Social Work Placements Handbook 2026/27

BSc (Hons) Social Work

PGDIP Social Work (Step-Up)

College of Health, Science and Society

School of Health & Social Wellbeing

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Introduction

This A-Z document intends to outline the processes and support relevant to students completing practice placements as part of the BSc (Hons) Social Work programme.
Additional guidance is available via Practice Support Net which all students, practice educators/supervisors and practice tutors should read.

Students must spend at least 200 days in practice over the course of their programme. This is currently structured as;

- 30 Skills Days
- 70 day first placement (Social Work Placement 1)
- 100 day final placement (Critical Reflective Practice for Social Work 1)

It is mandatory for students to attend all placement days, including any recall days to University. A placement day is usually taken to mean no less than 7 hours (plus a lunch break), but exact hours and working patterns may vary depending on the placement provider. Integral to placements, students will apply theoretical learning to practice with service users, carers, and other professionals. This offers the opportunity to develop practical skills and professional competence to evidence the nine domains associated with the appropriate level of the Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF) and, ultimately, reach the Professional Standards, to register as a social worker with Social Work England.

To ensure students gain broad experience, contrasting learning opportunities should be provided within the first and final placement. For example:

- A student could work in child protection for one placement and with children with different needs (such as in a children's disability team) for their other placement.
- A student could work with children in one placement and with adults in their other placement.
- A student could work in a local authority setting in one placement and in the voluntary sector for their other placement.

Roles and Responsibilities

The Practice Learning Team consists of the Student, the Practice Educator/Practice Supervisor and the Practice Tutor. When the Practice Educator is from outside the organisation they are referred to as an Offsite Practice Educator.

Student: Has an overall responsibility to provide evidence of their capabilities through learning opportunities provided by the Practice Educator/Supervisor and the placement.

Practice Educator (PE): Has an overall responsibility for the student learning experience and enabling the student to develop capabilities through practice experience. The Practice Educator will act as a role model to the students in developing their social work practice. The Practice Educator is a qualified and registered social worker, they may undertake the role of both the Practice Educator and Practice Supervisor if they are located in the agency, otherwise the support of the student will be split between a Practice Educator and Practice Supervisor. The Practice Educator will be appropriately qualified to PEPS 1 level for first placements and PEPS 2 for last placements.

Off-Site Practice Educator (OSPE): If there is no on-site Practice Educator an offsite Practice Educator will be provided. They will work with a Practice Supervisor who will supervise day to day work or be directly accountable for the student's work. The OSPE must establish a systematic method to assess evidence provided by the student and meet regularly with both the student and supervisor. They are also a qualified and registered social worker and will be an experienced Practice Educator with a PEPS 2 qualification.

Practice Supervisor (PS): The Practice Supervisor provides daily management of the practice learning. If there is no on-site practice educator, they will meet regularly with the student and Practice Educator to verify evidence and facilitate learning. The Practice Supervisor may not be a qualified Social Worker but will have attended a Managing Practice Learning Course.

Practice Learning Coordinator (PLC): PLCs are located in each of our statutory placement partners and in larger charitable organisations and work closely with the UWE Placement Lead. PLCs are responsible for arranging student placements within their organisations and can provide additional support to students while on placement. PLCs may also become more involved with the practice learning team should difficulties arise.

Practice Tutor (PT): Is a university-based tutor whose remit is to support the student on placement. The Practice Tutor will chair the Practice Learning Agreement meeting and Interim Assessment Review (this may be face to face, virtually or a combination of both). Where is felt necessary the Practice Tutor may

also attend the Final Review. They will review the portfolio and provide feed-back on the context analysis, at the initial, interim and final stage assessments. The Practice Tutor will also take responsibility for any supportive actioning planning that may be required as a result of difficulties within the placement.

Placement Lead: The placement lead at UWE is responsible for the smooth running of all practice placements as well as supporting any placements experiencing difficulty. If the Practice Tutor is unavailable, queries should be directed to the Placement Lead. The Placement Lead also carries responsibility for the academic aspects of the placement modules, including recall days and academic assessments, and chairing the Quality Practice Panel.

Quality Practice Panel: The purpose of the Quality Practice Panel is to:

- Quality assure and moderate placement reports and portfolios highlighting identified strengths and areas for development moving forward.
- Make recommendations around student practice, including action plans and failing placements.
- Address other placement related issues, including reviewing Placement Opportunity Forms and Placement Audits and making recommendations in relation to Practice Educators.
- Review the online portfolio and practice learning documents for any views on developments and improvements that could be made.

The panels will meet at the end of each placement round, and at the midpoint. Additional panels may meet on an ad-hoc basis, where specific issues are to be discussed.

Using this panel ensures transparency and fairness for everyone involved in placements, including students, placement providers and, ultimately, people who use social work services. It provides support for UWE staff who may otherwise be expected to make unilateral decisions.

Professional Placement Office (PPO): PPO take responsibilities for all administrative aspects of placements such as matching students to placements via ARC, liaising with students about pre-placement tasks, records of practice days on ARC, placement related finance queries and can signpost any placement related queries to the relevant people at UWE.

Key Placement Procedures and Policies

Accident/Incident Reporting in Practice

If a student has an accident or experiences an incident in practice, this should be reported to the university using the Raising Concerns Report Form. Students should also advice their Practice Learning Team of any accidents/incidents at the earliest opportunity via email.

In the unlikely event that a student sustains a needle-stick injury, they must follow the organisation's local needle-stick injury policy which will include attending Occupational Health as soon as possible. The student must also ensure that the incident is reported to the University by using the Raising Concerns Report Form above. The student should also make sure that their Practice Learning Team are made aware of this.

Adverse Weather

Students should check the University website for advice on university closures and the local radio for travel information. University sites may be closed during adverse weather conditions, however placements may be open and students should speak with their Practice Educator/ Supervisor to discuss appropriate arrangements. During periods of adverse weather Practice Educators / Supervisors will work with students to consider any alternative arrangements that can be put in place, for example working from home.

Annual Leave

Social work students are not entitled to annual leave due to the short-term nature of the placements. The timetable will clearly show University holiday periods, to which you are entitled. If you need to take annual leave for specific reasons, especially immediately following placement, you should discuss this with the Module Leader.

ARC

ARC is a web-based system that holds student information, placement details and a record of placement days completed. Students will also evaluate their previous placement on ARC (to release placement details of the next) and can check the number of practice days they have completed. Students need to use ARC to complete the self-declaration of good health and good character and advise of any conflicts of interest relevant to practice placements.

Days in practice should be recorded in ARC on a weekly basis and signed off by the Practice Educator / Supervisor. This ensures there is a clear record of days the student has completed allowing timely payment to the agencies supporting the practice, and evidencing the required number of days in practice.

Bursaries (NHS for Social Work)

BSc (Hons) Social Work: The Social Work Bursary is administered by Student Services, part of the NHS Business Services Authority (NHSBSA). They assess, award and pay bursaries to eligible students on approved undergraduate and postgraduate social work courses on behalf of the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC). Bursaries include a travel allowance for the purpose of attending practice placements.

Concerns About the Placement

What to do if you become concerned about a student whilst on placement
Practice Tutors should be alerted to any difficulties/concerns that arise within placement at the earliest opportunity. In the event the practice tutor is unavailable, please contact the Practice Support Line on hscpsl@uwe.ac.uk or 0117 3281152. In such cases, a Practice Learning Team meeting may be convened, which will be chaired by the Practice Tutor or placement lead. The Practice Tutor takes responsibility for recording this meeting and implementing an action plan with suitable deadlines recorded. This supportive action plan should be reviewed at three weekly intervals by the Practice Learning Team, as well as within the Interim Assessment and Final Assessment reviews.

The advice below sets out how the university will seek to deal with a range of possible difficulties that arise in practice, including those which relate to other matters than student circumstances alone.

What sort of difficulties might arise?
These could relate to one or more of the following areas:

a) personal circumstances that affect student learning and professional development
b) aspects of the practice learning opportunity including the quality of supervision and support or the availability of suitable work
c) lack of student progress in meeting assessment requirements

d) standards of practice in agencies adversely affecting the well-being of service users or carers
e) suitability of the student for professional practice.

Who can raise concerns?

Concerns may be identified by the Student, Practice Supervisor, Practice Educator, Practice Tutor, or anyone else involved in the student's practice learning.

How will concerns be addressed?

Transparent discussion of the issues should be discussed at the earliest opportunity within the Practice Learning Team. The Practice Learning Agreement should be reviewed at this point and amended where required. Placements should not be terminated without this meeting as it may be necessary for UWE to formally suspend the placement. The meeting should be chaired by the Practice Tutor or UWE Placement Lead.

Where there are complex issues, it may be that a meeting between the practice tutor and placement agency is required, prior to a practice learning team meeting. The placement lead can be available to support these discussions.

Following the meeting the Practice Tutor is responsible for informing the Placement Lead and the Practice Educator/Supervisor responsible for informing the Team Manager and Practice Learning Coordinator, unless other arrangements for communication are negotiated.

Written records of communication, discussion and decisions, as well as any support being offered will be recorded within the portfolio and depending on the severity, may be referred to UWE's Professional suitability and conduct procedure (PDF). Records of meetings will be signed by all participants. Information will be shared in accordance with University policy, legal frameworks and Social Work England requirements.

Standard of practice learning opportunity - if it is clear the practice learning opportunity is not viable for reasons other than student's standard of practice, and it is not possible to resolve the problem at that stage, the Placement Lead and Practice Learning Team should decide whether the student continues in the placement. If the placement is halted an alternative should be provided within the same assessment opportunity. In this instance, it may not be possible to carry existing placement days into the next placement due to the requirement to evidence the nine PCF domains. Any placement moves must be approved by the placement lead.

Standard of student practice - if there are any concerns regarding the standard of the student's practice a practice learning team meeting should be held

immediately and the process outlined above followed. For concern relating to the suitability of the student the University Professional Suitability and Conduct Policy should be used.

If the student does not meet the required standard and subsequently fails the placement, following appropriate support, the Quality Practice Panel will consider and make recommendations to the programme leader around whether the student should have another opportunity to undertake the placement. The recommendation will then be considered by the Faculty Award Board who will make the final decision.

Concerns regarding practice in the agency with Service Users (Whistle Blowing Policy) - if the issue relates to agency practice that causes serious concern regarding service users' well-being, the Raising Concerns Policy applies. This states that the agency whistle blowing policy for such a concern should be followed, and the student be supported by the university during this period.

The Practice Learning Team, in consultation with the placement lead, will decide whether the student continues in the placement. If the decision is made that the student should not continue, an alternative should be provided within the same assessment opportunity.

Disability Services

The Disability Service offer a wide range of support for students who have a disability or long-term health condition. Support services include assisted technologies, assessment, and support for specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia, and support with reasonable adjustments for placements via an access plan. Access plans are designed to give the student an opportunity to set out their needs around placements. This includes any support or reasonable adjustments that could be put in place, such as access to the placement, parking, travel and managing the working day.

If a student thinks they may have a specific learning difficulty, they should contact Disability Services for a diagnostic assessment. Some students do not realise that they have a specific learning difficulty until they reach university and may have developed strategies for dealing with the difficulties, however an assessment can be helpful as the impact on placements can be different.

Students will have been asked to declare any disability on their occupational health form on admission. If a student has a disability which may affect their placement, they should discuss this with the placement lead, who will complete the Access to Placement Plan in collaboration with the Disability Service. This plan will be shared with the placement provider.

Disclosure Barring Service (DBS)

All social work students require an enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check prior to starting the programme and students will not be allowed to start placement until they have DBS clearance. This DBS clearance is valid for three years, unless the student has a break in studies, following which a new DBS application will be required. International students will require UK enhanced DBS clearance prior to commencing placement and can apply for this once a UK home address is confirmed.

If a student receives a criminal conviction during their studies, it is a requirement of the university that they disclose this. In the first instance, this should be reported to their Academic Personal Tutor and Programme Leader.

Students must keep their DBS certificate safe as they may be asked to produce it for future practice placements as part of the placement's safer recruitment process.

Emotional wellbeing

Some students experience challenges with balancing the demands of practice and academic work whilst maintaining a healthy work – life balance. If a student is struggling with their emotional wellbeing they can consider the following:

- Talking to their Practice Learning Team
- Contacting their Academic Personal Tutor for advice
- Contacting the Practice Support Line hscpsl@uwe.ac.uk or 0117 32 81152
- Accessing support from the university Health and Wellbeing for students
- Speaking to their GP

Whilst there is flexibility in the pattern of attendance at placement, there must be sufficient rest breaks, students must have an 11-hour rest period within a 24- hour period, e.g., a student cannot do a night shift followed by a late shift if both fall within the same 24-hour period. This would also mean; it is not acceptable to do a night shift and then attend lectures the next day in university.

Should there be cause for serious concern about a student's wellbeing, please contact the Practice Support Line as above.

Health & Safety

Student's must read and understand the agency policies and procedures for Incident Reporting, Health and Safety, Risk Assessment and Lone Working. The student's understanding of such policies should be articulated in the Practice Learning Agreement and discussed with the Practice Learning Team.
Lone working may form part of the normal pattern of work in a placement. If lone working is considered appropriate for the student's stage of learning, this should be discussed and agreed at the Placement Learning Agreement meeting.

In order to develop the skills that are required to become a qualified practitioner, students must be an active participant in practice. However, unaccompanied visits to service users/ carers should only be undertaken after careful consideration of the following factors:

- The student's stage of learning
- The student's capability/previous experience
- The type and nature of the skills being developed
- Staff knowledge of the service user/carers and potential risks involved in lone working
- The student must not use their own vehicle if they cannot provide evidence of business insurance cover

Induction

All students should attend a University induction to the relevant placement module before commencing both the first and last placement. If for any reason students cannot attend this induction, they must contact the Placement Lead to discuss the absence and identify how the missed learning will be covered.

All students should have visited the placement provision, to attend a pre-placement meeting with the Practice Educator/Supervisor, prior to commencing the first and last placement. A thorough induction should be offered in the first four weeks of placement highlighting essential information relating to health and safety, personal safety, IT access, organisational policies, and dress code. An induction plan is beneficial in ensuring all important information has been covered.

Learner Support Fund

The Student Support Fund is a fund provided by UWE Bristol to support UK undergraduate and postgraduate students who may need extra financial support to remain in higher education. Priority is given to care leavers, estranged students, students with caring responsibilities and students with a disability. All applications are means tested and eligibility criteria apply. If a student experiences exceptional financial hardship which will prevent them from attending or continuing the social work course, they should contact a Money Advisor.

Manual Handling and Medication

Social Work students are not expected to undertake any manual handling and therefore no manual handling training is provided. Additionally, social work students are not authorised to administer medication as this is not relevant to the social work role and therefore is not something for which they receive training.

Occupational Health Service

The University commissions an occupational health service for assessment, advice and guidance in relation to fitness to engage on a Social Work programme, fitness to return to the programme and practice placements following a time out, and other health related matters.

A student may be asked to contact the service directly for telephone advice before a referral is made for them. All students should declare all health conditions before starting on the programme so that a judgement can be made whether they

are fit to undertake the programme. If a student does not declare a known health condition, which compromises their ability to be on the programme, this may be considered under the UWE Professional suitability and conduct procedure (PDF).

Paid Employment Outside of the Social Work Programme

The Social Work programmes are regarded full-time courses. Students have a responsibility to ensure that they are fit to attend their practice placement and other commitments associated with their studies. Undertaking paid employment whilst on placement is not advised as it will be difficult for students to maintain their own wellbeing and achieve well in their studies. Students sometimes gain employment with the placement provider; this paid employment cannot happen whilst the student is still on placement with the agency.

PebblePad

Social work students complete a portfolio of work while on placement using the PebblePad system. The portfolio has several elements including the Practice Assessment Report (PAR). This is a working online document that the Practice Learning Team use to record assessment and evidence of the student's practice against the PCF domains. Full training for PebblePad is provided during induction. Any technical difficulties in relation to PebblePad should be directed to HASpebblepad@uwe.ac.uk

Students should be allocated protected time each week, equivalent to half day a per week or where negotiated, one day a fortnight for the purpose of placement related research and the completion of their PebblePad Portfolio. Students should agree tasks for completion during this time with the Practice Educator/Supervisor. Students are not entitled to self-directed study days during practice placement for the purpose of other academic study. Study time cannot be negotiated for dissertation supervision or other coursework preparation which should be conducted outside of placement days.

Placement Allocations

BSc (Hons) Social Work: Placements are allocated through the Professional Practice Office and each placement must meet the requirements of the programme. Students sometimes identify a reason why the placement may not be suitable, for example a family member is a service user or works in the organisation. If this information has not been previously shared through the student profile on

ARC, the student should contact the Placement Lead at the earliest opportunity. Students must be prepared to travel within 60 miles of the university's geographical location. This is as per the terms of their offer at admission. In order to maintain transparency and equity, students are not allowed to contact and/or organise their own placements.

Practice Absence

If a student is absent from placement, they must report it to the Practice Absence Support Line and Practice Learning Team as soon as possible on the first day of absence.

The student should email practiceabsence@uwe.ac.uk copying in the practice learning team, or call 0117 32 83283 and leave a message with their name, contact number, current placement details and reason for their absence. Calls are not routinely returned from this number. If a student wishes to speak to someone, they should contact their Practice Tutor or Placement Lead in the first instance. Alternatively, students can email the placement office on ppoallocations@uwe.ac.uk

Students must ensure their online time sheets reflect the sickness absences and is recorded correctly.

If a student does not arrive at placement as expected and nothing is heard from them, the placement should contact the Practice Support Line on 0117 32 81152 to report this.

If a student has fewer than 5 days sickness or absence in a block during a placement, they should negotiate with the placement to make up the days missed and ensure the Practice Learning Team are aware and in agreement with the plan. If the student has more than 5 days absent, liaison with the Placement Lead is crucial to plan the completion of the placement.

If a student is sick for up to six consecutive days, they must submit a self-certification form. These are available from the Information Point and should be submitted directly to the Professional Practice Office. If a student is sick for seven days or more, a medical certificate is required. This should also be submitted directly to the Professional Practice Office

Students who have long periods of sickness, or frequent short-term sickness/absence, will meet with the Practice Lead and may be required to attend Occupational Health for a health assessment, which the Programme Leader will

request. Students may be required to intermit from the programme if the absence is lengthy as they may not be able to achieve the required competences in the available time.

Students should contact their Practice Learning Team if they require compassionate leave. Up to 5 days can be authorised by the Academic Practice Tutor, dependent on circumstances.

All other authorised absence needs to be negotiated by the student with their Practice Tutor/ Placement Lead. The Practice Tutor may agree absence for hospital appointments and carer emergencies, the Practice Learning Team need to be informed of any absence.

Practice Days

A placement day is usually taken to mean no less than 7 hours (plus a lunch break), but exact hours and working patterns may vary depending on the placement provider.
Students cannot work additional hours to reduce the total number of placement days they need to complete. To meet Social Work England requirements for qualification every student is required to complete 200 practice days made up of; 30 skills days, 70 placement days at the first placement level and 100 placement days at the final placement level 3. Students will need to upload their attendance declaration for Skills Days to their PebblePad portfolio. Students are entitled to a 20-minute break for every 6 hours worked. They are also entitled to a lunch break which is usually 30 minutes; lunch breaks are not counted as hours worked. Lunch breaks must be taken.

Practice days are recorded in ARC using the information provided from timesheets. Any queries about the information held on ARC should be directed in the first instance to the placement office; ppoallocations@uwe.ac.uk .

Professional Practice Office (PPO)

The Professional Practice Office manages all student placement allocations time sheet queries, placement finances and any other administrative placement queries. Please contact PPOallocations@uwe.ac.uk .

Service User/Carer Feedback

Students are expected to obtain service user/carer feedback during placement in order to inform and develop their practice as a student social worker. Discussion and agreement on how this can be achieved should take place at the Placement Learning Agreement meeting with subsequent anonymised feedback and student reflection captured in the dedicated tab on PebblePad.

Social Networking/Media

Many students use Social Networking as a means of communication. UWE encourages appropriate use to promote positive social and working relationships, the sharing of information and ideas, learning and good practice. However, students should ensure use of social networking is in line with the UWE Conduct Policy When Using Social Media guidance. The UWE social work team position statement on use of social media can be found on practice support net under policies and procedures. Any individual deemed by the university to be using a social networking site in an inappropriate or offensive manner may be referred to the Professional suitability and conduct procedure (PDF).

****In line with BASWs Social Media guidance, service user information should never be shared online****

Student Pregnancy, Maternity, Adoption and Partner Leave

Students who become pregnant during their studies should inform their APT at the earliest opportunity. If students are on placement during this time, they should inform their Practice Learning Team at the earliest opportunity to ensure that appropriate risk assessment can be undertaken, in line with the agency's policies. For more information, see Student Pregnancy, Maternity, Adoption and Partner Leave webpages.

Student Support While on Placement

Should the need for support arise, the student or other members of the practice learning team should contact the Practice Tutor in the first instance, followed by the Placement Lead. If you are unable to reach them, please contact the Practice Support Line. Contact details are: hscpsl@uwe.ac.uk and 0117 32 81152.

Should students require support in relation to their wellbeing whilst on placement, the UWE Wellbeing Service has a range of support options available.

Supernumerary Status in Placement

Students have supernumerary status and should be not counted as part of the staffing numbers. Social Work England states that *"Students are not part of the normal staff team so should not be asked to cover staff shortages or absences or respond to pressures being experienced in the team/setting, unless doing so is consistent with meeting their learning needs." and that "Allocation of all workload for students should not, therefore, be determined by the volume of work within a team or setting but should be at the professional judgement of the practice educator/work-based supervisor and appropriate to the student's level of capability and agreed learning needs"*. This ensures that as a student they undertake the placement as a learning experience and are not considered part of the workforce. When supernumerary status is not upheld, this appears to have a negative impact on mentors, students, and service users. If a student experiences this as a problem on placement, they should discuss with their Practice Tutor.

Time Keeping

Good time keeping links with professional conduct, demonstrating motivation, reliability, and commitment. Social work placements may involve a variety of working patterns. To be and feel part of a placement team, it is essential to experience the setting fully. This includes being on time to attend any shift handover, team meetings, supervision and team debrief. It also ensures that students are up to date with the daily running of the placement, any changes which may have occurred since they were last there and any safeguarding issues. If a student knows they are going to be late, it is courteous and professional to let someone know. In placement this should be the Practice Supervisor and/ or Practice Educator.

Timesheets

Timesheets must be completed via ARC to accurately reflect the student's days in practice and should be authorised by the Practice Educator / Supervisor at least once per week. Failure to submit timesheets will be classed as a non-submission against the practice module and results in delays processing payments to the agency offering the placement.

Falsification of timesheets will be referred to the Professional Suitability process within the university and may result in discontinuation of studies.

Travel Arrangements

Students may be placed anywhere within a 60-mile radius of Bristol and are responsible for the costs associated with this travel.

Students using their own vehicle must ensure their car is appropriately insured, taxed, and, where relevant, has a valid MOT certificate. Students will need to ensure that 'business cover' is added to their insurance policy for any driving they do during placement hours and for the purposes of transporting service users in their vehicle. This should be confirmed in the Practice Learning Agreement. Car parking whilst on placement is limited or non-existent in many areas. It is therefore advisable for students to find out before starting their placement if there are any facilities for student car parking.

Students who are required to undertake travel either by public transport or when using their own vehicle should be entitled to claim expenses from the organisation they are placed with. This should made clear to students as part of the induction process and recorded on the Practice Learning Agreement Meeting. This does not include travel costs to and from placement which are the student's responsibility

(see also bursaries).

University Health Centre

The University Health Centre based on Frenchay Campus aims to provide accessible healthcare for everyone working or studying at the University. All UWE Bristol students can register with the Health Centre.

Withdrawing from Placement

Students may experience changes in personal circumstance or unexpected events that make it impossible for them to continue the placement. Wherever possible a supportive action plan should be developed to enhance practice learning. However, if this is not feasible or the best course of action, the placement may be discontinued. The student may also need to discuss intermitting or withdrawing from the programme. The decision to intermit or withdraw will be considered with the Module Leader and Programme Leaders, and the faculty administrative process is followed. Anticipated dates and arrangements for the student's return will be clarified.

Intermitting or withdrawing can be a hard decision given the commitment already made and uncomfortable emotions may be raised by the issues involved. However, agencies and the programme team acknowledge that there are times when this is as an appropriate decision and indicates that students understand professional responsibility to services, service users and carers.
Assessment Implications - any modules that the student is taking at this point are treated according to the university regulations in terms of assessment opportunities and fees. Students are advised to consult a student adviser to make an informed decision and consider the implications of the decision.

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