



Lifelong  
Learning  
Programme

*With the support of the Lifelong Learning Programme of the European Union*

**„Identifying Barriers in Promoting the European Standards and Guidelines  
for Quality Assurance at Institutional Level“**

**IBAR**

Agreement number – 2010 – 4663/001 - 001

WP11  
**Quality and Information**  
Cross-Country Comparative Study  
2013

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## **IBAR – WP 11**

### **Quality and information Comparative study**

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## INTRODUCTION

The report addresses use of information for the HEIs effective management as well as disclosure of information on HEIs. National and institutional policies of 7 countries (Czech Republic, Latvia, Poland, Portugal, The Netherlands, Slovakia and United Kingdom) including their implementation in relation to the quality assurance has been analyzed. The report also highlights the examples of good practice as well as barriers occurred in the area.

The issue of the use and disclosure of information in QA is reflected in the ESG 1.6 and ESG 1.7.

ESG 1.6 refers to information and the quality of management as follows:

*HEIs should ensure the collection, analysis and use of relevant information for the effective management of their study programmes and their other activities. Institutional self-knowledge is the starting point of effective quality assurance. It is important that HEIs use sufficient tools to collect and analyze information concerning their own activities. They are not able without appropriate information, neither to understand what works and for what it is necessary to pay more attention, nor to identify the results of innovative practices. Information systems aimed at collecting quality data depend on local conditions.*

According to ESG 1.6, HEIs should collect at least information on:

- student progression and success rates,
- employability of graduates,
- student satisfaction with their study programmes,
- the effectiveness of teachers,
- profile of the student population,
- available learning resources and their costs,
- key performance indicators of HEIs.

ESG 1.7 refers to the public information and the quality as follows:

*HEIs should regularly publish actual, impartial and objective information, both quantitative and qualitative, concerning study programmes and academic degrees offered. HEIs are obliged to provide information about the intended learning outcomes, university degrees awarded, the procedures for the evaluation of the educational processes and educational opportunities available to students. Published information may also include the opinions of graduates and description of their professional careers as well as a current profile of the student population. All this information should be accurate, objective, and easily accessible; they should not be used primarily as a marketing tool. The HEIs should verify if it meets its own expectations with regard to the impartiality and the objectivity of its published information.*

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## METHODOLOGY

Twenty eight HEIs from 7 countries (Czech Republic, Latvia, Poland, Portugal, the Netherlands, Slovakia and United Kingdom) represented a survey sample of the variant types of higher education institution in the project. They were selected to demonstrate the diversity of higher education and to ensure that the data collected offered a rich picture of practice across the sector.

Data collection for WP11 was based using national as well as internal policy documents as well as documents publicly available on the websites. Semi structured interviews (based on face to face, email and phone communications) were used as the second core method to collect information. They were oriented mainly in target group of senior academic management and administrative staff working on level of HEI/faculties. In some cases, (e.g. LV, SK, CZ) the above mentioned target groups were enhanced by pedagogues and students. Short questionnaires were used as the additional data collection methods in the case of UK.

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## NATIONAL POLICY CONTEXT

The national policy on collection, use, analysis and disclosure of information in the surveyed countries is quite strictly formulated in the scope of two basic types of documents - the Law on Higher Education Institutions and the Accreditation Decrees. The implementation processes work in majority countries on the top – down principles in which HE institutions collect, analyze and use information based on requirements/recommendations of national policy documents. The processes are governed by the appropriate Ministry or other national governmental body. Higher level of HEIs autonomy in the implementation processes have been observed in two countries, the Netherlands and UK. In the case of the Netherlands, implementing of the national policy on information in accreditation processes is based on general agreement signed between the Dutch University Association and the Ministry. Subsequently, the individual HEIs can present, discuss and sign own performance agreements with the Ministry. The national policy in UK puts a stronger accent on autonomy of HEIs as well. UK takes into account several legislative documents – e.g. the 2010 Equality Act or the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education ´s Code of Practice. Implementing of national policy in this area is provided by external Quality Assurance Agency which is composed from representatives of HEIs as well as representatives of governmental bodies and other stakeholders.

The national policy documents in all countries stipulate what kinds of information are obliged/recommended to be collected, analyzed, used and disclosed by HEIs and how they should be reported. Scale of the required information is different in the individual surveyed countries. Most national legislation documents also formulate obligations and responsibilities of national bodies and higher education institutions in this area.

Based on national legislation, HEIs in all surveyed countries are required to contribute with information to the nation-wide registers. They vary in regard of their extent, content, complexity, outputs and accessibility. Majority of registers works under governance of responsible ministries (CZ, SK, PL, LV, PT, NL) or external agencies (UK). Complexity and effectiveness in the area of collection, use, analysis and disclosure of information registered in the systems have been identified as one of the biggest challenges in several surveyed countries (CZ, SK, PL). One of the most complex register operates in UK. The Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) administrates four main datasets covering the students, staff and financial aspects of HEIs, and also the activities of graduates after they have gained a higher education qualification.

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## **INSTITUTIONAL POLICY CONTEXT IN REGARD OF COLLECTION, ANALYSIS AND USE OF INFORMATION**

The aim of this part is to identify what are the institutional policies and practices regarding the collection, analysis and use of information in relation to:

- a) student progression and success rates,
- b) employability of graduates,
- c) student satisfaction with their study programmes,
- d) the effectiveness of teachers,
- e) profile of the student population,
- f) available learning resources and their costs,
- g) key performance indicators of HEIs.

HEIs in all surveyed countries collect, analyze and use information related to the mentioned aspects a) – g) in various extents. Majority of them (SK, CZ, PL, PT, LV) do not have established own complex internal policy in this area. HEIs mainly collect, process and use the information based on the requirements stipulated in the national policy documents which quite exactly define, what kind of information have to be collected, how and in what form they have to be analyzed and used. Institutional policy is better developed in countries (UK, NL) in which internal quality assurance/enhancement processes have a longer tradition and HEIs are more familiar with their implementation, even though collecting and use of information in regard of a) – g) aspects are more developed based on national policy than the institutional one.

### ***Student progression and success rates***

Information on student progression and success rates is collected through different offices or information systems in all surveyed HEIs based on requirement of national legislation. The collected information is focused on the quantitative data concerning the student entry and student results achieved during studies like is the number of admissions, number of students enrolled by study programmes, students' academic records, students' mobility, number of graduates, failure and dropout rates. HEIs in all countries send the collected information to the national registry systems which process them by less or more complex way. Use of the information on institutional levels in all surveyed HEIs is focused on corrective actions and improvement, decision-making purposes as well as for innovation purposes.

### ***Employability of graduates***

The employability of the graduates seems to be the biggest weakness in the information collection. Three countries (SK, CZ, PT) do not have specified the exact requirement in regard of collecting the HEI information on employability of the graduates. It causes situation that some HEIs do not gather any information regarding the employability of their graduates, some gather it occasionally in a limited scope, and some gather it based on alumni surveys. Thus collecting, analysis and use are not systematic. In other surveyed countries (LV, NL, PL,

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UK), HEIs are obliged by national legislation to provide systematic collection and analysis of the data. Data are analyzed and used on institutional levels (self - assessment reports in LV) as well as on national levels (HBO and VO monitors in NL, CSO database in PL or UK Destination of Leavers from Higher Education survey, as well as UK KIS dataset).

### ***Student satisfaction with their study programmes***

The relevant data are collected on the institutional levels in majority of HEIs by means of respective questionnaire surveys. In case of CZ, HEIs are required by the national legislation to provide internal evaluation and make the results public. In other countries (PL, SK), the national legislation asks for surveys aimed at evaluation of the students' satisfaction with study programmes (with regard to individual study subjects and pedagogues). In PT, all HEIs collect this information, some of them realize it by specific offices. Some of the surveyed HEIs (CZ, SK, PL) fight with the insufficient participation of students in the questionnaire surveys provided on institutional levels. Two countries (NL, UK) collect information on student satisfaction on both levels, the institutional and national ones. In the Netherlands, National Student Survey (NSE) figures satisfaction of students per programme on a yearly basis. Data is focused on the content of the programme, the acquired skills, preparation for the professional career, teachers, information from the study programme, study facilities, assessments and evaluations, course scheduling, study burden and study support. Other national resource, the WO-Monitor, is related to the student satisfaction with studies at the university, and the International Student Barometer (ISB) is tracking the opinions of international students. In the UK, national legislation (QAA Quality Code) asks HEIs for participation in the National Students Survey. All study programmes are required to gather data about student satisfaction with them. Thanks the well-established normative influence of the QAA Quality Code, the practice of the information collection and its use at UK HEIs is relatively uniform and well founded.

The data collected on institutional as well as national levels is used by the surveyed HEIs, mainly because of:

- evaluation of study programmes which is followed by the revision to increase their quality in regard of needs of labour market,
- evaluation of teachers,
- improving of HR policy,
- evaluation and quality of individual departments/offices, services,
- revision of the institutional policy documents,
- dissemination of the results to the respective stakeholders and public.

### ***Effectiveness of teachers***

It was observed that all surveyed HEIs collect information on effectiveness of teachers on institutional level. Data were collected by several ways. Some data were analyzed based on the results of students' evaluation questionnaires realized on institutional level (CZ, LV, PT,

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PL, SK) as well as on both, the institutional and national levels (NL, UK). In UK, it exists a large scale of other data sources from which information about the quality of teaching can be gained (feedback from alumni and employers and placement providers, retention statistics, mark profiles for students, modules and programmes, availability and quality of teaching and learning spaces for formal and informal learning, uptake and utilisation of any virtual learning environment and assistive technology, feedback from external reviews and accreditations). In NL, HEIs obtain the additional information through the annual review talk with members of the teaching staff.

Majority of other indicators, required by governmental bodies (Ministries, Accreditation Commissions), is focused on the quantitative results achieved by pedagogues in educational and research areas like numbers of lessons, numbers of publication outputs, numbers of project realized on national and international levels etc. The indicators also relate to the obtained qualifications. A didactical qualification is required for all teachers in majority of surveyed HEIs (except of PT). As one of the indicators of the staff quality is also used the number of staff with a Ma/PhD degree.

The gained information is used for improvement of education, innovation and decision-making, as well as for corrective actions. It is used as a part of the quality assurance policy and the accreditation process as well. Evaluations are also used by teaching staff as a feedback on the quality of their own teaching. Some HEIs (CZ, SK) collect and utilise information on effectiveness of teaching staff for statistical purposes in the annual reports on activities or statistical purposes resulting from the nation-wide registers.

### ***Profile of the student population***

Majority of HEIs in the surveyed countries collect information on the student profile (except of PT where only some HEIs collect these data). The scale of collected information varies. The core of information is aimed at students age, nationality, secondary school graduation, attended study programmes, results of the admission procedure, study progress, specific groups of students, graduates, students mobility etc. . In case of NL, the figures on drop-out rates, transferring students and completion rates are collected, as many HEI state that these are important, too. Some HEIs (CZ, NL, SK, PL, UK) also ask for some information concerning disability or social background of the students (in the case of low income families). It is used to provide students with special scholarships or other kind of support. In several countries (CZ, PL, SK), data collected on students are subjected to the law on protection of personal data. Data are collected mainly based on special working units, HEI information systems, or they are governed based on the students' administration (NL). In several cases (CZ, SK, LV), HEIs are required by the Law to send the data concerning profile of student population to the national registry system or national statistics. The information serves as a base for financial subsidy or funding in some countries (CZ, LV, PL, SK, UK). Information on profile of the student population is used for corrective actions and enhancing quality of teaching (LV, NL, PL). In UK, it is also used to monitor strategic progress in admission and retention of

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students from particular target groups and to determine performance of institutional commitment set down in agreements with the Office for Fair Access (Agreement helps safeguard and promote fair access to higher education).

### ***Available learning resources and their costs***

Data regarding available learning resources and their costs belong to the information less monitored by individual HEIs. In some cases (NL), they create a part of institutional and national student surveys to improve the relevant facilities based on students' comments and feed-backs related to their satisfaction with the study programmes and provided study sources and facilities. In other cases (LV, CZ, SK) this information is connected mainly with technical infrastructure, electronic information systems and services of the university libraries. Some HEIs (SK, CZ) collect information on social scholarships or special scholarships for excellent students or volunteers, which are guaranteed by the Law on Higher Education. In case of PT, not all the information is collected or always systematized and monitored by specific services. UK universities are obliged, based on the QAA Quality Code, to give information on learning resources available and their costs, namely about teaching/research/supervisory staff; learning support staff; learning and teaching spaces; libraries; special learning facilities (laboratories and studios), and communication and information technologies. The Code also requires HEIs to inform prospective students about advisory services, participation in the student union, arrangements for pastoral care, living accommodation available to students, and social and leisure facilities. Living costs are recognized as a key determinant of student choice of learning destination. In regard to the HEIs own evaluation, the information on available learning resources and their costs is used very rarely. It is used mostly for decision-making, corrective actions, improvement and innovation (LV). The relevant data are subject to negotiate the HEIs' budgets and can be including in annual reports of the HEIs (NL).

### ***Key performance indicators of HEIs***

The key performance indicators are monitored by some HEIs based on requirements of the HEIs funding national policy (SK, PL, CZ, LV) or accreditation processes (SK, CZ). Some HEIs (PL) identified that they are not taken into consideration in the accreditation processes. In case of some surveyed countries (CZ, LV), the key performance indicators can be considered as those which partly overlap the evaluation indicators aimed at the teaching staff effectiveness (number of lessons provided by teachers, number of publications, involvement in national or international projects, student/staff ratio, etc.). Some HEIs in PT aim to develop systematic and reliable mechanisms to collect and analyze information for quality assurance purposes. Own key performance indicators are not established and systematically used by HEIs (LV, PL, PT, SK). In the case of CZ, the situation in using of own key performance indicators is quite varied and it is not fully institutionalized at the central level. Their using depends on decision making of representatives of management of individual faculties/departments.

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In case of NL, HEIs' own key performance indicators create an important part of the accreditation process. HEIs are evaluated because of the performance agreements which all HEIs sign with Ministry for the next four years. Some indicators are mandatory (e.g. dropout in the first year, switch of programme in the first year, bachelor success rate, student satisfaction rating, percentage of students in excellence tracks or programmes), indicators refer to the quality of teaching staff and teaching intensity in bachelor programmes such as contact hours, the performance indicators aimed at the quality measures, such as quality of teachers and intensity of teaching), the other ones are set based on the individual HEI decision. All of indicators are used to be included in the HEIs' institutional policies. The information on the institution's own key performance indicators is considered as an instrument to improve the study quality and study success of the institution. They can be linked with the ESG standards.

HEIs in UK have other attitude to the monitoring and evaluation of own institution's performance. Instead of key indicators they use more specific key targets They can be as follows:

- key targets related to students: exceeding national average for overall satisfaction in National Student Survey (securing 85% graduate employment within six months of graduation, securing 90% student retention),
- key targets related to staff: all new staff to gain the PGCHPE within two years of employment, improved performance in the national Research Excellence Framework, increase in number of National Teaching Fellows,
- key targets related to educational providers: to establish stated number of overseas bases by some strictly defined date, secure 50% increase in number of students studying for university awards at partner colleges,
- key targets related to sustainability: growth in international student numbers, reduction in floor-space by 20 %, carbon reduction of 26 %.

The key performance indicators or the key targets used to be defined in the strategic plans of the universities. A tendency of the universities is to link the performance indicators to quantified targets. A lot of the indicators is used only for the institution purposes and are not used as the basis of reporting to the institution's governing bodies. The HEIs in UK use to have university-wide strategic plans that include key performance.

## INSTITUTIONAL POLICY ON DISCLOSURE INFORMATION TO PUBLIC

The aim of this part of our comparative analysis is to identify what are the institutional policies and practices regarding the collection, analysis and use of information in relation to:

- a) study programmes offered,
- b) intended learning outcomes,
- c) awarded qualification,
- d) teaching, learning and assessment procedures,
- e) learning opportunities available to students,
- f) views and employment destinations of past students,
- g) profile of the student population.

The disclosure of information concerning the offer of **study programmes** is a common practice in all surveyed countries. Information is published through the HEIs websites, respectively their parts (faculties, departments), as well as in the print documents. Information on study programmes, which are published by HEIs, contains the organizational rules, content and timing of modules, teachers, criteria and methods of assessment. Also information concerning learning opportunities, conditions of admission and awarded qualification are externally disclosed. Most of HEIs also publishes externally **intended learning outcomes**. The form of their disclosure and level of their treatment depend on implementation rate of the intended learning outcomes within the surveyed countries.

Significant differences were identified among the surveyed countries in regard of the disclosure of information concerning **employment destinations** of the past students. HEIs in UK and NL disclose information on previous student satisfaction with the study programmes. They also disclose information on employment of their graduates. These kinds of information are obtained through the national HEI monitors. Regarding to the other surveyed countries, some publishing information on graduates` employment by the HEIs was identified (e.g. in case of PT - 2 from 4 surveyed HEIs) as well as some disclosing of partial information concerning graduates` evaluation on study programmes (SK, CZ, PL). HEIs of these countries have established alumni clubs, but objective data on graduates` employment are not systematically collected, processed and published.

Information on the **profile of the student population** is predominantly used for internal purposes of HEIs. It serves as a basis for management decision making processes and is published in internal documents. Beside that, some of HEIs publish information on selected aspects concerning the student population externally as well (NL).

Information on **awarded qualification** is disclosed in the key reports (e.g. annual reports) which are published at the HEI web sites (NL, UK, CZ, SK, LT, PL and two HEI in PT). HEIs in UK typically publish this information in national newspapers. The minimal extent of the

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published information in this area is limited in some countries by the national legislation. (CZ, SK, PL).

Information on ***the teaching, learning and assessment procedures*** as well as ***learning opportunities available to students*** are usually communicated based on its publishing on the HEIs web sites, and in study handbooks and study guides (NL, SK, PL, LT, PT, CZ, UK). In some countries (NL, SK), personal presentations/communications to students at the beginning of their study programme is taken as a core dissemination tool in this area. The presentation is provided by the particular staff (coordinators of the study programmes, career counsellors).

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## CONCLUSIONS

The findings identified based on surveys realized in the participating HEIs point to the fact that information creates an integral part of almost all HEI managements. All participating HEIs acquire and use information for their management and quality assurance. Selected information is also disclosed externally to public.

### **Conclusions to ESG 1.6**

The **national policy** is quite well developed in all surveyed countries. The legal documents in all countries stipulate what kinds of information are obliged/recommended to be collected, analyzed, used and disclosed by HEIs and how they should be reported. Scale of the required information is different in the surveyed countries. Most national legislation documents also formulate obligations and responsibilities of national bodies and higher education institutions in this area. In all concerned countries HEIs use to collect various information, mainly for improvement purposes, corrective actions and decision making processes, even if they have no official strategy or policy related to this area. HEIs collect, use and disclose the information based on the requirements stipulated in the national policy documents.

The **institutional policy** is better developed in countries in which internal quality assurance/enhancement processes have a longer tradition and HEIs are more familiar with their implementation (UK, NL). In all surveyed countries, it was discovered a slow tendency of HEIs to identify their own needs based on analyzing of information collected beyond compulsory requirements. All surveyed HEIs are obliged to collect, analyze and use information on student progression and success rates, student satisfaction with their study programmes, profile of the student population, effectiveness of teachers and key performance indicators on institutional level with different complexity. This information collected on institutional levels is sent to nation-wide registry systems. In all surveyed countries, the surveys aimed at student satisfaction with their study programmes were realized. The differences have been observed in way of collection, analyzing and disclosure of the relevant data. Some countries (UK, NL) also realize the surveys on national level based on standardized questionnaires. Other countries (PL, SK, PT) prefer realization of surveys on institutional levels (it is required by the national laws). These kinds of surveys are characterized by low participation of students in this process. On the other hand, HEIs in the Netherlands collect and analyze information on satisfaction of students with study programmes based on national surveys as well as the institutional explorations. They do not have problems with students' participation. It is caused by adequate informing of students how their inputs contribute to higher quality of educational processes. Information on employability of graduates presents one of the biggest weaknesses of the institutional policies. It is rarely followed on the HEI institutional level in the surveyed countries (SK, PT, CZ) based on systematic collection of the relevant data. The information is collected on national level and it does not provide any sufficient evidence on individual HEIs. UK and NL

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have established national external agencies which regularly collect objective information on employability of graduates and disclose the results to public. Sophisticated disclosure processes are developed on institutional as well as national levels. Other countries (LT, CZ, PL, PT, SK) do not have developed the unified systems of collecting, analyzing and disclosure of the information. Systems are partially oriented towards some kinds of information collected on the level of HEIs or the national one. They are limited by the low level of objectiveness and accessibility and do not fill demands of individual HEIs to use this information in QA processes.

All surveyed countries have established the ***nation-wide registry systems*** collecting and analyzing information on different aspects of student progression and success rates, student satisfaction with their study programmes, profile of the student population, effectiveness of teachers, key performance indicators, employability of graduates, as well as learning resources. Registry systems work under governance of national bodies (ministries, external agencies, etc.). Complexity of the collected information as well as the effectiveness of information systems differ in the surveyed countries. UK can be taken as example of good practice with very complex national HESA information systems. HEIs in some other countries (SK) identified a weak effectiveness of the national information systems (they are governed by different ministries and are not interconnected, so it is necessary to send similar information several times, etc.). Except of UK and NL, some limitations were identified with regard to the level of incorporation of the information collected and analyzed on institutional as well as national level into internal quality assurance processes.

### ***Conclusions to ESG 1.7***

HEIs in all surveyed countries tend to aware importance of information disclosed to public. The main reason is competition on students among the HEIs. National legislation in all countries asks for transparent and honest information published in different forms. HE institutions in all surveyed countries are required/recommended by the national policy to disclose information concerning mainly study programmes, intended learning outcomes and awarded qualification. Significant differences were identified in regard to the disclosure of information concerning employment destinations of the past students. Information on the teaching, learning and assessment procedures as well as profile of the student population is predominantly used for internal purposes of the HEIs. It serves as a basis for management decision making processes and is published in internal documents. Some of HEIs publish selected aspects concerning the student population externally as well (NL). There was observed tendency of some HEIs (UK) to provide disclosure of information based on the recipients' perspective. This module represents a shift from disclosure of information to its communication. Even though that a quite strong attention in all surveyed countries was paid to identify a scale of information disclosed to public, the relatively low respect was dedicated to objectiveness and impartiality of the information. Implementation of standards in this area can help to prevent unfavorable marketing effects.

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## IDENTIFIED BARRIERS

Based on the results and findings of our research following barriers counteracting a broader implementation of ESG into the practice were identified:

- lack of institutional policies and procedures focused on the collection, use and disclosure of information, based on accurate assessments of HEI individual needs,
- ineffective nation-wide registry systems and insufficient access of HEIs to this information, mainly concerning the employability of graduates,
- insufficient participation of students and other stakeholders in internal QA processes calling into question the objectivity and impartiality of the information,
- low participation of external stakeholders from outside of the HEIs in the processes relating to the use, analyzing and disclosure of information,
- low awareness of the use of feedback in the revision processes,
- lack of standards providing objective and impartial information preventing their marketing potential,
- insufficient understanding of how the information is being perceived by the public, it is necessary to move from disclosure of information to communication of information,
- lack of specialized professional units within HEIs staffed by well qualified individuals who have responsibility for collecting, analyzing and publishing information.
- lack of an international forum enabling to share experiences in the area of information on quality assurance and benchmarking of individual countries,
- ethical and legal issues concerning disclosure of some kinds of information (e.g. personal information )

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