

Local Government Workforce Survey 2014/15

Research report
March 2016



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Foreword

Once again, we would like to thank all those who took the time to complete this survey. Whilst the results show little change from last year overall, this is an interesting finding in itself and will inform the LGA business plan. We recommend that the survey is used to inform local discussions on vital organisational and workforce issues. This foreword looks very briefly at one or two highlights. As always we have to caution that the samples each year do not necessarily match, so trends can be difficult to interpret.

Overall, the survey results have to be seen in the context of continuing pressure on council organisations. Average spending on training and development has again nudged downwards and data on sickness absence has not improved. On the other hand, turnover has increased a little and vacancy rates have dropped, suggesting that there is a little more life in the labour market.

Part of the response to recruitment needs can be seen in the answers to the questions about flexible working which show a very high level of awareness and activity around the need to give people a good work-life balance. There is an interesting indication of how councils are seeking to reshape their organisations in the fact that “commerciality” is now seen as the biggest skills gap and the biggest priority. The sector will need to think in a careful, coordinated way about how it finds and nurtures talent in this area.

One response has to be to develop the broadest possible talent pool at all levels, including leadership; the experience of women may seem to be improving but people from black, Asian or from other minority ethnic (BAME) groups and people with disabilities demand a greater focus.

One important way of broadening the talent pool is to take on more apprentices and there are indications that councils are gearing up to increase this activity which will be important as it becomes the subject of new public sector targets.

The LGA has a variety of commentaries, tools and offers on issues such as absence management and improved recruitment available on www.local.gov.uk/workforce.

The Local Government Association's Workforce Team

Summary

The Local Government Workforce Survey 2014/15 provides information on key elements of the workforce within councils. The figures provided by councils include school support staff, but exclude teachers. The survey is conducted annually by the Local Government Association's (LGA) Research and Information team and the previous surveys in the series can be found on the LGA's website¹.

All heads of human resources (or equivalent position) in England were asked to complete an online survey between November 2015 and March 2016. The final overall response rate achieved was 43 per cent (153 councils). By council type, the response rate was highest from metropolitan districts (58 per cent / 21 councils) and lowest from shire districts (38 per cent / 76 councils).

Regionally, response was highest from the North East (58 per cent / 7 councils) and lowest from the East Midlands (36 per cent / 16 councils)

Summary of results

- The median gross training expenditure per full time equivalent employee was £134.
- The median gross training expenditure on member development per councillor was £91.
- On average 0.8 days were spent on off-the-job training per employee.
- In 2014/15 there was a median of 11 apprentices, 14 work experience placements and 1 graduate placement per council.
- The most common capability or capacity skills gap across England was in relation to supporting commerciality, this was also the biggest skills priority.
- There was a median average of 13 per cent labour turnover rate and a median average vacancy rate of 7 per cent.
- Nine out of 10 (93 per cent) said it was their council's policy to increase opportunities for staff to work flexibly and 95 per cent said at

¹ <http://www.local.gov.uk/research-pay-and-workforce>

least some vacancies were advertised with the option of either working part time or on a flexible basis.

- On average, 3.8 per cent of days were lost due to sickness and 8.5 days per FTE employee.
- The most common cause of sickness absence was “stress, depression, anxiety, mental health and fatigue” (22 per cent of days lost).
- On average 46 per cent of the top five per cent of earners were women, three per cent were black, Asian or from other minority ethnic (BAME) groups and two per cent had a disability.
- Seven out of 10 councils (71 per cent) use “time served (i.e. annual incremental progression)” as the system of individual pay progression for the majority of staff.
- Nearly half of councils (44 per cent) carried out an employee engagement survey during 2014/15.

Introduction

The Local Government Workforce Survey 2014/15 provides information on key elements of the workforce within councils and includes data on school support staff, but excludes teachers. The survey was conducted by the Local Government Association (LGA) and updates previous surveys in the series.

Methodology

The survey was conducted by the LGA's Research and Information team using an online form. An email containing a unique link was sent to all 353 heads of human resources (or equivalent position) in English councils.

The survey was available to complete online between November 2015 and March 2016.

The final overall response rate achieved was 43 per cent (153 councils).

Table 1 shows response rate by council type. The response rate was highest from metropolitan districts (58 per cent / 21 councils) and lowest from shire districts (38 per cent / 76 councils).

Table 1: Response rates by council type		
Council type	Completed	Response rate (%)
Shire County	12	44
Shire District	76	38
London Borough	15	45
Metropolitan District	21	58
English Unitary	29	52
Total	153	43

Regionally, response was highest from the North East (58 per cent / 7 councils) and lowest from the East Midlands (36 per cent / 16 councils) (Table 2).

Table 2: Response rates by region		
Region	Completed	Response rate (%)
East Midlands	16	36
East of England	22	42
Greater London	15	45
North East	7	58
North West	19	46
South East	31	42
South West	16	39
West Midlands	15	45
Yorkshire and the Humber	12	55
Total	153	43

Where tables and figures report the base, the description refers to the group of people who were asked the question and the number in brackets refers to the number of respondents who answered each question. Please note that bases vary throughout the survey.

Where the response base is less than 50, care should be taken when interpreting percentages, as small differences can seem magnified. Therefore, where this is the case in this report, the non-percentage values are reported, in brackets, alongside the percentage values.

The results are broken down into two groups, with shire districts as one group and single tier and county councils combining to form the second group. This is because district councils are usually much smaller than both single tier and county councils. Presenting the results in this way means they can be viewed in the context of organisation size.

Throughout the report percentages in figures and tables may add to more than 100 per cent due to rounding.

Local Government Workforce Survey 2014/15

This section contains analysis of the full set of results.

Training and development

Councils provided their gross training expenditure on employees. Data on numbers of employees, derived from the Quarterly Public Sector Employment Survey², was used to calculate the average expenditure on training per employee.

The median gross amount that councils had spent per employee in 2014/15 was £134. In shire districts the reported median was £199 per employee and in upper / single tier areas the median was £89. Please see Table 3.

Table 3: Gross training expenditure per employee			
Response	Shire district	Single/upper tier	England
Mean (£)	223	111	172
Median (£)	199	89	134
<i>Base</i>	69	58	127

Base: all respondents (127)

Similarly, data provided by councils on gross training expenditure for member development and data on the number of councillors (held by the LGA) was used to calculate average expenditure on member development per councillor.

The median gross amount spent per councillor was £91 across England. In shire districts the median amount spent was £68 per member and in single and upper tier councils the median was £135. Please see Table 4.

Table 4: Gross training expenditure on member development per councillor			
Response	Shire district	Single/upper tier	England
Mean (£)	79	167	123
Median (£)	68	135	91
<i>Base</i>	58	58	116

Base: all respondents (116)

² http://www.local.gov.uk/research-pay-and-workforce/-/journal_content/56/10180/2991184/ARTICLE

Only 48 councils could provide a figure for the number of days of off-the job training per employee, so the values reported here should be taken as indicative only and the figures are not broken down by council type.

The median number of days of off-the job training per employee was 0.8. Please see Table 5.

Table 5: Days of off-the-job training per employee			
Response	Shire district	Single/upper tier	England
Mean (days)	-	-	1.0
Median (days)	-	-	0.8
<i>Base</i>	-	-	48

Base: all respondents (48)

In terms of work experience, there was a median of 14 placements provided by councils in 2014/15. In district councils there was a median of eight work experience placements and in single and upper tier councils the median was 30.

Respondents were also asked how many graduates their council provided placements for in 2014/15. For districts there was a median of zero, since most did not provide any graduate placements, and in single and upper tier areas the median was three. Overall, across all council types, the median was one. Please see Table 6.

Table 6: How many of the following were directly employed or placed in 2014/15...				
Response category	Response	Shire district	Single/up per tier	England
Work experience placements	Mean	10	58	32
	Median	8	30	14
	<i>Base</i>	61	50	111
Graduate placements	Mean	1	6	3
	Median	0	3	1
	<i>Base</i>	60	57	117

Base: all respondents (work experience placements: 111; graduate placements: 117)

The Workforce Survey 2014/15 did not include a question on the number of apprentices as it has done in previous years. This is because the question was included in a separate survey earlier in the year. These results are reported here. The survey achieved a response rate of 60 per cent, and included questions about the expected number of apprentices in subsequent years.

The median number of apprentices taken on by councils in 2014/15 was 11. In district councils the median was four and in single and upper tier councils there was a median average of 35 apprentices.

The median number of apprentices expected to have been taken on by councils in 2015/16 was 10. In district councils the expected median was four and in single and upper tier councils there was an expected median average of 40 apprentices.

The median number of apprentices expected to have been taken on by councils in 2016/17 was 15. In district councils the expected median was six and in single and upper tier councils there was an expected median average of 45 apprentices.

Table 7: How many apprentices were directly employed in 2014/15 and how many are expected to be placed in subsequent years				
Response category	Response	Shire district	Single/up per tier	England
2014/15	Mean	5	44	25
	Median	4	35	11
	<i>Base</i>	93	92	184
2015/16	Mean	5	50	28
	Median	4	40	10
	<i>Base</i>	90	89	178
2016/17	Mean	6	55	32
	Median	5	45	15
	<i>Base</i>	64	74	137

Base: all respondents (2014/15: 184; 2015/16: 178; 2016/17: 137)

The data were also used to estimate the total number of apprentices taken on in 2014/15, plus the expected numbers of apprentices in 2015/16 and 2016/17. In 2014/15 we estimated that there were approximately 7,000 apprentices taken on in councils in England, and that there would be approximately 8,000 in 2015/17 and 9,000 in 2016/17.

Councils were asked whether they have any capability or capacity skills gaps in a number of management areas. A capability skills gap is where managers in a council require additional training and development or support to close the skills gap. A capacity skills gap is where managers have the skills, but have no capacity to utilise them effectively.

The top two capability or capacity skills gaps across England were in relation to supporting commerciality (77 per cent) and supporting digitisation/use of technology (68 per cent). Table 8 shows the percentages of councils saying

that there was either a capacity skills gap, a capability skills gap or both. Table 21 in the annex of this report shows a more detailed breakdown of the results.

Table 8: Does your council have any capability or capacity gaps in the following skill areas?			
Response	Shire district (%)	Single / upper tier (%)	England (%)
Supporting commerciality	70	83	77
Supporting digitalisation/use of technology	61	74	68
Managing performance	49	75	63
Talent management / spotting	45	80	63
Coaching / mentoring staff	50	76	63
Managing change	53	71	62
Motivating staff	39	62	50
Engaging staff	39	61	49
Recruiting staff	23	38	31
Understanding equalities and diversity	22	32	27

Base: all respondents (134)

For each of the management skill areas respondents were also asked whether each of the skill areas were a priority, meaning it was a skills gap that would be addressed in the next 12 months. The top three skills priorities across England were supporting commerciality (48 per cent), managing change (47 per cent) and managing performance (44 per cent).

Table 9: Skills priorities			
Response	Shire district (%)	Single/up per tier (%)	England (%)
Supporting commerciality	43	52	48
Managing change	39	55	47
Managing performance	37	51	44
Supporting digitalisation/use of technology	34	45	40
Coaching / mentoring staff	26	35	31
Talent management / spotting	20	36	28
Engaging staff	24	31	27
Motivating staff	16	21	18
Recruiting staff	14	19	17

Understanding equalities and diversity	12	21	16
<i>Base</i>	76	77	153

Base: all respondents (153)

Recruitment and retention

Labour turnover is the total number of leavers as a percentage of the average headcount of employees over the financial year. The median average turnover reported by councils for 2014/15 was 13 per cent.

The vacancy rate is the number of vacancies on 1 April 2015 as a percentage of the overall headcount on the same date. The median vacancy rate reported by councils for this was 7 per cent. Please see Table 10.

Table 10: Labour turnover and vacancy rate				
Response category	Response	Shire district	Single/up per tier	England
Labour turnover	Mean (%)	12.6	14.4	13.5
	Median (%)	12.7	13.4	13.0
	<i>Base</i>	72	76	148
Vacancy rate	Mean (%)	5.6	12.8	8.5
	Median (%)	2.9	15.0	7.0
	<i>Base</i>	46	31	77

Base: all respondents (labour turnover: 148; vacancy rate: 77)

The Workforce Survey 2014/15 included some additional questions on flexible working. Councils were asked whether it was their policy to increase opportunities for staff to work flexibly. Across England over nine out of 10 councils (93 per cent) said this was their council's policy. See Table 11.

Table 11: Is it your council's policy to increase opportunities for staff to work flexibly?			
Response	Shire district	Single / upper tier	England
Yes (%)	91	96	93
No (%)	7	4	5
Don't know (%)	3	0	1
Total (%)	100	100	100

Base: all respondents (153)

Councils were also asked about their approach to advertising vacancies in relation to flexible working. Over half (54 per cent) indicated that all or most vacancies were advertised with the option of either working part time or on a flexible basis. Only five per cent indicated that no vacancies were offered with

the option of either working part time or on a flexible basis. See Table 12.

Table 12: Which of the following statements best describes your council's approach to advertising vacancies?			
Response	Shire district	Single / upper tier	England
"All vacancies are advertised with the option of either working part time or on a flexible basis."	20	23	22
"Most vacancies are advertised with the option of either working part time or on a flexible basis."	33	32	33
"Some vacancies are advertised with the option of either working part time or on a flexible basis."	39	40	40
"No vacancies are advertised with the option of either working part time or on a flexible basis."	8	3	5
Don't know	0	1	1
Total	100	100	100

Base: all respondents (153)

Sickness absence

Councils were asked to provide their sickness absence rate in two different ways: sickness absence as a percentage of days lost and the days lost to sickness absence per FTE employee. For both rates, councils were asked to provide a breakdown into short and long-term absence as well as the total. Short-term absence is defined as absence lasting up to and including 20 days and long-term is any absence over 20 days.

The sickness absence rate as a percentage is calculated by dividing the total number of days absence by the total days contracted to be worked and multiplied by 100. Councils reported a median of 3.8 per cent of days lost due to sickness overall. Sixty three councils were able to provide a breakdown and the medians for short and long-term sickness absence were 1.7 per cent and 2.3 per cent respectively. Please see Table 13.

Table 13: Percentage of days lost due to sickness				
Response category	Response	Shire district	Single/up per tier	England
Short-term sickness absence rate	Mean (%)	1.8	1.8	1.8
	Median (%)	1.7	1.8	1.7
	<i>Base</i>	23	45	68
	Mean (%)	2.0	2.5	2.3

Long-term sickness absence rate	Median (%)	1.8	2.5	2.3
	<i>Base</i>	23	45	68
Total sickness absence rate	Mean (%)	3.8	4.3	4.1
	Median (%)	3.2	4.1	3.8
	<i>Base</i>	30	52	82

Base: all respondents (short-term: 68; long-term: 68; total: 82)

A greater number of respondents were able to provide data on the number of days lost due to sickness per FTE employee. Councils calculate this by dividing the total number of days of absence by the total number of FTE employees.

Councils reported a median of 8.5 days lost per FTE employee in 2014/15. The median for short term absence was 3.8 days and the median for long-term absence was 4.9 days. Please see Table 14.

Table 14: Days lost due to sickness per FTE employee				
Response category	Response	Shire district	Single/up per tier	England
Short-term sickness absence per FTE	Mean (days)	3.9	3.8	3.8
	Median (days)	4.0	3.8	3.9
	<i>Base</i>	52	60	112
Long-term sickness absence per FTE	Mean (days)	4.2	5.6	4.9
	Median (days)	3.9	5.6	4.9
	<i>Base</i>	52	60	112
Total sickness absence per FTE	Mean (days)	8.0	9.0	8.5
	Median (days)	7.9	9.0	8.5
	<i>Base</i>	69	70	139

Base: all respondents (short-term: 112; long-term: 112; total: 139)

Councils were also asked to provide a breakdown of the number of days lost due to various illnesses. In total 91 were able to provide figures relating to each of the categories we requested³. The percentages were calculated by dividing each cause by the total number of days across the categories.

The biggest cause of sickness in 2014/15 was *stress, depression, anxiety*,

³ This excludes councils who stated that over 25 per cent of their days lost was caused by 'other' types of sickness absence. This is because it suggests that their system for coding sickness absence was not equivalent to the categories requested by us, and would therefore negatively affect the validity of this analysis.

mental health and fatigue (22.2 per cent), followed by *other musculo-skeletal problems* (15.7 per cent) and *infections* (8.7 per cent). Please see Table 15.

Table 15: Percentage of days lost to sickness by causes			
Response	Shire district	Single / upper tier	England
Stress, depression, anxiety, mental health and fatigue (%)	17.5	22.5	22.2
Other musculo-skeletal problems (%)	18.2	15.6	15.7
Infections (%)	13.9	8.5	8.7
Stomach, liver, kidney, digestion (%)	10.9	8.6	8.7
Back and neck problems (%)	8.0	7.7	7.7
Chest, respiratory (%)	5.6	5.9	5.9
Eye, ear, nose & mouth/dental; sinusitis (%)	5.1	4.7	4.7
Neurological; headaches and migraines (%)	4.2	3.5	3.5
Genito-urinary; menstrual problems (%)	2.0	3.1	3.1
Heart, blood pressure, circulation (%)	2.8	2.9	2.9
Pregnancy related (%)	1.1	1.3	1.3
Other (%)	9.3	13.2	13.0
Unknown (%)	1.4	2.4	2.4
<i>Base</i>	39	52	90

Base: all respondents (90)

Leadership

The median average for the top five per cent of earners in councils who were women was 43 per cent. In shire districts the median was 35 per cent and in single and upper tier councils the median was 52 per cent.

The median average for the percentage of the top five per cent of earners in councils who were black, Asian or from other minority ethnic groups (BAME) was five per cent. In single and upper tier councils the median was seven per cent, but in shire districts the median was zero per cent. The reason there was a median of zero per cent for district councils is because a majority had no officers in the top five per cent of earners who were from BAME groups.

The median average for the percentage of the top five per cent of earners in councils who had a disability was two per cent across England, three per cent in single and upper tier councils and zero per cent in shire districts. Please see Table 16.

Table 16: Percentage of the top five per cent of earners who are women, BAME or disabled

Response category	Response	Shire district	Single/upper tier	England
Percentage of the top 5 earners who are women	Mean (%)	35	51	43
	Median (%)	35	52	46
	Base	68	72	140
Percentage of the top 5 of earners who are BAME	Mean (%)	3	7	5
	Median (%)	0	5	3
	Base	69	71	140
Percentage of the top 5 of earners with a disability	Mean (%)	3	3	3
	Median (%)	0	3	2
	Base	63	69	132

Base: all respondents (women: 140; BAME: 140; disability: 132)

Pay, rewards and performance management

The majority of respondents (84 per cent) reported that their council was using “other flexible benefits (including salary sacrifice schemes)” in their approach to employee rewards. This was followed by “other flexible leave benefits” (69 per cent). Please see Table 17 for the full results to this question.

Table 17: Which, if any, of the following elements do you use, or are you planning to use in your approach to rewards?

Response category	Response	Shire district	Single / upper tier	England
Trading leave	Yes, already in use (%)	25	27	26
	Implementing in the next financial year (%)	3	6	5
	No, not implementing (%)	55	55	55
	Don't know (%)	17	12	14
	Total (%)	100	100	100
Other flexible leave benefits	Yes, already in use (%)	67	70	69
	Implementing in the next financial year (%)	1	5	3
	No, not implementing (%)	17	18	18
	Don't know (%)	14	6	10
	Total (%)	100	100	100

Total reward benefit statements	Yes, already in use (%)	4	4	4
	Implementing in the next financial year (%)	7	6	7
	No, not implementing (%)	71	69	70
	Don't know (%)	18	21	20
	Total (%)	100	100	100
Survey of employee reward preferences	Yes, already in use (%)	16	10	13
	Implementing in the next financial year (%)	8	10	9
	No, not implementing (%)	59	52	56
	Don't know (%)	17	27	22
	Total (%)	100	100	100
Other flexible benefits (including salary sacrifice schemes)	Yes, already in use (%)	86	83	84
	Implementing in the next financial year (%)	4	5	5
	No, not implementing (%)	7	6	7
	Don't know (%)	4	5	5
	Total (%)	100	100	100

Base: all respondents (153)

About seven out of 10 respondents (71 per cent) said that their council used “time served (ie annual incremental progression)” as the system of individual pay progression for the majority of staff. This was followed by “performance / contribution related progression”, which was used by around a fifth of councils (22 per cent).

Table 18: What system of individual pay progression does your authority use for the majority of staff?

Response	Shire district	Single / upper tier	England
Time served (i.e. annual incremental progression) (%)	74	69	71
Performance/contribution related progression (%)	21	22	22
Spot salaries (i.e. no incremental progression) (%)	3	5	4
Other (%)	1	3	2
Don't know (%)	1	1	1
Total (%)	100	100	100

Base: all respondents (152)

Over nine out of 10 councils (93 per cent) indicated that they carried out an

employee engagement survey in 2014/15. See Table 19.

Table 19: Did your authority carry out an employee engagement survey in the 2014/15 financial year?			
Response	Shire district	Single / upper tier	England
Yes (%)	91	96	93
No (%)	7	4	5
Don't know (%)	3	0	1
Total (%)	100	100	100

Base: all respondents (153)

Organisational design review

Respondents were asked about when, if at all they had last carried out an organisational design review. Almost four out of 10 (37 per cent) across England had conducted an organisation design review during 2015/16 (ie between 1 April 2015 and at the time of completing the survey). Among single and upper tier councils almost half (48 per cent) had conducted such a review in 2015/16, but only a quarter (26 per cent) of district councils.

Only 15 per cent had not conducted an organisational design review at all in the previous five years, with only nine per cent of single/upper tier councils and a fifth (21 per cent) of district councils being in this position.

Table 20: When in the last five years, if at all, has your organisation conducted an organisational design review?			
Response	Shire district (%)	Single / upper tier (%)	England (%)
2015/16 financial year (ie between 1 April 2015 and present)	26	48	37
2014/15 financial year	21	10	16
2013/14 financial year	7	10	8
2012/13 financial year	5	9	7
2011/12 financial year	9	8	8
We have not conducted an organisational design review in the last five years	21	9	15
Don't know	11	5	8
Total	100	100	100

Base: all respondents (153)

Annex

This table was referenced at page 10 of this report.

Table 21: Does your council have any capability or capacity gaps in the following skill areas?				
Response category	Response	Shire district	Single/upper tier	England
Managing change	There is a capability skills gap	29	25	27
	There is a capacity skills gap	3	8	6
	There is both a capability skills gap and a capacity skills gap	21	38	29
	There is neither a capability skills gap nor a capacity skills gap	47	30	38
Managing performance	There is a capability skills gap	30	30	30
	There is a capacity skills gap	3	6	5
	There is both a capability skills gap and a capacity skills gap	16	39	28
	There is neither a capability skills gap nor a capacity skills gap	52	24	38
Understanding equalities and diversity	There is a capability skills gap	9	14	11
	There is a capacity skills gap	6	6	6
	There is both a capability skills gap and a capacity skills gap	7	12	10
	There is neither a capability skills gap nor a capacity skills gap	78	68	73
Recruiting staff	There is a capability skills gap	15	15	15
	There is a capacity skills gap	1	4	3

	There is both a capability skills gap and a capacity skills gap	7	19	13
	There is neither a capability skills gap nor a capacity skills gap	76	61	69
Talent management / spotting	There is a capability skills gap	22	22	22
	There is a capacity skills gap	9	10	10
	There is both a capability skills gap and a capacity skills gap	14	48	31
	There is neither a capability skills gap nor a capacity skills gap	55	19	37
Coaching / mentoring staff	There is a capability skills gap	16	26	21
	There is a capacity skills gap	14	13	13
	There is both a capability skills gap and a capacity skills gap	20	37	29
	There is neither a capability skills gap nor a capacity skills gap	50	24	37
Engaging staff	There is a capability skills gap	14	25	19
	There is a capacity skills gap	8	11	9
	There is both a capability skills gap and a capacity skills gap	17	25	21
	There is neither a capability skills gap nor a capacity skills gap	61	40	50
Motivating staff	There is a capability skills gap	14	24	19
	There is a capacity skills gap	11	8	9
	There is both a capability skills gap and a capacity skills gap	14	30	22
	There is neither a capability skills gap nor a capacity skills gap	61	38	49
Supporting commerciality	There is a capability skills gap	22	21	22
	There is a capacity skills gap	10	9	9

	There is both a capability skills gap and a capacity skills gap	38	53	46
	There is neither a capability skills gap nor a capacity skills gap	30	17	23
Supporting digitalisation/use of technology	There is a capability skills gap	19	25	22
	There is a capacity skills gap	8	14	11
	There is both a capability skills gap and a capacity skills gap	34	35	35
	There is neither a capability skills gap nor a capacity skills gap	39	26	32

Base: all respondents (134)

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