



National College for
Teaching & Leadership

Assessment Only criteria supporting advice

**Information for Assessment Only
providers**

March 2016

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Summary

About this advice

This is supporting advice from the National College for Teaching and Leadership (NCTL).

Expiry or review date

This supporting advice will be reviewed when necessary.

What legislation does this advice refer to?

- The Education (School Teachers' Qualifications) (England) Regulations 2003 (S.I. 2003/1662) as amended
- The Education (Health Standards) (England) Regulations 2003
- The Education (Specified Work and Registration) (England) Regulations 2012
- The Higher Education Act 2004 (as amended by the Education Act 2011)
- The Education (Student Support) Regulations 2011
- The 2010 Equality Act
- The 2001 Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (SENDA)
- The Data Protection Act
- The Freedom of Information Act 2000
- The Childcare (Disqualification) Regulations 2009

Who is this advice for?

This advice is for:

- Accredited providers of ITT that are approved to offer the AO route and their partner schools.
- Candidates seeking a place on the AO route.

Approval

In order to offer the AO route to qualified teacher status (QTS), an accredited ITT provider's provision must not be judged 'requires improvement' or lower quality¹.

The NCTL will consider suspension of a provider's approval to offer the AO route where:

1. ITT provision is subsequently deemed to be of 'requires improvement' or lower quality¹,
2. the provider is subject to withdrawal of accreditation procedures, or
3. AO provision does not comply with the following AO criteria.

¹ As determined by Ofsted inspection grade criteria.

1. Entry criteria

All AO providers must ensure all of the following prior to acceptance onto the route:

A1.1 That all entrants have achieved a standard equivalent to a grade C in the GCSE examinations in English and mathematics, and that all those who intend to train to teach pupils aged 3-11 additionally have achieved a standard equivalent to a grade C in the GCSE examination in a science subject.

Scope

The aim of this criterion is to ensure that entrants to the AO route have demonstrated their achievement of a minimum standard of educational attainment and, in the case of primary entrants, have an acceptable level of subject knowledge in the core subjects of the National Curriculum.

The criterion makes it clear that it is the standard, not the certificate, that matters. Applicants who are otherwise suitable but, for whatever reason, have not successfully achieved a GCSE grade C may be given an opportunity to show that they can nevertheless meet the required standard, either by taking an equivalence test or by offering other evidence of attainment, which should demonstrate a similar level and breadth.

The NCTL does not provide a list of qualifications that can be considered equivalent to the GCSE examinations in English, mathematics and science. When AO providers look for evidence that a qualification is of a standard equivalent to GCSE grade C, they should look at the content not only in terms of its level, but also in terms of its breadth.

Specific qualifications

Qualifications in key and functional skills at level 2 are not equivalent to GCSEs in terms of content, and AO providers should look for additional evidence of breadth of knowledge and understanding in applicants with key and functional skills certificates but without GCSEs at grade C or above in English and mathematics.

While applicants with a GCSE grade C or above in English and/or English language may be deemed to have met the requirement, AO providers should look for further evidence of a breadth of achievement in English where applicants have achieved a GCSE grade C or above in English literature.

Further information

The [National Recognition Information Centre for the United Kingdom \(UK NARIC\)](#) can provide advice on the equivalence of overseas qualifications. UK NARIC can be contacted at: UK NARIC, Oriel House, Oriel Road, Cheltenham, GL50 1XP. Tel: 0871 330 7033; fax: 0871 330 7005.

All AO providers must ensure all of the following prior to acceptance onto the route:

A1.2 That all candidates hold a first degree of a United Kingdom higher education institution or equivalent qualification².

Scope

The aim of this criterion is to ensure the graduate status of teaching. All entrants must have attained a qualification that demonstrates the level of knowledge, understanding and transferable intellectual skills associated with graduate status.

[Legislation](#) requires all entrants to teaching in England to have a UK first degree or equivalent qualification. Any equivalent qualification must be one single qualification, not an aggregation of a number of separate qualifications. Applicants will need to have attained a first degree-level qualification before acceptance as a candidate.

AO providers should view original certificates in order to validate an applicant's degree status. However, they should exercise discretion in the case of recent graduates where there is a delay in the applicant receiving the original certificate. In these cases, providers should obtain written confirmation from the relevant degree-awarding institution that the applicant has achieved graduate status, and should ensure that they view the original certificate as soon as it is available.

Degree subjects

Legislation does not specify that teachers must have a degree in a particular subject or discipline. It is the standards for qualified teacher status (QTS) that specify the subject knowledge required for the award of QTS. There is no statutory requirement for primary applicants to have a degree in a national curriculum subject, nor is there a requirement for secondary applicants to have a degree in a specified subject, as long as they meet all of the standards for QTS, including those that relate to subject and curriculum knowledge.

Information on degree-level qualifications

Providers will need to make sure that those responsible for decisions on entry are familiar with, or have access to, advice on the range of qualifications generally regarded as equivalent to a first (bachelor's) degree in the UK, including overseas qualifications, professional or vocational qualifications, and qualifications no longer available but held by mature applicants.

For example, the MEng is a four-year first degree, the BPhil is usually a research degree, and some taught master's degrees may be open to people without a first degree. It is for the provider to decide whether an individual's qualification meets this criterion, and

² A first degree comprises 300 HE credit points of which 60 must be at level 6 of the QCF.

whether a particular master's degree demonstrates the breadth and type of academic engagement that would be expected from first degree study. Providers that are not degree-awarding bodies may wish to seek advice from those that are.

Further information

The [National Recognition Information Centre for the United Kingdom \(UK NARIC\)](#) can provide advice on the equivalence of overseas degrees. NARIC can be contacted at: UK NARIC, Oriel House, Oriel Road, Cheltenham, GL50 1XP. Tel: 0871 330 7033; fax: 0871 330 7005.

The [Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland](#) describes the higher education qualifications awarded by UK higher education institutions (HEIs) at five levels, formerly identified as certificate, intermediate, honours, masters and doctoral.

All AO providers must ensure all of the following prior to acceptance onto the route:

A1.3 That all candidates, as part of the provider's selection procedures, have taken part in a rigorous selection process designed to assess their:

- a) suitability to teach, and**
- b) ability to demonstrate meeting all the standards for QTS without the need for any further training.**

Scope

The aim of this criterion is to ensure that, before anyone is admitted to the AO route, they have been deemed suitable to be awarded QTS. This will help to protect children and young people from candidates who might put them at risk of harm because the candidate's previous conduct shows that they are unsuitable for teaching. AO providers will conduct interviews, run background checks, and assess if an applicant has the appropriate intellectual and academic capabilities and personal qualities, attitudes, ethics and values to meet the standards for QTS.

Providers should consider a wide range of evidence to determine applicants' suitability to teach, for example: information from application forms, information from DBS checks, referees' reports, advice from schools, results of any entry tests or tasks, applicants' portfolios, and interviews.

Interviews

Providers should consider how information from interviews can help to identify and take account of applicants' prior experience. The interview process might include, for example, classroom observation, discussions of professional portfolios of evidence and discussions with managers.

Equality

To comply with equality legislation, providers must ensure that interview procedures promote equality of opportunity and avoid discrimination.

The [2010 Equality Act](#) and [2001 Special Educational Needs and Disability Act \(SENDA\)](#) require providers to ensure they are not discriminating against applicants with disabilities or special educational needs (SEN).

Applicants with disabilities are under no obligation to disclose their disabilities. Providers must ensure that their provision does not place applicants with disabilities at a disadvantage. Providers must also consider making anticipatory adjustments to promote positively equality of access for disabled applicants, including access to benefits, facilities and services. They should provide as many opportunities as possible for applicants to

identify any special arrangements they may require, for example when inviting them for interview or making arrangements for any entrance tests.

Intellectual and academic capabilities

AO providers should consider the full range of applicants' knowledge, skills, academic background and prior experience to determine their suitability for the AO route. The selection process provides an opportunity to assess applicants' ability to communicate effectively.

Appropriate qualities, attitudes, ethics and values

Providers should consider the full range of experience and achievement to assess applicants' suitability for the AO route. Providers may wish to consider applicants' non-cognitive attributes, as well as their academic qualifications. Providers should have in place rigorous selection processes, so that only applicants with excellent subject knowledge and aptitude for teaching enter the AO route.

Health and physical capacity to teach

Providers have a responsibility to ensure that candidates have the health and physical capacity to teach and will not put children and young people at risk of harm.

The activities that a teacher must be able to perform are set out in the [Education \(Health Standards\) \(England\) Regulations 2003](#). Providers are responsible for ensuring that only candidates who have the capacity to teach are accepted onto the AO route.

Many people with disabilities or chronic illnesses may have the capacity to teach, just as those without disabilities or medical conditions may be unsuitable to teach. Visit [GOV.UK](#) for further information on your disability rights. Successful applicants offered a place on the AO route may have completed a fitness questionnaire. AO providers should not ask all-encompassing health questions but should ensure that they only ask targeted and relevant health-related questions which are necessary to ensure that a person can carry out an intrinsic function of the work of a teacher.

Disclosure and Barring Service checks

Statutory guidance, [Keeping Children Safe in Education](#) requires providers to ensure that all entrants have been subject to a [Disclosure and Barring Service \(DBS\)](#) criminal records check including a check of the children's barred list, and they should keep records showing that applicants have obtained these.

AO candidates are not required to be employed by a school. Providers should confirm to schools taking a non-employed candidate for their period of assessment that the candidate's criminal record check, including a check of the children's barred list, has been completed and that the individual has been judged by the provider to be suitable to

work with children. Schools may wish to record this confirmation in their single central record, but they are not required to do so.

In the case of employed candidates, the responsibility lies with the employer to ensure the checks have been carried out. A further DBS check should not be undertaken by the AO provider if they have received notification from the employing school that a satisfactory enhanced check has been obtained.

Providers should view criminal record checks, including checks of the children's barred list for all non-employed candidates prior to commencing school-based elements of their assessment, making decisions on suitability based on the applicant's certificate, which is the only copy the DBS will now issue, and information from the update service where available.

Providers and employers must check that candidates are not subject to a prohibition order issued by the Secretary of State. The list of prohibited teachers can be found via the NCTL online employer access service. For assistance with this service, please e-mail employer.access@education.gsi.gov.uk.

Persons guilty of breaching the DBS Code of Practice are liable to a fine and imprisonment, and AO providers are likely to face withdrawal of their ITT accreditation.

If a provider removes a candidate, or if they would have removed the candidate had they not left because that candidate has harmed or poses a risk of harm to children, the provider must refer this case to the DBS.

Any queries about DBS checks should be referred to the DBS at customerservices@dbs.gsi.gov.uk or on 03000 200 190.

Other background checks

Individuals who are unsuited to working with children may not have any previous convictions, and providers should be vigilant during the selection process. Providers or employing schools have a duty to ensure that trainees are properly managed and supervised and that, if they have concerns, information is referred to the police and the DBS.

Students from overseas who undertake school-based experiences in schools in England should be subject to criminal record checks, including a check of the children's barred list. Home Office has published guidance on [criminal record checks for overseas applicants](#).

Childcare disqualification

The Department for Education has published [statutory guidance](#) on the application of the [Childcare \(Disqualification\) Regulations 2009](#) and related obligations under the Childcare

Act 2006. AO providers must have regard to this statutory guidance when carrying out their duties to safeguard and promote the welfare of children.

Further advice on the childcare disqualification arrangements can be obtained from the Department for Education by emailing Mailbox.disqualification@education.gsi.gov.uk or on 01325 340 409.

Links

Other relevant information includes:

- Statutory guidance: [Regulated Activity \(children\) - supervision of activity with children which is regulated activity when unsupervised](#)
- Statutory guidance: [Working together to safeguard children](#)

All AO providers must ensure all of the following prior to acceptance onto the route:

A1.4 That all candidates have passed the professional skills tests prior to entry.

Scope

The [professional skills tests](#) are set in the context of the wider professional role of a teacher, and all AO candidates must pass them prior to starting the AO route.

When [registering for skills tests](#), applicants can register for special arrangements.

All AO providers must ensure all of the following prior to acceptance onto the route:

A1.5 That all candidates have taught in at least two schools³, early years and/or further education settings.

Rationale

The aim of this criterion is to ensure that candidates can demonstrate sufficient breadth and variety of experience by having taught in at least two schools, early years and/or further education settings prior to acceptance onto the route.

Scope

Candidates need breadth and variety of experience in schools or other settings to enable them to meet all the standards for QTS. They need to have taught children and young people from different backgrounds, across the ability range and in their chosen age ranges, as well as gaining experience of different approaches to teaching and learning and to school organisation and management.

The criterion specifies that candidates must have **taught** in two schools prior to entry to the AO route. It is not sufficient for candidates only to have had **experience** of two schools. Providers will wish to consider whether a candidate's prior experience of teaching in school provides enough evidence to allow the provider to confidently count those previous teaching experiences towards the two schools stipulated in this criterion. Providers will need to be clear about the nature and extent of the prior experience, whether it offered candidates the opportunity to teach children and young people and whether, taken together with other experiences, it prepared the candidates sufficiently to meet the standards for QTS. Candidates must show experience of teaching across their chosen age ranges and must be able to demonstrate that they have met all the standards for QTS for these age ranges. Typically, a candidate with fewer than 2 years of teaching experience in schools as an unqualified teacher would be unsuitable for the assessment only route. Practical teaching experience for the purposes of AO is not restricted to taking place wholly or mainly in England.

³ Section 4 of the Education Act 1996 defines a school as: "an educational institution which is outside the further education sector and the higher education sector and is an institution for providing (a) primary education, (b) secondary education or (c) both primary and secondary education".

2. Assessment criteria

All AO providers must ensure all of the following:

A2.1 The content, structure, delivery and assessment of AO provision are designed to:

- a) enable candidates to demonstrate meeting all the standards for QTS across the age range of assessment, and**
- b) ensure that no candidate is recommended for the award of QTS unless they have demonstrated meeting all of the standards for QTS.**

Scope

At the outset, AO providers should make clear to candidates, and to all of those involved in AO, the scope and coverage of the route, including subject and curriculum knowledge and the anticipated outcomes of assessment. The AO criteria are minimum expectations and AO providers have the discretion to impose additional entry or assessment requirements where these are intended to secure the quality of the route and do not contradict the AO criteria.

Route design underpins all the assessment criteria and should be flexible enough to meet the needs of every candidate. Providers should look particularly at the extent to which their assessment practices are designed to ensure that candidates have met the standards for QTS.

For those being assessed in non-specialist primary settings, the assessment process must cover the relevant curriculum subjects. For secondary candidates, providers will need to assess the necessary knowledge and understanding of their subject(s) and related pedagogy.

Providers should ensure that they have the expertise to assess candidates in the age-ranges and subjects they teach; this expertise will usually have been developed through delivery of high quality ITT in these age ranges and subjects.

Deciding whether a candidate meets the standards for QTS is a matter of professional judgement, taking into account the assessed performance of and all other relevant evidence produced by the candidate. It is important to devise assessment processes that pay due regard to equality and fairness, that are robust and that make consistent and accurate judgements.

Assessment processes must be designed so that candidates are only recommended for the award of QTS when they have demonstrated that they meet all of the standards for QTS. Providers will need to devise procedures to do this that are fit for purpose and provide accurate assessments based on secure evidence, while not placing an unnecessary burden on candidates.

All AO providers must ensure:

A2.2 All candidates recommended for the award have been assessed as meeting the standards for QTS within one of the following age phases:

Ages 3-11 (primary)

Ages 7-14 (middle)

Ages 11-19 (secondary)

Scope

Assessment must ensure that candidates have the knowledge and skills they need to be able to teach in one of the specified age phases. Typically, primary assessment will take place across the 3-7, 5-11, or 7-11 age ranges. For middle, assessment typically will take place across the 7-14 age range, and for secondary, assessment will typically take place across the 11-16 or 14-19 age ranges.

To meet this criterion, providers should consider how the assessment design and candidates' time teaching in at least two schools, early years or FE settings prior to entry will ensure that candidates can teach across the full ability range of their chosen age phase.

All AO providers must ensure:

A2.3 That the process of assessment:

- a) includes the assessment of practical teaching in a school⁴, and**
- b) typically does not last longer than three months.**

Scope

The aim of this criterion is to ensure that assessors have the opportunity to verify a candidate's achievement against the standards for QTS in a practical teaching context, within a suitably short period of time.

Assessments of candidates against the standards for QTS and subsequent recommendations for the award of QTS should not be based solely upon evidence of prior experience and achievement. This evidence, whilst being valuable in its own right, must be verified by providers so that they can be sure that candidates are continuing to meet the standards for QTS, and that a subsequent recommendation for the award is secure.

Assessment may take place in an independent school, a special school, or in a pupil referral unit (PRU).

AO providers should satisfy themselves that employing schools have the capacity to undertake their responsibilities. Where a school has serious weakness⁴ or is in special measures, it may still be possible for providers to use the school, especially if the improvements to be made do not affect the subject or age range in which the candidate is being assessed. The provider will need to be confident that the candidate will not be disadvantaged by being assessed in the school and that the situation is kept under close review.

Candidates are accepted onto the AO route after an initial assessment to assess whether they are likely to be able to demonstrate that they are meeting all of the standards for QTS. The AO route is intended for very experienced graduate teachers without QTS who can demonstrate meeting all the standards for QTS without the need for further training. Therefore, the whole process for a candidate should be completed in no longer than three calendar months from their registered start date.

Where a candidate fails to meet a provider's reasonable expectations of providing evidence for assessment within the three-month period, or where assessment determines that the candidate does not fully meet the standards for QTS, the candidate should be deemed to have failed the route.

⁴ Or early years or further education setting.

3. Management and quality assurance criteria

All AO providers must ensure all of the following:

A3.1 That their management structure ensures the effective operation of the AO provision.

Scope

Providers must plan their provision to ensure that they comply with the current AO criteria and provide the opportunity for candidates to demonstrate that they meet all of the standards for QTS. Providers are expected to provide assessment of high quality and seek continuing improvement.

All AO providers must ensure:

A3.2 That partners establish an agreement setting out the roles and responsibilities of each partner in working together to assess candidates against the standards for QTS.

Scope

The aim of this criterion is to ensure that schools and other settings that contribute to the AO route work as full partners, are actively involved in the route and that they work together, under the guidance of the approved provider and within the context of a partnership agreement, to select, support and assess candidates.

Providers may wish to work with their existing school partners, but will also need to consider how to work in 'one-off' partnership with new schools that approach them in support of an individual's application for the AO route.

Partnership agreements should be clear, working documents that can be used to guide and inform the contributions of each partner, and help to support coherent arrangements across the various contexts in which the assessment takes place. The partnership agreement will be underpinned by other practices, such as well-understood procedures for communication between the partners and agreed arrangements for the coordination of assessment.

Where provision is not school-led, providers must assure the significant role of schools in the selection and assessment of candidates. The roles and responsibilities of all partners should be clearly defined in the partnership agreement.

Other arrangements, such as the partnership's quality assurance procedures, policies for equality of opportunity and the formal organisation and management of the partnership should be addressed in the partnership agreement. The partnership agreement may make reference, for example, to the functions of groups and committees in managing the partnership and the ways in which resources are allocated among partners. It will set out the criteria for removing schools from the partnership, particularly where quality issues arise. The agreement and any associated supplementary documentation should be reviewed and revised by members of the partnership at appropriate intervals.

Roles and responsibilities

All assessors and candidates need to be clear about who is responsible for elements of assessment, how provision is managed and how the elements fit together to ensure assessment addresses all the standards for QTS.

Partnership agreements should specify the different roles within the partnership including, for example, provider assessors, school staff, and internal and external moderators. They should also set out how partners contribute towards:

- selecting and interviewing applicants
- moderating assessment judgements of candidates against the standards for QTS
- any route committees
- quality assurance including improvement planning and self-evaluation
- the promotion of equality of opportunity
- the safeguarding of children and young people

All AO providers must ensure:

A3.3 That they comply with all current legislation relevant to AO.

Scope

This criterion expects AO providers to review and update their provision so that it continues to meet the AO criteria and associated legislation.

The [Education \(School Teachers' Qualifications\) \(England\) Regulations 2003](#) (SI 1662) as amended, set out the statutory requirements for QTS in England.

The [Education \(Specified Work and Registration\) \(England\) Regulations 2012](#) (SI 762) as amended, specify what requirements must be satisfied by individuals who are not qualified teachers in order to carry out specified work in schools.

Legislation relating to equality, discrimination and employment applies to AO providers (see also criterion A1.3), who have a duty to promote equality of opportunity. Providers must ensure their provision complies with the [Equality Act 2010](#).

Providers must also ensure they carry out relevant background checks for all applicants (see criterion A1.3).

Providers must comply with the requirements of the [Data Protection Act 1998](#), in relation to holding and processing personal data, and to the [Freedom of Information Act 2000](#).

Providers should make sure that all members of the partnership are fully aware of their duties under all relevant legislation and have in place arrangements for ensuring that these are met when selecting and assessing candidates.

Further information

The following is a list of some relevant legislation. This is not intended to be exhaustive and AO providers will need to ensure they have identified and comply with all legislation relevant to AO.

The [Equality Act 2010](#) is the governing legislation for all matters relating to all acts of discrimination. Also relevant are:

- [Education \(Health Standards\) \(England\) Regulations 2003](#) (SI 3139).
- [The Special Educational Needs and Disability Act \(2001\)](#).
- [Disabled Students' Allowances \(DSAs\)](#).

The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) provides further guidance on the Equality Act for [schools](#) and [further and higher education institutions](#). The EHRC also has information on the [Codes of Practice](#) that relate to equal pay, race, disability and gender discrimination.

The intrinsic functions of the work of a teacher are prescribed by The [Education \(Health Standards\) \(England\) Regulations 2003](#) for the purposes of section 141 of the [2002 Education Act](#).

Other relevant documents include:

- The Health and Safety Executive's [Five Steps to Risk Assessment](#).
- [Guidance for practitioners and managers from HM Government on Information sharing](#).

Guidance from the [Office for Fair Access](#) sets out what providers should do to ensure they promote fair access to higher education.

All AO providers must ensure:

A3.4 That rigorous moderation procedures are in place to assure the reliability, accuracy and consistency of assessments of candidates against the standards for QTS.

Scope

Candidates can only be recommended for the award of QTS if they meet all the standards for QTS. Therefore, the assessment of candidates must be accurate and reliable in establishing whether or not candidates meet the standards for QTS. In order to ensure accuracy and reliability the providers should have clear and robust assessment and moderation arrangements in place, informed by appropriate criteria for the various aspects and stages of the assessment process.

Internal moderation

Internal moderation provides a system of checks and balances within a provider to ensure that candidates in different settings are assessed accurately and reliably. AO providers should ensure that arrangements for internal moderation are in place and that they work effectively. The roles and responsibilities of those carrying out such arrangements are likely to be contained in partnership agreements.

External moderation

AO providers should appoint suitable external moderators. External moderators should have no direct involvement with the work of the provider. They should be able to offer an external perspective on the attainment of other providers' candidates being assessed for the award of QTS, which should help to verify the accuracy of the assessments made by the provider. Providers should consider how to use external moderators to corroborate and standardise their assessments of candidates.

All AO providers must ensure:

A3.5 That they monitor, evaluate and moderate all aspects of provision rigorously and demonstrate how these contribute to securing improvements in the quality of the assessment of candidates.

Scope

The aim of this criterion is to ensure that providers have robust procedures in place for monitoring and evaluating all aspects of their AO provision and that they can demonstrate, through the evidence gathered and through outcomes for candidates, how the implementation of their procedures contributes to securing improvements in quality.

AO providers should define clearly the arrangements and responsibilities for monitoring and evaluating the quality of provision across all the contexts in which it takes place, and identify ways in which it could be improved.

Providers should have systematic procedures in place in order to demonstrate that monitoring and evaluation have secured improvements in quality and outcomes for candidates. This may mean keeping comparative data and other evidence over a period of time. Providers are not required to grade AO candidates, but may wish to consider whether this is possible and if it would support their evaluation of outcomes for candidates.

Similarly, providers may wish to examine the procedures and practices they have in place for assessing the subject and pedagogical knowledge of all candidates and the knowledge of relevant curriculum areas for generalist primary and early years candidates, and evaluate these against the success of candidates in demonstrating meeting the standards for QTS. The evidence will need to be sufficiently robust to enable the provider to draw conclusions, and act upon them.

All monitoring and evaluation processes and activities should focus on impact and outcomes – particularly in the context of the standards achieved by candidates. Reporting and documenting of such activities should be evaluative rather than descriptive.



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Reference: NCTL-20014-2016



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