good information about meeting their material and developmental needs.

EVIDENCE:

Although Standard 14 was not fully inspected on this occasion, Inspectors noted that the young people who were visited or spoken to were positively encouraged to participate in helping out in the house and to develop independence skills. Two young people in their early teens were able to do their own washing and ironing. The Agency is also introducing a new Leaving Care Service that is not operational yet.

Carers are provided with good information about allowances and payments and reported that they receive these promptly. No issues were raised within cases tracked.

Management

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

- There is a clear statement of the aims and objectives of the fostering service and the fostering service ensures that they meet those aims and objectives.(NMS 1)
- The fostering service is managed by those with the appropriate skills and experience. (NMS 2)
- The fostering service is monitored and controlled as specified. (NMS 4)
- The fostering service is managed effectively and efficiently.(NMS 5)
- Staff are organised and managed effectively.(NMS 16)
- The fostering service has an adequate number of sufficiently experienced and qualified staff.(NMS 17)
- The fostering service is a fair and competent employer.(NMS 18)
- There is a good quality training programme. (NMS 19)
- All staff are properly accountable and supported.(NMS 20)
- The fostering service has a clear strategy for working with and supporting carers.(NMS 21)
- Foster carers are provided with supervision and support.(NMS 22)
- Foster carers are appropriately trained.(NMS 23)
- Case records for children are comprehensive.(NMS 24)
- The administrative records are maintained as required.(NMS 25)
- The premises used as offices by the fostering service are suitable for the purpose.(NMS 26)
- The fostering service is financially viable. (NMS 27)
- The fostering service has robust financial processes. (NMS 28)
- Local Authority fostering services recognise the contribution made by family and friends as carers.(NMS 32)

The Commission considers Standards 17, 21, 24 and 32 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for the following standard(s):

16, 17, 21, 24, 25

Quality in this outcome area is **good**. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

The fostering service provided by Foster Care Associates East Midlands is efficiently and professionally managed.

EVIDENCE:

Foster Care Associates produce a range of professional informative documents and leaflets about the Agency. A National Prospectus/Statement of Purpose with an inclusion of a local Statement of Purpose provides essential information. Excellent, age appropriate, children's guides in the form of storybooks, CD ROMs and 'File of Facts' are provided for all children at time of placement. Children are also given small cards to carry round which list key contact numbers, should they wish to make a complaint, allegation or representation.

Although the staff group is based in three offices (soon to be four) across the East Midlands, the Team Managers, and Supervising Social Workers do cover for vacancies in other offices on occasions. Despite some recent delay in filling vacancies at the Peterborough office, carers and children have continued to receive a very good level of support. There are sufficient qualified staff plus experienced resource workers supporting carers, plus support from professional educational and therapeutic officers. Some staff spoke positively about opportunities provided by the Agency for them to pursue professional qualifications and on occasions promote their career, within the Agency.

The Agency has in place very good and consistent strategies for supporting carers. Carers reported an excellent level of support, both through personal supervision sessions and a relevant training programme. Comments from carers in questionnaires were very positive, 'We couldn't ask for a more helpful or supportive team'. 'It is wonderful to know FCA are there'. 'My supervising social worker is very good. She helped me to maintain this placement through difficult times. The placement would have definitely broken down without her support'. 'The support we receive is excellent'. We have received total support, far beyond what could be expected'.

There is a comprehensive training programme provided for carers, and internal and external trainers provide this training. Carers are expected to attend four courses from the annual training programme and all carers must attend the Every Child Matters course. Fifteen carers are studying for NVQ 3 Awards and group of carers are waiting to commence the Award this month. Specialist training for Parent and Child Assessment placements is provided, and Personal Development Discussion Groups, led by a Therapist and Social Worker, are run in local offices.

Children's records and files were very well managed and organised. The Agency provides an excellent range of forms, checklists, monitoring forms and recording tools. Inspectors noted some very good examples of individual recording.

As indicated previously in this report, although there was evidence that Safe Care Plans were discussed and confirmed as being in place within supervision sessions, no up to date, child specific plan was seen on file. The Agency should ensure that copies of appropriate Safe Care Plans are maintained on file. This was a recommendation identified at last year's Inspection. Some LAC documentation was also absent from some files and the system for chasing these up, when Local Authorities did not respond to initial requests, appeared inadequate. The Manager indicated that this issue was currently being looked at by the Agency. Front sheets were not always accurate (e.g. legal status, approval status) and the Agency was reminded to update these at times of change.

SCORING OF OUTCOMES

This page summarises the assessment of the extent to which the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services have been met and uses the following scale.

4 Standard Exceeded (Commendable) **3** Standard Met (No Shortfalls)
2 Standard Almost Met (Minor Shortfalls) **1** Standard Not Met (Major Shortfalls)

"X" in the standard met box denotes standard not assessed on this occasion

"N/A" in the standard met box denotes standard not applicable

BEING HEALTHY	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
12	4

STAYING SAFE	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
3	3
6	4
8	4
9	3
15	3
30	4

ENJOYING AND ACHIEVING	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
7	4
13	4
31	X

MAKING A POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
10	3
11	4

ACHIEVING ECONOMIC WELLBEING	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
14	X
29	3

MANAGEMENT	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
1	4
2	X
4	X
5	X
16	3
17	3
18	X
19	X
20	X
21	4
22	X
23	X
24	2
25	3
26	X
27	X
28	X
32	X

No

Are there any outstanding requirements from the last inspection?

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

This section sets out the actions, which must be taken so that the registered person/s meets the Care Standards Act 2000, Fostering Services Regulations 2002 and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider(s) must comply with the given timescales.

No.	Standard	Regulation	Requirement	Timescale for action

RECOMMENDATIONS

These recommendations relate to National Minimum Standards and are seen as good practice for the Registered Provider/s to consider carrying out.

No.	Refer to Standard	Good Practice Recommendations
1	FS24	The Agency should ensure that there is a copy on file of a signed, dated Child Specific Safe Care Plan for all children placed.

Commission for Social Care Inspection

Leicester Office

The Pavilions, 5 Smith Way

Grove Park

Enderby

Leicester

LE19 1SX

National Enquiry Line: 0845 015 0120

Email: enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk

Web: www.csci.org.uk

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