

## **Blended Learning Strategy – Appendix to University Learning and Teaching Strategy (2006- 2010)**

This Blended Learning Strategy is a major appendix to the University's current Learning and Teaching Strategy (2006 - 2010)<sup>1</sup>. It was created, following a request from Executive, by the Blended Learning Strategy Working Group, led by the PVC (Academic) Professor Sally Glen.

This report sets out the background, the drivers and some of the issues in the further development of blended learning at the University of Wolverhampton and follows this with six student entitlements for blended learning, each with a rationale and examples. The report also includes targets for each of the six entitlements for the next three years, 2008-2011. Following wide consultation, the final part of the report includes five recommendations for the changes required in different areas of University practice to align these with fully supporting the achievement of the strategy. A copy of the 'Wolverhampton Report: E-learning Review', the major catalyst for this strategy, concludes the report.

### **1. Background.**

The use of technology is now critical to success in all aspects of modern life, including work and educational settings. The University has a long and successful history of using and developing different technologies to support the quality of learning opportunities and experiences, dating back to the 1990s.

The University defines Blended Learning as the use of technologies to extend and enhance the student learning opportunities through the provision of tasks and materials which enrich, and are aligned with, face-to-face learning. It is also anticipated that one potential by product of this strategy will be to focus our attention on curriculum design and our face to face pedagogies in general.

### **2. External Drivers.**

There are a variety of external drivers to this strategy and this section highlights four of these.

HEFCE has an e-Learning strategy and an implementation plan (2005-2012)<sup>2</sup> for the HE sector to support institutions to develop and embed e-learning over this time frame. This strategy proposes that e-learning can transform University learning and teaching, and it aims to support Universities in the setting of their own visions and plans.

The Leitch Report (2006)<sup>3</sup> into the UK's long term skills needs cited IT skills as moving from being high level skills, to those which are now viewed as basic, "The ability to use a computer is one of the most visible and widely used generic skills." It

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<sup>1</sup> University of Wolverhampton Learning and Teaching Strategy 2006-2010 (2006). *Enhancing the student learning experience* [online] Wolverhampton: UK. [accessed November 14<sup>th</sup> 2007] <Available from [http://asp2.wlv.ac.uk/celt/place/LT\\_Strategy%202006-10.pdf](http://asp2.wlv.ac.uk/celt/place/LT_Strategy%202006-10.pdf)>

<sup>2</sup> HEFCE Strategy for e-Learning (2005) [online] London: UK. [accessed November 14<sup>th</sup> 2007] <Available from [http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/HEFCE/2005/05\\_12/05\\_12.doc](http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/HEFCE/2005/05_12/05_12.doc)>

<sup>3</sup> H M Treasury (2006) Leitch Review [online] London: UK. [accessed November 14<sup>th</sup> 2007] <Available from [http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/independent\\_reviews/leitch\\_review/review\\_leitch\\_index.cfm](http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/independent_reviews/leitch_review/review_leitch_index.cfm)>

is anticipated that this strategy will develop each learner's IT skills, especially her or his capacity to learn through this medium.

The 2006 literature review of Blended Learning *The undergraduate experience of blended e-learning: a review of UK literature and practice*<sup>4</sup> undertaken by the Higher Education Academy reported students' responses to Blended Learning as 'overwhelmingly positive' (pg. 3) and listed the following 6 recommendations for successful blended learning in practice: use the term blended learning; work with and within your context, use blended learning as a driver for transformative course redesign, help students develop their conceptions of the learning process, and disseminate and communicate results of evaluations. This strategy will assist us in adopting these six recommendations.

The JISC report *In their own Words*<sup>5</sup> researched the role of technology in the lives of current University learners (digital natives) and demonstrated that learners '... are adept at blending personal and institutionally owned technologies with traditional approaches to learning in ways that are unique to them.' (pg 3). In addition, technology was used seamlessly to create supporting peer networks and that 'Learners also find significant advantages in using technology. These differ according to the individuals' perspectives, but increased choice, ease of access to information and control over when and how they learn are highly valued.' (pg 3).

The use of IT in secondary schools is also being heavily promoted through the DFES strategy 'Harnessing Technology: Transforming learning and children's services'<sup>6</sup>. This strategy aims to enable the University to better provide learning which is matched to real world competences, experiences and expectations of our future 'digital natives', emerging from the school system.

The report on e-Learning at this University by Professors Salmon and Fothergill, '*Wolverhampton Report: E-learning Review*' (attached as Appendix A) also highlighted six more localised external drivers (pg 4) and this strategy also responds to these.

### **3. Internal Drivers**

There are also a variety of internal drivers requiring a managed, strategic and operational response, in addition to our context as a widening participation institution, which this strategy aims to address.

The University can be congratulated on its progress to date in the use of technology for student learning, with some 21,000 annual student users of WOLF and more than 10,000 active users of PebblePAD for ePDP. WOLF use consistently contributes to students' satisfaction with their learning opportunities, as evidenced in responses to the National Student Survey<sup>7</sup>, the internal satisfaction survey, and in the research

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<sup>4</sup> Sharpe, R., Benfield, G, Roberts, G., and Francis, R. (2006) *The undergraduate experience of blended e-learning: a review of UK literature and practice*. The Higher Education Academy. [online] York: UK. [accessed November 14th 2007] <Available from

[http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/assets/York/documents/ourwork/research/literature\\_reviews/blended\\_elearning\\_full\\_review.pdf](http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/assets/York/documents/ourwork/research/literature_reviews/blended_elearning_full_review.pdf)>

<sup>5</sup> JISC (2006) *In their own words: Exploring the learner's perspective on e-learning* [online] London:UK. [accessed November 14th 2007] <Available from

<http://www.jisc.ac.uk/media/documents/programmes/elearningpedagogy/iowtext.doc>>

<sup>6</sup> DFES (2005) 'Harnessing Technology: Transforming learning and children's services' [online] London:UK. [accessed November 14th 2007] <Available from <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/publications/e-strategy/>>

<sup>7</sup> e.g., "The fact that information is available to us electronically online, so I can study well and effectively at home" – taken from NSS free text responses.

conducted by the marketing department as to the nature of the 'brand' of the University of Wolverhampton. In addition, we have areas of national excellence in less mainstream blended learning areas, such as Podcasting and mobile learning, which are not, as yet, mainstream approaches to learning.

The specific internal drivers for this Blended Learning Strategy then are as follows:

Executive approved the '*Wolverhampton Report: E-learning Review*', commissioned by the Vice Chancellor and this strategy is a response to the first three of its final six recommendations (p. 25). Recommendation 1 was,

1. *Currently the e-learning strategy is embedded in the L & T strategy- may be worthwhile giving special attention for a few years: develop a new pedagogical innovation strategy that focuses on aligning the university's mission with those of faculties and department learning and teaching strategies, and is specific about the benefits for student learning.*

The University, by including this Blended Learning strategy as an appendix to its Learning and Teaching strategy, aims to refocus attention on this aspect of pedagogical innovation, which may have become less visible with its integration into the University Learning and Teaching Strategy. It is proposed to articulate its targets in terms of student learning entitlements. These align with the QAA's wish to see policies and procedures for managing and enhancing the '... academic standards of awards and qualifications, quality of the student learning opportunities and effective means of enhancing the quality of the education provision'.

2. *Develop an excellent communication plan for the strategy, with targets and feedback.*

This second recommendation will be developed following approval for the new Blended Learning Strategy, and the third (below) will need to be addressed in workstream planning and resource allocation following approval of the strategy.

3. ***Develop an action plan that includes both IT and staff development but 'goes beyond' to institutional capacity building which includes resourcing and symbolic approaches to rewards, recognition and celebration at institutional, national and international levels, and direct support for innovation through buy out of time, and targets re-engineering learning design.***

A further internal driver is in the University's Strategic Mission 2006-2012<sup>8</sup>, which has, as one of its strategic objectives, to *Become a nationally-recognised centre of excellence in technology-supported learning* and as its Indicator of Success *Increasing use of technology-supported learning at all levels*. This Blended Learning strategy is one step towards establishing the University of Wolverhampton as a nationally-recognized centre of excellence.

## **4. Current Issues in Blended Learning at University of Wolverhampton**

### **4.1 Good practice**

Professor Salmon's report highlighted many areas of existing good practice and successes in the University's application of Blended Learning. Among these were:

- the success of the PG Cert in moving forward new staff's use of technology;

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<sup>8</sup> University of Wolverhampton: Strategic Plan - 2006 to 2012 (2006) [online] Wolverhampton: UK. [accessed November 14th 2007] <Available from <http://www.wlv.ac.uk/Default.aspx?page=11717>>

- excellent pockets of innovation;
- good opportunities for interested staff to explore the use of TSL;
- all the staff they spoke to were supportive of CELT;
- students felt that their introduction to ICT had improved over the last three years;
- PebblePAD was successful, and
- that students appreciated the high level of access to computing including wireless facilities.

#### **4.2 Areas for development**

Professor Salmon's report also highlighted areas which she felt needed or could command further attention. This strategy is one of the mechanisms for addressing some of these suggestions, specifically with regard to the embedding of blended learning:

*The University is good at innovation in learning and teaching, and there is a taste for it amongst some academics but poor at sustainable implementation. Our review suggests that not only is this true, but the challenging issue of scaling and associated embedding of pedagogical changes need attention (pg 13)*

The strategy aims to achieve the embedding of our Blended Learning across all levels of study, undergraduate and postgraduate, and with each students' engagement with learning. The report also had the following to say about the pedagogical use of TSL – e.g., *the VLE is not being used in a kind of 'cutting edge way', there are no mechanisms in place for 'scaling up' or 'embedding' what there is .. did not talk of innovative uses of TSL*, and again this strategy aims to address this. There were also a variety of other areas for development which were noted in the report, including:

*Staff time: A work allocation model has been in place for 2 years, which may need to be used more imaginatively to ensure that appropriate time is given for the development of TSL and ...was no encouragement from the Head of School to seek training and support when designing a new course that was intended to use e-learning.*

*Communication about TSL: e.g., staff did not really know the university mission or strategy in terms of IT or TSL.*

### **5. Blended Learning Strategy**

This section describes the strategic aims and proposed student entitlements, the rationale for each and examples of these in a blended learning format.

The overarching aims of this strategy are to enhance student learning and to improve each student's learning experience. The student entitlements directly address mechanisms for engagement with learning opportunities (2, 3, 4 and 6), based on current research and theoretical understanding of how technology can improve learning<sup>4</sup>, as well as the use of technology to make students' interaction with the University easier (1 and 5). These are the six student entitlements.

#### **All our students are entitled to:**

1. have access where possible to an electronic copy of all lecturer-produced course documents e.g. module guides, assessment briefs, presentations, handouts, and reading lists

2. formative assessment/s opportunities on line with appropriate meaningful electronic assessment feedback;
3. have opportunities to collaborate on line with others in their learning cohort;
4. have the opportunity to participate in electronic Personal Development Planning (ePDP);
5. submit all appropriate assessments online;
6. opportunities to engage in interactive learning during all face to face sessions.

The rationale, for student learning and experience benefits for 1-6 above, are to enable each learner to:

1. have 24/7 access to all learning content, and to ensure equality of access;
2. gauge her or his progress against the learning outcomes, to receive supporting feedback on this progress, and for staff to have information on student progress;
3. use asynchronous collaborative learning which extends the face to face learning, creating supportive learning networks, managed by learners at a time and place best suited to their needs;
4. understand better her or his learning process, act on feedback, so as to become more effective and successful, as well as collecting evidence on achievement to enhance employability and satisfying QAA's requirement for HE Progress files;
5. save time and paper, and encourage feedback to each learner to be provided electronically;
6. participate in, and engage with interactive learning opportunities in her or his face-to-face learning sessions. There is no expectation that this need necessarily involve the use of technologies.

**Examples of learning uses of technologies which, where appropriate, could be used to support these learner entitlements.**

*Level of sophistication ->*

<b>Learner entitlements</b>	<i>Standard</i>	<i>Moving beyond</i>	<i>Sophisticated or fringe uses</i>
<b>Content</b>	Written materials in WOLF or PebblePAD  Web links to other rich information sources  Reading lists linked to electronic journals	Video clips  Interactive materials in podcasts and vodcasts  Embedded links to e-resources e.g., e-journals, case studies, and e-books	Sequential concepts illustrated through multimedia animations  Reusable Learning Objects  Simulations of content in action through virtual worlds  Learner generated content through use of a course wiki
<b>Formative assessment</b>	MCQs and objective questions with feedback  Tutor whole group	Mobile learning with SMS-based formative assessment questions and their	Work submitted and returned with feedback and annotations on scripts

	feedback on specific task through a blog or Forum	feedback Formative assessment using voting systems used in class	Peer-peer online formative feedback
<b>Collaboration</b>	Discussion tasks in WOLF Forums  Students creating and sharing opinions through blogs -	Module content created collaboratively through a wiki  Online group work - debates etc	Role plays and simulations enacted in virtual worlds  Students using their own collaboration tools e.g. <i>Facebook</i>
<b>ePDP</b>	Basic use of PebblePAD - e.g., strengths and weaknesses analysis, thoughts, planning for learning.	Use of PebblePAD action plans, reflective and shared blogs	Portfolio used for summative assessment;  Students submitting e-cvs as job applications
<b>e-submission</b>	Some coursework submitted and returned on-line with electronic feedback	Most coursework submitted and returned on-line with electronic feedback and annotations	All coursework submitted and returned on-line with electronic feedback and annotations
<b>Interaction</b>	Group and pair work based learning tasks,  Opportunities for formative assessment	Debates, simulations, role plays and discussions  Practical work on applying understanding of content	Problem-based learning  Student led sessions

## 6. Implementation of the strategy.

It is proposed that this strategy be implemented in the same manner as the Learning and Teaching strategy, whereby each School formulates a School action plans that includes School targets, to achieve the University level targets. The strategy would be monitored by the University Quality Enhancement Committee, through SQECs and Schools would be asked to provide evidence to support claims of attainment of the targets.

## 7. Evaluation, review and development of the strategy

The progress and success of the strategy will be evaluated annually. The ILE will conduct the evaluation and report on strategy progress to UQEC during, and at the end of year one. School level review of the current Learning and Teaching strategy takes place via Annual Monitoring. The blended learning strategy will also be monitored at school level through this process. The working group considered the

merit of revising module evaluation questionnaires to encourage feedback from students specifically on the implementation of the blended learning strategy, but concluded that this would be inappropriate. The working group noted that there are approaches to annual monitoring differ from School to School, and that processes which govern the collection and compilation of data from module evaluation questionnaires may be sub-optimal. There is some difficulty in compiling trend analyses from annual monitoring data. It would be difficult to determine the impact of the Blended Learning strategy on key university performance areas, such as retention, progression and attainment of students, within the current annual monitoring regime. The working group felt that a review of the efficacy of the current annual monitoring process would be helpful.

Whilst the targets included within the grid on the following page mostly progress the strategy through the levels of study, it will be necessary to review progress during the first year and to negotiate targets for Level 1 which move learner entitlements further across the sophistication grid (page 6 above).

## The Blended Learning Strategy – Targets

The targets for the six blended learning student entitlements

Entitlements	Targets at end of academic year		
	2009	2010	2011
<b>All students are entitled to:</b>			
1. have access to a digital copy of all lecturer-produced course documents.	All documents to be available for all University courses	All documents to be available for all University courses	All documents to be available for all University courses
2. have formative assessment/s opportunities on line with meaningful electronic assessment feedback	All level 1 modules to have at least one significant on-line formative assessment early in the module	All level 1 and level 2 modules to have at least one significant on-line formative assessment early in the module.	All modules to have at least one significant on-line formative assessment early in the module.
3. collaborate on line with others in their learning cohort	All level 1 modules to have collaborative learning systems and opportunities promoted.	(to be reviewed)	(to be reviewed)
4. participate in ePDP	All level 1 students to have engaged with ePDP to identify their personal goals and areas for development.	All level 1 and 2 students to have undertaken ePDP to evidence their key transferable employability skills.	All students to have undertaken ePDP to evidence their learning experience in HE.
5. submit all (appropriate) assessments online	Used in all Level 1 University modules - where appropriate	Used in all level 1 and 2 University modules where appropriate	Used in all University modules where appropriate
6. engage in interactive learning during all face to face sessions.	All face to face sessions to incorporate interactive learning.	All face to face sessions to incorporate interactive learning.	All face to face sessions to incorporate interactive learning.

Whilst the targets in this grid mostly progress the strategy through the levels of study, it will be necessary to review progress during the first year and to negotiate targets which move the Level 1 learner entitlements further across the sophistication grid (page 6 above).

## 8. Areas of current University practices which need to be aligned with this strategy.

The working group identified and investigated six areas of current University practice to ensure alignment with this strategy's intended outcomes so as to enable it to succeed. These are:

### 8.1 Workload allocation model

Each School has a formula for calculating the teaching hours for a module. In the case of blended learning the formula is still applied – on the basis that reducing class contact doesn't take away other aspects of the module workload – and on-line contact with students also requires time commitment. Currently most Schools have few on-line/blended modules so this is not a major issue. As Schools develop experience and capability in blended learning it may be necessary to revisit this current working assumption. Preparation for blended-learning modules, which requires significant change to the curriculum, may receive additional time allocation through non-specific duties. Each School will need to evaluate the level of technical support it requires to generate on-line material and incorporate resourcing requirements into its annual business plan.

The group felt that the workload allocation model was sufficiently flexible as it stands to enable staff to achieve the student entitlements.

### 8.2 Validation and re-validation, procedures and documentation.

In consultation with QASD colleagues, the working group noted that the six entitlements do not need to be stated in the pathway or module validation documentation as a separate category. However there does need to be some change to the rubric of the current sections of the Module Specification Template, as follows.

On the current Module Specification Template there is a box for completion, which states currently:

9	Technology Supported Learning (TSL)
Explain how technology is being used to support student learning in this module – e.g. WOLF, PebblePad, on-line data bases,	

The Module Specification Template guidance would be altered to state:

9	Technology Supported Learning (TSL)
Explain how technology is being used to support student learning in this module – e.g. WOLF, PebblePad, on-line data bases, <b>student entitlement to blended learning</b>	

Entitlement 2 will be difficult to monitor, as it is formative. This should be monitored by the subject leader as part of Annual Monitoring. A prompt will need to be added to the Annual Monitoring template documentation provided by QASD.

Entitlement 4 will need to be in the documentation on **guidance for validating a Programme at Level 1**. It is more difficult to monitor this practice as it is across a programme and not per module.

### **8.3 Statements in student course documentation about their entitlements.**

- (i) The six student entitlements should be listed in all module and course guides.
- (ii) The University Module Guide template requires revision by QASD in order to incorporate the entitlements.
- (iii) The entitlements should be preceded by a statement from the University which explains why the University of Wolverhampton is adopting this strategy and what benefits we believe this will have for the students.

*'In 2008, the University adopted a Blended Learning Strategy which promotes the integration of technology supported learning across all our modules. We believe this will improve the employability of our students and the effectiveness and efficiency of our learning and teaching practice.'*

- (iv) The rationale for each of the six entitlements could also be reproduced, as on page 5, above.

### **8.4 Staff support.**

The group recognised the need to put in place a range of mechanisms to support staff in achieving the strategic targets which fall under six different but related headings. Within each area these support mechanisms have been listed in the order in which they are likely to have most impact. There are cost implications for these staff support opportunities which need to be addressed by ILE or a Blended Learning Unit and a selection made from the following.

#### (i) Incentives to support staff

A. In line with the paragraph on the workload allocation model, staff need to have sufficient time to (a) develop understanding of the rationale for, and the variety of ways in which BL can be used support learning, (b) develop technical understanding and (c) create blended learning and to be active and visible in the blended context where appropriate. This must be real time and based on an appropriate interpretation of the workload allocation model.

B. A system for identifying staff awareness 'gaps' - appraisal - and development sessions into which this can feed. There should be recommendations for appraisers for 2008/9 to include the strategy in appraisal with relevant prompts developed by the ILE.

C. Demonstrable senior management leadership, support and engagement in Blended Learning for example Deans' use of blogs for School-wide communication and discussion of issues and plans.

#### (ii) Team-based curriculum development and support

A. An opportunity (time and blended learning experts made available) for module teams to review their modules' curriculum, working in tandem with a blended learning pedagogic expert, to appropriately integrate blended learning opportunities. This needs to follow the validation and revalidation cycle, as well as being available on demand.

B. Module teams to be able to 'commission' small group training / development sessions with blended learning experts - half day / whole day / away days - focussed on a module need - e.g., we want to integrate regular aligned formative objective assessment - these sessions would cover the pedagogy, the how, and staff would have space and time to create blended learning in a supportive environment.

C. Mentoring or colleague support - each section could allocate a mentor who could be upskilled at a high level re pedagogy and technical support and this role needs to be taken into workload allocation.

D. Quality student buddies (final year SED or other appropriate learners) could be used to work with staff on technical needs.

E. Opportunities to peer-review colleagues' blended learning solutions.

(iv) Instant help

A. Phone based immediate support for all technical enquiries e.g., - 'How do I set up a gateway in PebblePAD?' ... a blended learning hotline!

B. Access to local, campus based expertise, ideally someone with both a technical overview and pedagogic understanding to accompany tentative staff into a classroom when new technologies are being used for the first time.

(v) Support resources

A. Full on-line help videos and written materials, which include pedagogic advice at appropriate points on all our University Blended Learning systems.

B. Online localised case studies - as examples of successful Blended Learning – on the ILE web site.

(vi) Workshops / training

A. Training sessions - weekly, campus based, at a regular time, drop in type, surgeries with a specific focus - across the ranges of technology and across all sites e.g., lunchtimes - 12-2 every Tuesday and Thursday at Walsall.

B. As currently offered on the Corporate Staff Development Programme a range of training sessions, focused on the uses of the technology.

C. Mini online courses on blended learning, carried out through blended learning - e.g., How to e-moderate; How to use 'e' formative assessment.

(vii) External income generation to support staff

A. We need to ensure that we have the best possible chance to access external funds (JISC / HEA etc) through bid writing for all calls.

In summary, the support of staff using some or all of the mechanisms outlined above, depending on resources, will need to be addressed by the ILE or a dedicated Blended Learning Unit.

## **8.5 Equipment levels in Learning and Teaching spaces.**

It is acknowledged that the University needs to provide robust, but easy to use, technology to enable TSL and support the Blended Learning Strategy. To this end IT Services has developed a strategic plan to update all centrally timetabled teaching rooms with a standard set of fixed AV equipment defined in consultation with schools and the ILE. This equipment will include data projection facilities, a networked PC, an amplifier, DVD/VHS player, inputs for laptop and USB devices, as well as dry-wipe boards. Support is provided via an escalated phone service called 'the AV hotline'. In addition, other improvements such as faster log-in times for classroom PCs and processes to embed appropriate learning software technologies are core IT Services activities. This will ensure that technology is available, consistent, reliable and effectively supported.

## **8.6 Staff Appraisal Procedure**

The considerations regarding staff appraisal in relation the strategy are the same for any other introduction or development of University strategy. Staff must be made aware of the new or developed strategy, and must then be equipped to respond to it. Appraisal is the mechanism by which relevant objectives for staff can be agreed to ensure the strategic intent is achieved.

Whilst staff's expectation need to be taken into account, engagement with the new or newly developed strategy will become an expectation of the University as employer. The working group would produce a list of prompts for appraisers, if required.

## **8.7 Summary of recommended changes to support this strategy**

In summary the group proposes that the following actions be taken to ensure that the University is fully enabling achievement of the blended learning strategy targets:

1. Interpretation of the workload allocation which includes explicit reference to blended learning development
2. Changes (minor) to the validation and re-validation, procedures and documentation as detailed above
3. Inclusion of the six entitlement statements and the rationale in pathway and module guides
4. A selection from the range of support mechanisms as described in 4 (above) is offered by the ILE, or a Blended Learning Unit, targeted at Level 1 initially, from September 2008.
5. An appraisers' checklist for blended learning is produced by the ILE/Blended Learning Strategy group for September 2008.

In addition, the Blended Learning Strategy working group recommends consideration of a review of annual monitoring practices.

## **8.9 Communication Strategy**

One of the key recommendations from the *Wolverhampton Report: E-learning Review* that a clear communications strategy be developed. This is planned when the strategy has had Academic Board approval.

## Blended Learning Strategy Working Group

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