



Cymru Iach ar Waith
Healthy Working Wales

Supporting Young People at Work

AN EMPLOYER'S GUIDE



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INTRODUCTION

This guide provides practical advice to help employers attract, support and develop young people, strengthening both individual organisations and the wider Welsh economy.

It was developed through workshops, surveys and informal discussions with employers, practitioners, young people and partner organisations.

Businesses across Wales face skills shortages, changing workforce needs and increasing pressure to attract and retain talent. At the same time, many employers overlook a valuable and often underused group: young people.

With the right support, they can become a skilled, loyal and motivated workforce for the future.

**YOUNG WORKERS
BRING ADAPTABILITY,
DIGITAL CONFIDENCE
AND FRESH
PERSPECTIVES.**

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1

YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE WORKPLACE

COMMON EXPERIENCES

Young people are entering a complex and fast-changing world of work shaped by economic uncertainty, rising living costs and evolving career pathways.

Employers should understand the experiences, expectations and pressures shaping this generation. Creating a supportive and safe environment will help attract talent, promote wellbeing and build a skilled, motivated workforce, while contributing to a more resilient Welsh economy.

THE CHANGING CONTEXT OF EARLY CAREERS

The move from education to work has become more complex, with young people facing a wider range of pathways and pressures than previous generations¹. Understanding this context helps employers engage and support early-career staff.

Key factors include:

- **Economic uncertainty** – Many young people have grown up through financial instability and cost-of-living pressures, shaping their confidence and career outlook.
- **Rising living costs** – Higher housing, transport and everyday expenses can create financial strain, particularly on entry-level salaries.
- **Changing career pathways** – Careers are less linear, with more movement between roles and sectors. Flexibility and ongoing learning are essential.
- **Digital transformation** – While often confident with technology, young workers may still need support to develop workplace-specific digital skills.

WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE BRING

- Adaptability and willingness to learn
- Confidence with digital tools
- Curiosity and new ideas
- Strong sense of purpose and values²
- Collaborative approaches



¹ Crowley, L. (2024) The Changing Face of the Youth Labour Market – [Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development](#)

² Deloitte's Gen Z and Millennial Survey (2024)

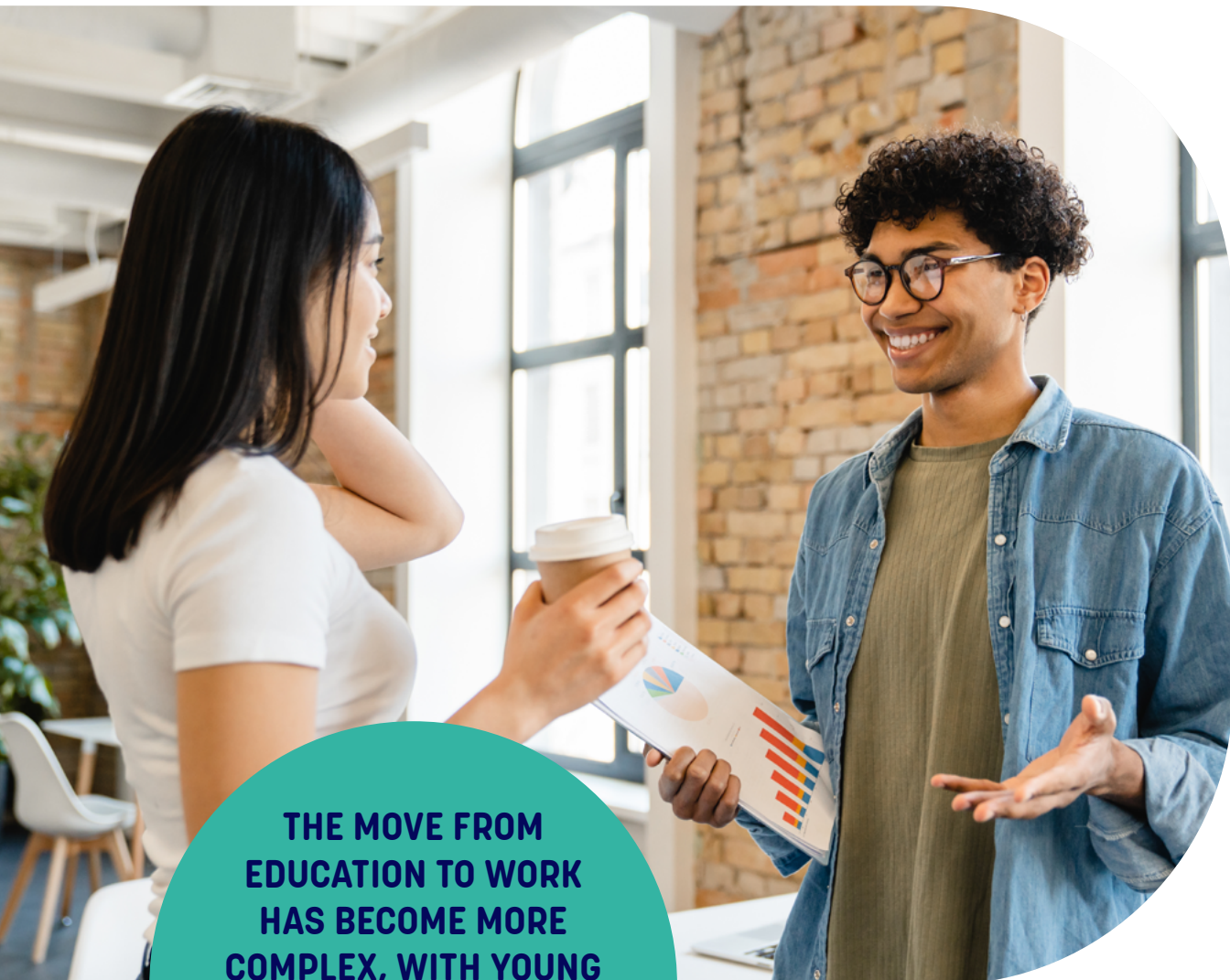
COMMON CHALLENGES

- Limited work experience
- Confidence and “imposter” feelings
- Navigating professional expectations
- Balancing independence with support
- Increased mental health pressures

**AVOID ASSUMPTIONS –
YOUNG PEOPLE ARE
DIVERSE INDIVIDUALS
WITH DIFFERENT NEEDS,
MOTIVATIONS AND POTENTIAL.**

WHY THIS MATTERS:

Understanding young workers improves recruitment, retention, wellbeing and long-term workforce development.



**THE MOVE FROM
EDUCATION TO WORK
HAS BECOME MORE
COMPLEX, WITH YOUNG
PEOPLE FACING
A WIDER RANGE
OF PATHWAYS AND
PRESSURES.**

2

RECRUITING YOUNG PEOPLE

Recruitment is often a young person's first experience of the workplace and it shapes how they view your organisation.

Traditional recruitment can create barriers for young people, especially first-time applicants. Complex processes, unclear requirements and expectations of prior experience can deter capable candidates, leaving some feeling they don't fit or that the organisation isn't for them.

COMMON BARRIERS

- **Lack of experience** – Many entry-level roles still ask for previous experience that young applicants may not yet have had the opportunity to gain.
- **Lack of networks** – Young people often lack established networks that can help them find out about job opportunities or secure references.
- **Complex application processes** – Long forms, unfamiliar terminology and multiple recruitment stages can be intimidating for first-time applicants.
- **Low confidence or unfamiliarity** – Some young people may not know how to write applications, prepare for interviews or present their skills effectively.
- **Financial and socioeconomic barriers** – Costs related to travel, equipment or unpaid work experience can disproportionately affect applicants from lower-income backgrounds.

**TRADITIONAL
RECRUITMENT CAN
CREATE BARRIERS
FOR YOUNG PEOPLE,
ESPECIALLY FIRST-TIME
APPLICANTS.**

INCLUSIVE RECRUITMENT

Many young people struggle to access good quality entry-level roles, while employers face skills shortages. Inclusive recruitment helps bridge this gap by widening access, recognising potential and creating fair opportunities for diverse young candidates.

Inclusive recruitment means:

- **Using clear, simple language that:**
 - Focuses on essential skills, not experience
 - Articulates and is transparent about pay and expectations
 - Highlights development opportunities
- **Widening entry routes to include:**
 - Apprenticeships and internships
 - School and college partnerships
 - Alternative or “second chance” pathways for young people who haven’t followed a typical or continuous path into employment³
- **Recruit for potential prioritising:**
 - Motivation and willingness to learn
 - Problem-solving and teamwork
 - Reliability and communication
- **Create a positive process by:**
 - Giving clear guidance and timelines
 - Offering feedback where possible
 - Ensuring fairness and accessibility

**RECRUITMENT
EXPERIENCES SHAPE
HOW YOUNG PEOPLE
VIEW YOUR
ORGANISATION.**

Inclusive selection processes mean:

- Providing clear instructions and timelines
- Offering guidance for interviews or assessments
- Making reasonable adjustments where needed
- Ensuring fair, trained interview panels

Use selection methods that reflect the role and avoid unnecessary or overly complex tests for entry-level positions.

³This can include those who have left education early, have gaps in employment or training, didn’t meet standard entry requirements or have faced barriers such as health, financial or personal challenges.

COMMUNICATION

For many young people, recruitment processes can feel intimidating. Clear and helpful communication builds trust and confidence:

- Acknowledge applications promptly
- Set realistic timelines
- Offer feedback where possible
- Maintain a respectful tone

A transparent and supportive process helps young people feel valued and improves their connection to your organisation, even if they are not selected.



> Visit the [HWW website](#) to learn more about communication in the workplace



3

EFFECTIVE ONBOARDING

The early days and weeks of employment strongly influence how confident, motivated, engaged and supported a young employee feels.

Effective onboarding goes beyond administrative induction. It is a structured process that helps new employees understand their role, connect with colleagues, build confidence and motivation, and begin contributing meaningfully to the organisation.

Young employees who feel welcomed, supported and informed are more likely to settle quickly and perform well.



Employers can achieve this by:

- Preparing before day one with clear information
- Providing a warm welcome and introductions
- Setting clear expectations and responsibilities
- Offering structured, manageable learning
- Scheduling regular check-ins

Support mechanisms can include:

- Line manager support
- Buddy or peer systems
- Ongoing onboarding (3–6 months)

STRONG ONBOARDING HELPS YOUNG EMPLOYEES SETTLE QUICKLY AND PERFORM CONFIDENTLY. AVOID OVERLOADING NEW STARTERS WITH INFORMATION; INSTEAD, BALANCE ESSENTIAL GUIDANCE WITH OPPORTUNITIES TO BUILD FAMILIARITY AND RELATIONSHIPS.

4

HEALTHY WORK DESIGN

The way work is organised has a powerful impact on employees' wellbeing, performance and long-term development.

Healthy work design involves structuring tasks, responsibilities and working conditions in ways that promote both productivity and wellbeing. When work is designed thoughtfully, young employees are more likely to feel motivated, capable and supported in their development.

Principles of healthy work include:



Clear roles and expectations

Role clarity helps employees understand what they are responsible for and how their work contributes to organisational goals. Without clear direction, young employees may feel uncertain about priorities or worry about making mistakes.



Manageable workloads

Workloads should be realistic and appropriate to experience, helping employees build skills without becoming overwhelmed.



Opportunities to learn

Jobs that involve repetitive or narrowly defined tasks can quickly lead to disengagement, especially for young employees eager to learn and grow.



Supportive relationships

Positive relationships with managers and colleagues provide guidance, feedback and reassurance, helping young employees develop confidence.



Safe and respectful environments

Employees should feel physically and psychologically safe, with clear standards that promote respect and prevent bullying or harassment.



Balanced autonomy and guidance

Young employees benefit from clear direction while developing independence, with responsibility increasing as their confidence grows.

DESIGN ROLES THAT ALLOW YOUNG EMPLOYEES TO LEARN, CONTRIBUTE AND GROW, WHILE AVOIDING OVERLOAD OR CONFUSION.

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SUPPORTING AND MANAGING YOUNG WORKERS

For many young people, a line manager has the greatest influence on their experience of work.

A supportive manager can help build confidence, develop skills and create a sense of belonging. In contrast, a poor management experience can quickly lead to disengagement, stress or early resignation.

Managing young workers effectively is not about lowering expectations. It means recognising their stage of development and providing the structure, support and feedback they need to succeed.

Good management focuses on:

- Clarity of expectations
- Regular support and check-ins
- Constructive, balanced feedback
- Learning and development opportunities
- Respect and inclusion

In practice:

- Explain what success looks like
- Encourage questions and curiosity
- Treat mistakes as learning opportunities
- Recognise progress and achievements
- Support confidence and wellbeing

MANAGERS WHO APPLY THESE PRINCIPLES IN PRACTICE HELP YOUNG EMPLOYEES BUILD CONFIDENCE, COMPETENCE AND COMMITMENT TO THEIR WORK. THESE WORKERS ARE MORE LIKELY TO THRIVE.

In turn, organisations benefit from increased engagement, stronger skills and a more resilient workforce.

6

BUILDING CONNECTION AND BELONGING

Feeling part of a team is essential for confidence and motivation.

Feeling connected to colleagues and included within a workplace community is a powerful contributor to engagement and wellbeing. Developing a sense of belonging can be particularly important for young people just starting out in employment. Many will be navigating new professional environments, adjusting to unfamiliar social norms, and building networks for the first time.

When young workers feel isolated or disconnected, they may struggle to ask for help, to participate confidently, or to remain motivated. Young employees are more likely to feel valued, supported and committed to their company or organisation when workplaces support them in building connections and a sense of belonging.

Employers can do this by:

- Encouraging early social connections
- Promoting peer relationships
- Offering mentoring opportunities
- Creating inclusive team cultures
- Recognising contributions



**A SENSE OF BELONGING
HELPS YOUNG WORKERS
ENGAGE, CONTRIBUTE
AND STAY.**

7

PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY

Young workers need to feel safe to ask questions, share ideas and learn from mistakes.

For young workers navigating unfamiliar environments, psychological safety helps build confidence and engagement. It allows them to feel supported as they learn expectations, understand workplace norms and develop relationships with colleagues and managers, moving from simply coping at work to actively contributing and enjoying their role.

When psychologically safe, young workers are more likely to:

- Ask questions and learn quickly
- Share ideas and perspectives
- Collaborate confidently with colleagues
- Develop resilience and problem-solving skills

Conversely, where psychological safety is lacking, young workers may become anxious, withdrawn and reluctant to participate. Young workers may:

- Avoid asking questions when they need help
- Stay silent in meetings even when they have useful ideas
- Hide mistakes rather than seeking support
- Experience greater stress and self-doubt

Creating psychological safety is not only important for wellbeing; it also underpins learning, innovation and performance. Managers play a key role in shaping this environment through everyday behaviours. Even small actions such as how they respond to questions, handle challenges or react to new ideas send powerful signals.

Employers can create and encourage psychological safety by:

- Welcoming questions and curiosity
- Responding constructively to mistakes
- Encouraging participation in meetings
- Challenging stereotypes and bias
- Modelling openness and learning

**THIS ENVIRONMENT SUPPORTS
INNOVATION, CONFIDENCE
AND PERFORMANCE.**

8

MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

The mental health and wellbeing of young workers is increasingly important for employers. Many young people entering work report higher levels of stress, anxiety and uncertainty, shaped by early career experiences that can influence confidence, engagement and long-term outlook.

Supporting wellbeing helps individuals thrive while also improving productivity, retention and engagement. It should be seen as both a responsibility and a business priority. Young people often begin work alongside major life changes, such as leaving education, managing finances and adapting to new environments. They may face uncertainty about expectations, financial pressures, concerns about job security and the challenge of balancing work with further learning. These pressures can increase stress, particularly where support is limited or wellbeing is not openly discussed.

By recognising these challenges, employers can respond with empathy and practical support, creating healthier, happier and more supportive workplaces.



Employers can support wellbeing through:

- Awareness and training
- Open, stigma-free conversations
- Realistic workloads and expectations
- Access to support services
- Healthy work-life balance

Employers can also signpost staff to trusted support, such as [Hapus](#) for mental health resources and the HWW [wellbeing at work](#) topic page for guidance and tools.

Key actions can include:

- Checking in regularly
- Encouraging breaks and boundaries
- Promoting supportive relationships
- Watching for signs of [burnout](#)

WELLBEING SUPPORT IMPROVES BOTH INDIVIDUAL OUTCOMES AND ORGANISATIONAL PERFORMANCE.

9

DEVELOPING SKILLS AND CAREERS

For many young people, feeling they are learning and progressing is key to a positive experience at work. Early-career employees are often highly motivated by opportunities to build skills, gain experience and move forward.

When development is limited or progression is unclear, motivation and engagement can quickly decline. In contrast, organisations that actively support learning are more likely to retain talent and build a strong future workforce.

Young employees are often exploring their interests, strengths and career direction, and opportunities to develop can be just as important as salary or job title.

Supporting growth can:

- Increase motivation and engagement
- Build confidence and competence
- Encourage long-term commitment
- Support innovation and fresh thinking

Managers can support experiential learning by:

- Offering varied and meaningful work
- Providing training and qualifications
- Giving stretch opportunities
- Clarifying progression pathways
- Holding regular career conversations
- Recognising progress to reinforce motivation and growth.

**MOST LEARNING
AT WORK HAPPENS
THROUGH DAY-TO-
DAY TASKS AND
EXPERIENCE.**

10

INCLUSIVE AND FAIR WORKPLACES

Young people entering the workforce bring diverse experiences, identities and perspectives. They come from a wide range of cultural, socioeconomic and educational backgrounds. Some may be the first in their family to enter professional employment, while others may be navigating challenges related to disability, neurodiversity, gender or other aspects of identity.

For young workers to thrive, workplaces must not only offer opportunities but ensure those opportunities are fair, inclusive and accessible. Inclusive environments help all employees feel respected, supported and able to contribute fully.

WHY INCLUSION MATTERS

Early career experiences shape how individuals view work and their place within it. When young employees feel excluded or undervalued, this can affect confidence and long-term progression.

Inclusive workplaces:

- Help employees feel respected and valued
- Ensure access to learning and development
- Encourage diverse perspectives
- Remove barriers to participation

They benefit organisations too, strengthening creativity, problem-solving and resilience by drawing on a wider range of experiences and ideas.



Employers can promote inclusion by:

- Challenging bias and stereotypes
- Ensuring fair access to opportunities
- Supporting socioeconomic inclusion
- Providing reasonable adjustments
- Encouraging respectful communication

**INCLUSIVE WORKPLACES
ENABLE ALL YOUNG
PEOPLE TO SUCCEED
AND CONTRIBUTE.**

> Visit the HWW website to learn more about topics including [equality, diversity and inclusion](#), [neurodiversity](#) and [fair work](#).

11

LISTENING TO YOUNG EMPLOYEES

Creating opportunities for young employees to share their views is essential for building supportive and effective workplaces. Listening to early-career staff helps organisations understand their experiences, identify areas for improvement and shape practices that better support the next generation.

Young employees often bring fresh perspectives on workplace culture, technology, collaboration and processes. When their views are welcomed and considered, organisations can benefit from new ideas while strengthening trust and engagement.

WHY LISTENING MATTERS

When young employees feel heard, they are more likely to feel valued and engaged. Listening also helps organisations understand early-career experiences that may not always be visible to senior leaders.

Effective listening can help organisations:

- Identify barriers affecting early-career staff
- Improve onboarding, training and management practices
- Strengthen engagement and morale
- Encourage innovation and new ideas
- Build a culture of openness and trust

Employers can encourage feedback by:

- Creating safe, open communication
- Holding regular one-to-one conversations
- Using surveys and forums
- Acting on feedback and sharing outcomes

WHEN YOUNG EMPLOYEES
FEEL HEARD, THEY ARE
MORE LIKELY TO FEEL
VALUED AND ENGAGED.

Listening should be an ongoing part of organisational learning, not a one-off activity. It builds trust, engagement and continuous improvement.



12

MEASURING IMPACT

Supporting young employees effectively requires more than good intentions. Organisations need to understand whether their efforts are making a real difference and where improvements are needed. Measuring impact helps move from isolated initiatives to sustained, evidence-informed practice.

By gathering data, reflecting on experiences and refining policies over time, organisations can ensure their approach remains relevant, effective and responsive to change.

WHY MEASUREMENT MATTERS

Without measurement, it is difficult to know whether programmes and practices are working. Monitoring outcomes helps organisations understand what is effective and where further attention is needed.

It can help to:

- Identify strengths in current approaches
- Highlight challenges affecting early-career staff
- Improve recruitment, onboarding and development
- Track progress over time
- Demonstrate commitment to supporting young talent

**AN EVIDENCE-BASED
APPROACH ALSO
HELPS ENSURE
RESOURCES ARE
USED EFFECTIVELY.**

IDENTIFYING WHAT TO MEASURE

Start by focusing on the areas most relevant to your goals for supporting young employees.

For example:

- **Recruitment and access**
Measure the number of young applicants and hires, the diversity of candidates entering early-career roles and the effectiveness of different recruitment and outreach channels.
- **Retention and progression**
Track early turnover rates, how long employees remain in entry-level roles and rates of internal progression among early-career staff.

- **Engagement and satisfaction**

Assess employee engagement scores, feedback from surveys or focus groups and overall levels of motivation and job satisfaction.

- **Learning and development**

Monitor participation in training programmes, outcomes in skills development and progress towards individual career development goals.

Selecting a manageable set of indicators helps organisations focus on meaningful insights rather than collecting excessive data. These insights can highlight challenges and opportunities that may not be evident from numbers alone.



USING EMPLOYEE FEEDBACK

Numbers only give part of the picture, but feedback from young employees helps give a deeper insight and understanding of their real lived experiences. It can highlight issues like unclear expectations, limited development opportunities and barriers to inclusion.

REVIEWING THE EMPLOYEE JOURNEY

Measuring impact is particularly useful when reviewing key stages of the early-career journey, including:

- Recruitment experiences and candidate perceptions
- Effectiveness of onboarding and early training
- Quality of line management and feedback
- Opportunities for learning and career development
- Experiences of inclusion, belonging and wellbeing
- Exit information – when young employees leave, their reasons can provide valuable insight into workplace practices. Exit interviews can help inform and address underlying issues rather than treating departures as isolated cases.

REVIEWING EACH STAGE HELPS
PINPOINT WHERE IMPROVEMENTS
ARE MOST NEEDED.

13

FINAL THOUGHTS AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Young people are vital to the future of every organisation. By understanding their experiences and offering inclusive recruitment, effective onboarding, development opportunities and supportive workplace cultures, employers can help young employees thrive.

Investing in young workers is both a social responsibility and a strategic priority. It enables employers to build stronger, more resilient teams, develop future leaders, and create inclusive, thriving workplaces.

Through thoughtful, supportive practice and continuous improvement, employers can help young people grow, succeed and build meaningful careers.



Healthy Working Wales supports employers to create environments where young people can succeed, benefiting individuals, organisations and communities across Wales. If you'd like tailored advice or support, you can contact the free [Workplace Adviser Support \(WAS\)](#) to book a conversation with an adviser.

Our '[Thriving at Work – A Young Person's Guide](#)' offers practical advice for young people starting work. We encourage employers to share this resource with young people joining their organisation.

Healthy Working Wales would like to thank all of the young people, employers and Public Health Wales staff who contributed to the workshops and surveys, roundtable discussions and evidence reviews that led to this guide being produced – without your input, we could not have had authentic insights into the challenges facing young workers today.



We would also like to acknowledge the work of RCS in conducting the workshops and surveys and producing the content for this guide.

Mae'r canllaw hon ar gael yn Gymraeg hefyd.
This guide is also available in Welsh.

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