Rural Regeneration and Development Fund
Third Call for Applications

Information Booklet

June 2020
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Scheme Outline

1. Rural Regeneration and Development Fund

Under Project Ireland 2040, funding has been provided for the Department of Rural and Community Development’s Rural Development Investment Programme.

A key element of this programme is the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund (“the Fund”) which was established in 2019. The Fund seeks to provide investment to support rural renewal, strengthen and build resilience in rural communities and assist in the regeneration of towns and villages with a population of less than 10,000, and outlying areas.

The Fund, along with other funding interventions delivered through the Rural Development Investment Programme, such as the Town and Village Renewal Scheme, CLÁR, the Local Improvement Scheme and the Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme, seeks to assist in achieving the National Strategic Outcomes of Strengthened Rural Economies and Communities, set out in the National Development Plan 2018-2027.

The Fund is administered by the Department of Rural and Community Development. To date, the Fund has allocated funding of €148 million for 110 projects around the country worth a total of €212 million.

2. Objectives of the Fund

Given the challenges now faced arising from the Covid-19 crisis, the need to support economic recovery and the overall economic development of rural areas is now more important than ever.

In that regard, the projects allocated support from the Fund to date have already begun to provide an important economic stimulus for rural areas, meeting the needs and objectives identified by stakeholders around the country. With the focus now on economic recovery and equipping rural communities to address the challenges faced, the capital investment provided by the Fund can assist in achieving sustainable community and economic development in rural Ireland; the revitalisation and regeneration of towns and villages; the encouragement of entrepreneurship and innovation; the development of key economic growth sectors such as the bio-economy and agri-food; assist other sectors, such as tourism, in meeting new challenges; improved community development and quality of life; and the protection of the environment and implementing climate action.
The Fund seeks to support coordinated and collaborative projects between Government Departments, State agencies, Local Authorities, other public bodies, communities and, where appropriate, philanthropic funders and/or the private sector, which will have an impact on sustainable economic and social development in rural areas.

It should be noted that the Fund will only support investments of scale which would not otherwise be delivered without the additionality provided by the Fund, prioritising projects that are outside the scope of funding by existing schemes. In this context, projects are likely to be multi-annual and multi-faceted, involving a number of elements or phases as part of a broad strategic plan.

Funding will be awarded through a competitive bid process, based on the extent to which applications deliver on the objectives of the Fund and the various requirements and criteria set out as part of this document. The Department, assisted by an independent Project Advisory Board, will consider the applications submitted and submit recommendations for funding to the Minister.

3. Applications Sought

This third call for applications under the Fund invites proposals under Category 1 - capital projects which are ready to commence on the date of application.

For the purposes of clarity, Category 1 projects which are ready to commence are those which have the necessary consents (e.g. planning/Part 8, environmental, wildlife, archaeological etc.) in place, are at an advanced stage of design, satisfy the requirements of the Public Spending Code¹, and are procurement-ready.

The lead party to an application will be required to certify that the project proposed is at the required level of readiness at the time of submission. Any projects which are identified as still requiring planning or other consent(s) following the closing date for applications will not be considered.

4. Support Available

As a general rule, the Fund will provide up to 90% of the total project value, with at least 10% to be provided in matching contributions by the applicants. A minimum of 20% of the matching contributions element must be in cash.

Match funding may be in the form of a combination of wider Exchequer and/or State sector expenditure, Local Authority investment and/or land, community investment, philanthropic contributions, private sector investment (where appropriate), or other asset

¹ https://publicspendingcode.per.gov.ie/
contributions. Funds secured from existing Department of Rural and Community Development schemes or programmes are not eligible to be used as matched funding.

Where land or other assets are being put forward as elements of match funding this must be supported by appropriate evidence relating to the value of the land or assets concerned, such as an up-to-date valuation provided by an accredited source.

The minimum request from the Fund for Category 1 projects is €500,000. There is no upper limit, but all proposals must demonstrate detailed project costings and clear value for money. The complexity of the appraisal requirements and the methods used will depend on the size and nature of the project and should be proportionate to its scale. Further guidance is set out for information of applicants in the Public Spending Code.

The precise level of grant for an individual project will depend on the nature and quality of the proposal. In some cases, the Fund might form the minor part of the total investment, providing a small (subject to the minimum request from the Fund being €500,000) but important element of funding to add value to a larger project which already has substantial funding commitments in place.

In cases where projects are proposed of a type or funding level which could conceivably raise questions relating to State Aid\(^2\), it will be expected that applicants will have carried out their own enquiries with a view to making a case to the Department, as part of their application, that State Aid issues do not arise. The final judgement on such matters will, however, remain the responsibility of the Department.

5. Who can apply?

For the purposes of compliance with public financial procedures, the lead party to an application must be a State-funded body.

A lead party – i.e. a State-funded body - is only permitted to submit a maximum of 5 applications to this Category 1 call. However, it should be noted that if a project is not ready to commence on the date of application the relevant application will not be considered. Applications which are put forward should be the product of comprehensive deliberation and preparation and set out a well-developed case for projects of a scale and ambition commensurate with the Fund’s objectives.

For the purposes of clarity, State-funded bodies are local authorities, Local Development Companies and other State agencies, including Commercial State bodies. Community organisations, voluntary groups or other civil society bodies cannot act as the lead party

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to an application but can partner with a State-funded body, which would be in a position to assume the lead party role.

Proposals under the Fund should demonstrate a collaborative approach between two or more organisations. The purpose of collaboration should not be exclusively to lend financial or general policy support to a project but should denote a full endorsement of the stated rationale, aims and expected outcomes for that particular project. In that regard, it would be of significant benefit, in instances where a project is aimed at delivering benefits in a particular sector or area, to have secured the collaboration and support of the relevant authority or agency with overall responsibility for that area or sector.

Applicants must be able to demonstrate that the Fund can provide additionality to their existing level of activity and deliver a sustainable impact on rural areas. In that regard, it should be noted that this Fund sets out to complement other funding schemes operated across Government but will not act as a substitute or replacement for them.

6. Eligible Areas

The Fund will focus on all settlements and rural areas with fewer than 10,000 people which are located outside the five city metropolitan areas. Projects that involve collaboration across Local Authority boundaries, as well as within those boundaries, are strongly encouraged, where the participating settlements/areas meet the population criteria.

Rural towns with a population of over 10,000 people will be eligible to apply for funding under calls for the Urban Regeneration and Development Fund, which is administered by the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government.

A small number of specified towns with fewer than 10,000 people but with more than 2,500 jobs (2016 baseline) and which function as significant centres of employment may also be eligible for support under the Urban Regeneration and Development Fund (see Appendix 1). However, no individual project will be able to avail of both the Urban and Rural Funds.

7. Key Criteria

To achieve the objectives of the Fund, proposals should demonstrate:

- The capacity to deliver on the National Strategic Outcome of Strengthened Rural Economies and Communities, Local Economic and Community Plans, County Development Plans, the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies, or other local, regional or sectoral development plans/strategies.
o **Collaboration**, involving relevant Government Departments, State agencies, Local Authorities and other bodies as appropriate; and **endorsement** by key stakeholders such as the relevant authority or agency with overall responsibility for that area or sector in which the project is located.

o **Sustainability**, the capacity to deliver lasting benefits which will outweigh the investment made and be in a position to achieve and maintain financial independence.

o **A Contribution to key policy priorities** – economic recovery in rural areas and assisting the transition to a competitive, low carbon, climate-resilient and environmentally sustainable economy.

o **Transformative potential**, the capacity to deliver transformative change for a rural town or village, deliver social and economic benefits for rural communities and act as a catalyst for increased activity in a rural area.

o **Additionality**, how the project could not otherwise have taken place without the Fund and how the Fund is not acting as a substitute for investment which is already provided for under the remit of a Department or agency.

o **Value for Money** – funding a project which will deliver outputs and outcomes which will justify the investment made.

o **Leveraging of funding** from the parties to the application, including philanthropic funders and/or the private sector where appropriate.

o **A significant and sustainable impact** on the social or economic development of rural communities.

### 8. Type of Proposals Sought

The primary focus of this third call for applications under the Fund is to:

- ensure that the investment provided can act a key driver for economic recovery in the post Covid-19 environment, providing an immediate stimulus to support the recovery and further development of rural economies and communities; and

- deliver planned and sustainable regeneration in towns and villages, driving greater economic activity and footfall, addressing dereliction and ensuring the re-use of buildings.

Proposals which help contribute to the delivery of key policy priorities – economic recovery in rural areas and assisting in the transition to a competitive, low carbon,
climate-resilient and environmentally sustainable economy - will receive additional weight as part of the assessment process.

The type of interventions that will be supported from the Fund can include:

- A range of measures in towns and villages which support regeneration and economic recovery, which might include:
  - Projects which take an integrated approach to developing employment opportunities within a town and/or its environs, for example, based around a sectoral strength (e.g. an industry cluster) or a cultural, heritage or environmental asset;
  - Projects which deliver business infrastructure within town centres, remote working facilities and facilitation works e.g. works to unlock key areas within town centres for business development (subject to State Aid rules);
  - Large-scale public realm projects in towns and villages;
  - Measures to address building vacancy in order to encourage town centre regeneration, including building refurbishment, redevelopment and/or demolition;
  - Support for town centre residency projects;
  - Infrastructure that enables improved accessibility within towns and villages, supporting in particular sustainable modes such as walking, cycling, and public transport links. This may include any improvements that encourage footfall in town or villages; and
  - Other measures to address infrastructural deficiencies in towns and villages in relation to services, access, or other infrastructure that may be needed.

- Co-location facilities which enable the clustering of Local Authority and community services.

- Projects which consolidate and better position our strong existing tourism offering, with particular focus on projects in pursuance or support of existing Masterplans, major tourism routes (for example, the Wild Atlantic Way) or Visitor Experience Development Plans. In addition, projects which improve infrastructure for existing tourism trails and amenities and those which seek to avail of evidence-based opportunities, including environmental or ecotourism or marine and activity tourism.

- Projects that support the development and diversification of the agri-food sector in rural areas. For example, the development of production facilities to
demonstrate the potential of the bioeconomy, provision of facilities to add value to agri-food products and/or to encourage innovation and collaboration in the sector, the conversion of existing agri-food related buildings etc.

- Projects that support job creation, entrepreneurship and innovation in rural areas (e.g. development of Digital Hubs, Enterprise Hubs, Creative Hubs, landing spaces, training facilities). It should be noted that in relation to such projects it will be important that the proposal meets an identified need or deficiency in an area. It should also be noted that priority will be given to proposals which will locate hubs or other facilities directly within towns and villages and which re-purpose or renovate existing sites as part of the proposal.

- Projects which deliver on multiple objectives are particularly welcome, for example, delivering a town centre regeneration project which also contributes to economic, tourism, community or cultural development.

- Support can also extend to providing assistance for the management and development of a project once construction is completed (for a maximum of 3 years, subject to agreed performance indicators). For example, support for the development, management and promotion of enterprise centres, remote working hubs and tourism attractions.

This list is not exhaustive but provides an indication of the type of activities which will be eligible for support. It is important to note that a proposal may include more than one component as part of an overall plan to deliver a strategic objective for a town, village or rural area, subject to an agreed town plan or regeneration strategy for the area.

As signaled above, this call from the Fund is being repositioned in order to respond to the challenges arising from the Covid-19 crisis setting a strong focus on economic recovery and town and village centre regeneration. Given the many competing demands for public investment arising as a result, it is of fundamental importance that the Fund focus its support on projects which can deliver on these objectives but which have no particular funding stream which can support their needs. In that regard, priority will not be accorded to certain project types which could clearly avail of existing funding streams. These project types include:

- Sports projects, particularly projects for the exclusive use of one form of sport; and

- Single purpose community developments.

In addition to the above, new build projects outside towns and villages will not be prioritised for funding, with re-purposing, renovating or building upon vacant or derelict sites within towns and villages preferred.
9. Project Selection process

A Project Advisory Board is in place to oversee the assessment of proposals and to advise the Minister for Rural and Community Development on the proposals received. The Advisory Board is chaired by the Department of Rural and Community Development and is comprised of a number of relevant Government Departments, as well as external experts.

Projects will be assessed using the criteria at Appendix 3. The initial assessment and analysis process will be undertaken by the Department of Rural and Community Development. The outcomes from this process will be considered by the Project Advisory Board and, together with:

- the observations and advice of the members of the Board; and
- a final determination on the extent to which projects align with the National Strategic Outcome of *Strengthened Rural Economies and Communities*, the overall objectives of the Fund, economic recovery and the requirement to achieve balanced regional development,

will then form the basis for the preparation of a report by the Department to the Minister on projects to be recommended for funding.

Final decisions on the funding of projects will be made by the Minister for Rural and Community Development, following consideration of the recommendations provided.

10. Payment Schedule

Payments from the Fund will be made on a phased basis over the course of the project on the basis of milestones being achieved by the project promoters. Full details will be included in the Funding Agreement signed with the successful applicants.

11. Financial governance and Project reporting requirements

All expenditure incurred will be subject to the terms of the Public Spending Code which can be found at [http://publicspendingcode.per.gov.ie/](http://publicspendingcode.per.gov.ie/), and the Capital Works Management Framework, available at [https://constructionprocurement.gov.ie/capital-works-management-framework/](https://constructionprocurement.gov.ie/capital-works-management-framework/).

In general, the requirements outlined below will apply to all funding approved from the Fund.
1. All appropriate central and/or local Government financial, procurement and accounting rules and regulations will be complied with.

2. Any legislative requirements relevant to the project will be adhered to.

3. Each Lead Applicant will fully account for the sums advanced in a timely manner.

4. All projects will be subject to audit by the Department of Rural and Community Development and/or the Comptroller and Auditor General and/or the Local Government Audit Service. Full and accurate documentation to support all expenditure should be maintained and accessible for audit purposes at all times and for a period of six years from the date of completion of the project.

5. On-going monitoring and evaluation of the project outputs and outcomes should take place in the context of assessing the impact of the intervention. The Lead Applicant will be expected to collect appropriate data to facilitate this process on an on-going basis and make this data available to the Department of Rural and Community Development.

6. Projects will acknowledge the support of the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund in all public announcements and advertising relating to the project and will use all relevant branding as set out in the Funding Agreement.

7. The Department of Rural and Community Development and/or the Government of Ireland may highlight the project in the promotion of the Fund or of its wider policies.

8. The Lead Applicant will provide any reports and information relating to the project as may reasonably be requested by the Department of Rural and Community Development from time to time.

9. Each Lead Applicant will provide a contact point to the Department to facilitate timely interaction in the context of payments and information requests.

10. A final report detailing all elements of expenditure relating to the grant aid will be required upon project completion.

The current *Funding Agreement and Terms and Conditions* template for the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund is available at [www.gov.ie/drcd](http://www.gov.ie/drcd). Non-Compliance with the rules outlined above, or any additional stipulations agreed during contract negotiations, may result in a requirement to refund part or all of the grant aid awarded.
12. Timelines

The third call for proposals under the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund will open on 19 June 2020.

The deadline for the receipt of applications under the third call for proposals is **12 noon on Tuesday, 1st December 2020.** **Applications should be submitted electronically** on the official Application Form which is available on the website of the Department of Rural and Community Development at [www.gov.ie/drcd](http://www.gov.ie/drcd).

All applications will be acknowledged and a unique project identified number assigned. It should be noted that applications must be completed in full before submission. Incomplete applications will be omitted from the process.

It is envisaged that an announcement of approved projects will be made in March 2021, following the assessment process.

To contact the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund Team, or to submit an application, please email: [rrdf@drcd.gov.ie](mailto:rrdf@drcd.gov.ie).
Appendix 1

Towns eligible for URDF or the RRDF

Towns with population of less than 10,000 people and >2,500 jobs (2016) which may be eligible for support from either the Urban Regeneration and Development Fund or the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund, but may apply for funding under one scheme only.

1 Gorey
2 Shannon
3 Nenagh
4 Westport
5 Roscommon
6 Monaghan
7 Tuam
8 Thurles
9 Dungarvan
10 New Ross
11 Ballinasloe
12 Carrick-on-Shannon
13 Trim
Appendix 2

National Strategic Outcomes

Project Ireland 2040 sets out a comprehensive framework for the future development of Ireland, identifying 10 National Strategic Outcomes as follows:

1. Compact Growth
2. Enhanced Regional Accessibility
3. Strengthened Rural Economies and Communities
4. Sustainable Mobility
5. A Strong Economy, supported by Enterprise, Innovation and Skills
6. High-Quality International Connectivity
7. Enhanced Amenity and Heritage
8. Transition to a Low Carbon and Climate Resilient Society
9. Sustainable Management of Water and other Environmental Resources
10. Access to Quality Childcare, Education and Health Services

### Appendix 3

**Rural Regeneration and Development Fund**

**Project Appraisal Scheme**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment Criteria</th>
<th>Max. marks available</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Readiness</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Is the project ready to commence?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Note:</strong> This is a pass/fail requirement which will be judged upon whether the project is ready to enter the procurement phase at the time the application is lodged. Planning and other consents must be in place at the time of application.</td>
<td>Pass/Fail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Policy objectives</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extent to which national, regional and local strategic objectives (the National Strategic Outcome of <em>Strengthened Rural Economies and Communities</em>, County Development Plans, LECPs, sectoral strategies or plans etc) are met</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Note:</strong> Marks will likely be awarded based on a judgement of the extent to which proposals meet national, regional and local objectives and specific requirements or priorities set out in sectoral, regional or county strategies or plans. Marking will also likely be informed by a judgement as to how the outcomes of proposed projects meet such objectives or requirements and the level and quality of evidence provided to support these links.</td>
<td>Pass mark of 60 (60%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration between promoting parties and level of endorsement of key local and sectoral authorities for proposal</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Note:</strong> Marks for collaboration will likely be awarded based on a judgement of the level of added value provided by the collaboration proposed as part of a project e.g. through working across boundaries or joining together to reach shared goals. The judgement of marking will also likely be informed by level of</td>
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collaboration and support provided by the relevant authority or agency with overall responsibility for the area or sector which a project is located in or aimed at.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Capacity of partners to deliver project as envisaged and to meet Public Spending Code and governance requirements</th>
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<tr>
<td>Note: Marks will likely be awarded based on a judgement of the strength of the Governance arrangements set out, the track record of the project partners, the project plan set out and the associated timelines and milestones, arrangements for monitoring, project management, financial oversight and compliance with PSC requirements. The track record of the lead party in terms of the delivery of projects previously allocated funding from the Fund will also be a key factor.</td>
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<td>100</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Extent to which the proposal can deliver on key policy priorities</th>
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<tr>
<td>Note: For the purposes of this third call under the Fund, the key policy priorities relate to:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Economic recovery in rural areas; and</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assisting the transition to a competitive, low carbon, climate-resilient and environmentally sustainable economy.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Marks will likely be awarded based on a judgement as to the extent to which proposals contribute to delivering on these priorities.</td>
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<td>100</td>
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<tr>
<th>Potential Impact</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Economic or social impact on rural areas or communities (e.g. jobs, investment, place-making, etc)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Note: Marks will likely be awarded based on a judgement of the level of innovation of the project, the robustness of the economic or social targets set out, the relevance of outcomes targeted by the project and the completeness of the proposals to measure the achievement of outcomes.</td>
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<tr>
<td>100</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
### Transformative Potential, particularly in relation to rural towns and villages

*Note: Marking will likely be informed based on a judgement of the extent to which the proposal will contribute to balanced regional and local development, the extent to which the proposal will likely deliver transformative change for a rural town and village and result in social and economic benefits for rural communities, particularly where need for such change is identified as most acute, and the extent to which it will act as a catalyst for increased activity and development in a rural town or village once complete.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality</th>
<th>Mark</th>
<th>Notes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Transformative Potential</td>
<td>100</td>
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### Sustainability

*Note: Marks will likely be awarded based on a judgement of the capacity of the project to deliver lasting impacts which will outweigh the investment made and/or the capacity of the project to achieve financial independence.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality</th>
<th>Mark</th>
<th>Notes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sustainability</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>Pass mark of 60 (60%)</td>
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### Quality of budgetary proposal

*Note: Marks will likely be awarded based on an overall judgement on the value for money of the project informed by the size and scope of the proposal, its geographic and population reach and its likely impact on people and communities in rural areas, in comparison to the scale of the investment sought. This will also be informed by the robustness of the budgetary proposal and a judgement as to the appropriateness of the costs set out.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality</th>
<th>Mark</th>
<th>Notes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quality of budgetary proposal</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>Pass mark of 60 (60%)</td>
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### Additionality

*Note: Marks will likely be awarded based on a judgement as to the likelihood of the project proceeding in the absence of the Fund, the extent to which the Fund allows the project to be undertaken on a larger scale or to impact on a wider population, the availability of other funding outlets which the project could avail of, the extent to which investment is relevant to the project is potentially already provided for under the remit of any Department or agency and the extent to which the project has unlocked funding from other partners.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality</th>
<th>Mark</th>
<th>Notes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Additionality</td>
<td>100</td>
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### TOTAL

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Quality</th>
<th>Mark</th>
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<td>TOTAL</td>
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