



# **Advanced Certificate in Market & Social Research Practice**

## **Guide to the Integrated Assignment – Candidates**

*A comprehensive guide to the Integrated Assignment element of  
assessment for MRS Candidates*

Effective from June 2020 Assessment

The Market Research Society (MRS) is the UK professional body for research, insight and analytics. We recognise 5,000 individual members and over 500 accredited Company Partners in over 50 countries who are committed to delivering outstanding insight. As the regulator, we promote the highest professional standards throughout the sector via the MRS Code of Conduct.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

### **Overview of the MRS Advanced Certificate in Market and Social Research Practice**

The role of market and social research is vital in informing and driving effective decision making within both the business and public sectors.

The MRS Advanced Certificate in Market & Social Research Practice (Advanced Certificate) is designed for those who have just entered or are seeking to enter the research profession, working in the areas of commercial market and/or social research. The overall aim of the qualification is to enable candidates to develop a clear practical understanding of the principles underpinning all stages in the research process, and to develop the skills required to enable them to design and carry out key research tasks. As such, it enables candidates to select appropriate approaches and tools based on a clear understanding of the research problem and the objectives of any associated programme of research.

The Advanced Certificate is a single-unit qualification which follows the research process from problem definition through to interpreting and reporting on results. The qualification comprises 2 elements, each divided into a number of topic areas:

Element 1 (The Research Context) contains two topic areas, focusing on the setting in which research takes place and the preparation needed to underpin the research process. The learning outcomes in this section inform and guide each stage of the development of a research project.

Element 2 (The Research Project) contains three topic areas, focusing on the stages involved in planning and carrying out the research project based on the understanding of the context. Understanding of the research setting, and the ethical principles underpinning research, are woven into each of the topic areas in Element 2.

In order to reflect the inter-dependence of the various stages in the research process, the assessment of the qualification follows an integrated approach. All candidates must successfully complete 2 components of assessment:

A coursework element (the Integrated Assignment, or IA): This requires candidates to prepare a brief & proposal for a research project. To successfully pass the IA candidates are required to integrate knowledge from across the syllabus, from problem definition to reporting.

A written examination: All questions in the examination require candidates to demonstrate how they might apply their learning in practical situations. In order to be successful, candidates must demonstrate that they can integrate and apply knowledge from different areas of the syllabus in order to address the given problems. In each examination round, all elements of the syllabus will be assessed through the range of questions.

The document provides:

- guidance for candidates on how to develop Integrated Assignment tasks, based on the published specifications;
- guidance on how centres might support candidates in the formative elements of the assignment.

## AIM & STRUCTURE

### Aim of the Integrated Assignment

The aim of the Integrated Assignment (IA) is to allow you to demonstrate the extent to which you have developed a range of market and/or social research skills. To this end, you must complete an assignment which integrates learning objectives from the three elements of the Advanced Certificate syllabus, from problem definition to reporting, providing clear justification for your choices.

The Advanced Certificate syllabus focuses on all stages of the research process, from problem identification to reporting research results. The IA requires you to demonstrate your ability to meet learning outcomes at all stages in the research process.

There are two IA submission rounds per year: **January & June**.

You are required to demonstrate the depth of understanding which underpins the choices you make in the design of the proposed research project.

All choices made regarding the various elements of the proposed research should be supported by clearly-explained rationale.

The use of *Proprietary Methods* – that is, a company's own branded research product - is not forbidden within the IA. However, the aim of the IA is for you to demonstrate your knowledge of the syllabus and therefore the use of a propriety method or solution must be handled with care. If you use your own company's *Proprietary Methods* as part of your solution to the research problem **You need to ensure** that the underlying methodology associated with it is clearly explained and that a suitable rationale or justification is given as to why this method has been chosen over other non-proprietary methods. Failure to explain the method involved and failure to justify adequately its use in the given context could result in the assignment failing to reach the pass criteria.

### Format of the Integrated Assignment

The IA must be in the format of a **Research Brief and Proposal**.

**The Brief and the Proposal must** address a practical research problem. All assignments **must** contain a Brief, indicating the client's requirements, in order that the extent to which, the research set out in a proposal addresses the client's stated needs' can be assessed. While it may be based around a research scenario provided by a centre, the brief **must** be written by you. Both the Brief and the Proposal are assessed.

IAs that do not include a brief will be graded as 'non-compliant' as they will not comply with the assessment criteria and therefore cannot be assessed within the qualification framework.

Centres are responsible for ensuring you receive written guidance on completing the assignment which both matches the format requirements and meets the detailed content specifications. Centres must also ensure that the scope of the research problem selected can be sufficiently addressed within the parameters of a 3,500 – 4,000 word count.

Submission of IAs completed as a 'Group Task' and written up individually are **not** permissible, owing to the difficulty of verifying that the work is that of the individual candidate.

## Selecting a Research Problem for the Integrated Assignment

Centres can set a research scenario from which you can develop your brief. In all cases, the scenario should provide a clear indication of the proposed timings and budget for the project being discussed, and to identify how resources will be allocated across a project.

Alternatively, you can select your own research problem on which to base your Brief and Proposal. The IA can be based on a fictional or 'real life' research problem. If you who select a 'real life' problem on which to base your IA you will be required, to confirm (via a signed form) that - although based on a real life problem - the Brief & Proposal you have submitted is an original piece of work by yourself, that it is not a re-drafted or re-written version of an existing client brief and/or a proposal prepared\* for a client.

MRS reserves the right to go back to a Centre and/or an individual for clarification if there is concern that this guidance has not been adhered to.

### Anonymisation

Candidates do not need to anonymise the tools/programmes used for analysing data/handling a sample. E.g. candidates may name programmes such as Excel. However, to prevent the breaking of professional confidence and/or prevent use of a real brand as the focus of the assignment, compulsory anonymisation is required for all other client/companies/products. Any naming of real-life companies or organisations would deem the IA to be non-compliant. The IA is for assessment purposes and not real-world purposes. Anonymisation can be done simply by assigning a letter, e.g. Company K or government department responsible for food safety issues. It is recognised that proposals often reference internal company information summarised in a brief, any such information used in the proposal should also be outlined in the brief. Other desk research within an IA must not be invented. The source of the information, which should be in the public domain, should be attributed/referenced.

\*Proposals written to secure business will usually concentrate on selling the proposed solution. However, to secure a pass grade or above in the Integrated Assignment, you are required to demonstrate your familiarity with the strengths and weaknesses of different methodologies, supported by critical evaluation.

### Structure of the Integrated Assignment

It is recommended that the IA is divided into clear sections to ensure all the required assessment criteria are covered in the assignment. Guidance for each section is given on [Pages 7-12](#). At each stage, you must ensure that you describe what you propose to do and why you propose to do it, critically evaluating the choices you have made within the proposal.

The sections in the assignment correlate with the requirements of assessment, therefore if a section is omitted, this could result in your assignment not meeting the pass criteria.

If you identify any potential limitations with any of the choices you have made, you need to indicate how you would address those limitations.

**Word Count:** Assignments must include a total word count at the end of the assignment. As a rough guide, we recommend allocating the word count across the sections in the following way:

Section 1: Brief – up to 750 words

Sections 2 – 6: The research proposed - up to 3,000 words

Section 7: Time to Completion and Budgets – up to 250 words.

*Please note: This suggested allocation is for guidance only. You will not be penalised if the word count is allocated differently.*

### **Section 1: The Brief**

You should:

- 1) **Identify a research problem** which you are interested in or which has relevance to you, your current job and/or your current employer. You may like to discuss your choice of problem with your centre. If you have been presented with a research scenario, you may choose an aspect of the scenario which is of interest or relevance and develop/adapt it into a brief, in consultation with the centre.
- 2) **Carry out some background research** relevant to the problem you have decided to research. If this is a problem you are investigating for someone else, you need to discuss the issues with them to clarify any points that are not clearly understood.
- 3) **Clarify:**
  - the resources – time, money, people - you have to spend on the research project
  - the information the client needs and what the client intends to do with the information gained as a result of the research project.
- 4) **Write out a formal brief** on behalf of their 'client' expressing the relevant information gained in 2) above.

We recommend that the brief is completed in no more than **750 words**.

## The Proposal

*Please note: The proposal is a **plan** for research. You are not actually required to undertake the research which you propose. You are submitting a proposal in response to the brief in the hope that it will be accepted by a client and you will get the contract.)*

### Section 2: The Proposal: Background and Objectives

You should:

- 1) **Prepare to write the background to the proposal** by revising the background information you gathered for Section 1.
- 2) **Carry out some further background research** so that you can show that you understand the problems facing your potential 'client' and that you understand the character and dynamics of her/his marketplace and the products and services in it.
- 3) **Decide on the specific objectives** which the research is going to achieve. For example, if you have decided to research the training needs in your department, you may wish to identify needs within a particular area (e.g. IT training).
- 4) **Make sure** that:
  - you have defined very clear boundaries for the research project.
  - the research objectives are clearly linked to the research problem.
  - the scale of the project is a) in line with the resources available – time, money, people
  - the proposed research can be written up in sufficient depth and detail within the IA word limit of 3,500-4,000. Tutor input and feedback will be key here.

Write out the **first two sections of your proposal**: Background & Objectives



### **Section 3: The Proposal: Research Design and Sampling Plan**

You should:

- 1) **Consider which type of research design** is most suitable for the research problem. What type of data are you going to collect? What categories of research are you going to carry out? Why is this design suitable in delivering the information required? Why is that type of data or type of research relevant/appropriate to the research problem and the research objectives?
- 2) **Specify:**
  - the sampling method which is most appropriate for the research problem you have defined.
  - the population of interest and whether a sampling frame will be used
  - how the sample size is decided and indicate the relationship between the sample size and the population of interest.
- 3) **Describe** how the sample members will be selected.
- 4) **Present a clear rationale** for all of the choices made in relation to sampling – the sampling method, the population of interest and the sample size.
- 5) **Review the suitability** of the choices made in relation to the research problem, the ethical and legal framework in which research operates and the resources available for the project.
- 6) **Write up your proposals** for:
  - The research design
  - The sampling plan

#### **Section 4: The Proposal: Data Collection**

You should:

- 1) **Determine** whether you are **collecting qualitative and/or quantitative data**. You will need to focus here on specific data collection techniques and not be tempted to use all the techniques available but select those which are most appropriate to your research brief and your sample. You must give reasons why the method/s you choose are appropriate.
- 2) **Specify clearly how you will collect the data**. You do not need to design, for example a whole questionnaire or interview guide. However, you should provide examples of:
  - the types of questions which will be asked;
  - the topics which will be covered;
  - other information about the respondents which will be required to solve the research problem.
- 3) **Review the suitability of the choices made** in relation to the research problem, the ethical and legal framework in which research operates and the resources available for the project. It is important that you demonstrate a practical understanding of research practice including how resources – people, time and money – are allocated.
- 4) **Write up your proposal for data collection**, remembering to include information about:
  - The types of questions/topics to be covered
  - The data collection techniques they propose to use

#### **Section 5: The Proposal: Data Analysis**

You should:

- 1) **Decide how you are going to analyse the data** and how you are going to transform data into information and insight with which to address the research objectives. The link to the research objectives and the client's problem must be clear.
- 2) **Identify specific data analysis procedures and** that are appropriate to
  - the type of data,
  - the sample
  - the research problem
  - the client's information needs

This may include, for example, the types of tests that will be applied to quantitative data or the techniques that will be used to analyse qualitative data. As with all decisions made in the proposal, the rationale for the choice of procedures and/or techniques should be clear.

- 3) **Review the suitability of the choices made** in relation to the research problem, the ethical and legal framework in which research operates and the resources available for the project. It is important that you demonstrate a practical understanding of research practice including how resources – people, time and money – are allocated.

**Write up your recommendations for the data analysis** procedures and techniques to be used in this research project.

## **Section 6: The Proposal: Reporting and/or Presenting Findings**

You should:

- 1) **Describe** how you plan to report and/or present findings to the client, giving a clear rationale for the approach you suggest.
- 2) **Specify:**
  - The frequency of reporting (e.g. will there be only a final report, or also interim reports)
  - The format(s) that reporting or presentation of findings will take

This section of the proposal should make clear how the selected approach to reporting and presentation of findings is appropriate to the research objectives, the client's needs and the data collected.

- 3) **Review the suitability of the choices made** in relation to the research problem, the ethical and legal framework in which research operates and the resources available for the project. It is important that you demonstrate a practical understanding of research practice including how resources – people, time and money – are allocated.
- 4) **Write up your plans for reporting and/or presenting findings** of this research project.

## Section 7: The Proposal: Time to Completion and Budgets

*Please note: When your assignment is assessed, costs will not be judged specifically on how realistic they are. Rather, they will be assessed on the comprehensive budget list the candidate draws up and how accurately it reflects the tasks they propose.*

You should:

- 1) **Review the time required to complete the research.** Remember to check the brief for completion dates.
- 2) **Identify the tasks** in the research project **which need to be costed** (e.g. fieldwork, travel time, incentives, analysis, reporting etc.).
- 3) **Allocate a budget for the key elements of** the research project. For example, a cost for research design and planning; a cost for fieldwork; a cost for data analysis; and a cost for reporting. Allocating a cost to a task should show that you understand the time required for a task to be completed - and who will be involved in that task - and so will demonstrate that you have a practical understanding of research practice.

**Please note:** If you do not have access to information on the cost of market or social research, you can try various approaches to identifying likely costs. For example, you could:

Look at the jobs and news articles on websites such as Research Live ([www.Research-Live.com](http://www.Research-Live.com)). This will give you some insight into the salaries of research personnel. More web addresses can be found in the **Recommended Reading & Reading Sources**.

- 4) Prepare a **time schedule of project tasks or areas** indicating which project team member will be responsible for carrying out each task/area. Apart from the name/job title of the team member you will need to provide **brief** details of the team members' expertise and experience dealing with the kind of research proposed.

## Guidance on setting a Research Scenario

Centres may set a scenario for you to base your Integrated Assignment (IA) on. The inclusion of an independently prepared brief is part of the IA Assessment Requirements. Centres must therefore ensure that they supply you with a research scenario which balances the amount of information given with the requirement for you to design a brief which incorporates a significant element of your own work. The scenario should therefore be a research problem from which you can devise your own brief and proposal.

It is not permissible for centres to issue you with a brief which you simply cut and paste into your assignment. There must be demonstrable personal input from you into the development of the brief and proposal.

You are required to submit an individual IA which provides evidence of your own ability to analyse and describe the selected research process.

## Ethically robust research

All research proposed within an IA must comply with the ethical and legal framework of the country or countries covered within the IA.

Research programmes set out in the Brief & Proposal must be ethically robust and must as a minimum adhere to the rules set out within the *\*MRS Code of Conduct*, and where relevant should follow MRS guidelines for research practice.

IAs must identify any international or national legal, ethical and regulatory issues in relation to research proposed and set out how these issues will affect data collection, analysis, research outputs and how findings are used and reported. Omission of this or IAs in conflict with current international and national legal, ethical and regulatory issues. for research and data practice will be graded as a Fail.

Where appropriate *MRS Code of Conduct\** rules and/or guidelines should be referred to explicitly. Where ethical and legal considerations are included, you must demonstrate understanding of the ethical and legal requirements and why any identified issues are relevant to the context of any given Brief & Proposal. This might include broad ethical concepts such as informed consent and avoiding participants harm, as well as specific issues relating to research.

*\*Please Note:* The MRS Code of Conduct does not take precedence over national law. If you are undertaking an IA based on international research, you should take its provisions as a minimum requirement and fulfil any other responsibilities set down in law or by nationally agreed standards.

For example, these might include the following:

### Research Design

- Children or young people as research participants
- The purpose of research and/or client details to be withheld
- Use of verbatims, transcripts or recordings, generated by a project, and/or by clients after a project is concluded

### Sampling

- Use of samples from a very small population or, for employee research, from a sample of participants in a small organization
- Use of client customer databases

- Use of customer databases
- Use of contact details trawled from online sources
- Use of data gathered from social media sites

### Method of Data Collection

- Use of unsolicited emails or texts
- Use of cookies on participants' devices in introductions or invitations to online research
- Recontacting of participants
- Use of incentives
- Observers during data collection

### Data Processing and Analysis

- Identification of participants
- Use of verbatims and recordings
- Use of social media data

### Outputs and Reporting

- Generation and use of research outputs for media reporting
- Data transfer
- Data Security
- Data destruction and retention

## Integrated Assignment length, layout & language

### Length

- The assignment should be between a **min 3,500 and max 4,000 words** (excluding appendices).
- All words within the main body of the text, including those within tables are included within the word count. Text within the title page, contents page or header and footer is not included in the word count.
- IAs that exceed the 4,000 word limit will be classified as 'non-compliant' as they do not comply with the assessment criteria and cannot be assessed within the qualifications framework.
- IAs that are below the 3,500 word limit are unlikely to contain sufficient information to adequately meet the pass criteria.
- You **must** include a combined word count for both the Brief & Proposal at the end of the assignment. MRS reserves the right to request an electronic version of the assignment to verify a stated word count.
- A maximum of 2 single-sided pages of appendices is permitted. Appendices are not to be used for further substantiating text and should only be used for a Glossary and/or Bibliography, for example. Appendices should not be used to extend the word limit.

## Layout

- MRS Qualifications strongly recommends that you produce your Integrated Assignment in Word format. This format best allows you to provide full explanation and justification of your rationale. This does not preclude the inclusion of charts, data tables, pictures etc.
- The Integrated Assignment should be formatted in A4 size, with a one-inch margin around the text.
- Each section within the assignment should be clear and easy to read, by:
  - using headings and bullet points effectively.
  - avoiding over-brief note form.
  - ensuring that the use of English is clear, accurate and appropriate to a client audience.
- IAs must be submitted to the centre in digital format. Hard copies will not be accepted. The IA file should be titled in the following format: 'IA Surname Initial'.
- The IA must be accompanied by a digital Integrated Assignment Coversheet. This should be titled in the format 'Coversheet Surname Initial'

## Language

- The language used in all assessed components of the MRS Advanced Certificate is English. The language of the Integrated Assignment should be appropriate to both the task and the professional nature of the qualification.
- It is the responsibility of the Centre to ensure that you have an appropriate level of language competence in English to allow you to undertake and complete the assessed components of the qualification. Please refer to **Syllabus & Assessment Guidelines** for comprehensive information.

## **ADMINISTRATION & ASSESSMENT**

### **Submission of Integrated Assignment for Assessment**

You must submit your Integrated Assignment to your centre co-ordinator by the specified deadline. Please retain a copy for yourself.

The centre co-ordinator is required to submit 1 copy of the assessed Integrated Assignment, each including a completed Integrated Assignment Coversheet and Assessment Feedback Sheet to MRS by the published submission deadline.

### **Confidentiality**

Your assessed Integrated Assignment is retained, in secure storage, at MRS for three years following the date of submission. From time to time MRS uses candidate IA Submissions for training & standardisation purposes. IAs selected for Training & Standardisation purposes are anonymised before use.

Compulsory anonymisation of client/product is required – any naming of real-life companies or organisations would deem the IA to be non-compliant.

### **Non-Compliant Integrated Assignments**

Integrated Assignments submitted to MRS will be classified as Non-Compliant, if they:

- Do not include fully completed Integrated Assignment Coversheet including signed declarations where requested.
- Are in excess of the maximum 4,000 word limit
- Do not display the word count at the end of the assignment
- Have not been anonymised to avoid identification of real-life client, company or product

### **Providing support for you**

Centres are encouraged to arrange a system of support to enable you to complete the Integrated Assignment. The type of support offered may vary from centre to centre. However, examples of the types of support systems on offer might include:

- a system of individualised tutorials;
- the provision by tutors of written/verbal feedback on draft sections of individual assignments;
- group discussions of the approaches chosen.

It is recommended that Tutors/Assessors build an ethics review submission into the support programme, getting you to submit an ethical and legal issues review for your project at a very early stage. The aim here is to enable you to identify where you will/might encounter ethical and/or legal issues and to plan how to handle them within the overall research design/plan. This should avoid ethics and/or legal issues being a bolt-on or afterthought and to ensure it becomes an integral part of the research process. For guidance on the relevant issues, see page 13.

Any feedback provided by the tutor team should be constructive in highlighting the strengths and weaknesses in initial drafts, but not so detailed that the final draft is a result of tutor, rather than your effort.



## Content Specifications and Assessment Criteria

The following grid outlines the expected content of an integrated assignment, and how the specified content maps against the learning outcomes of the qualification.

Content Specifications	Learning Outcomes
<p>The assignment should include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a brief, outlining the business problem and the research problem</li> <li>a proposal for a programme of research to meet the needs of the brief</li> <li>identification of any relevant ethical and legal requirements linked to the proposed researched, and a description of how these will be addressed.</li> <li>a clear rationale for the choices made at each stage in the proposal</li> </ul>	4, 5, 8
<b><i>The Brief should:</i></b>	
<p>a) describe the context for the research b) outline the business problem to be addressed c) identify any parameters for the research, such as timescale, resources available, or reporting requirements</p>	1, 2, 4
<b><i>The Proposal should:</i></b>	
a) discuss and define the problem to be researched, and define appropriate research objectives	2, 3, 5, 7, 8
b) identify an appropriate research design to address the research objectives	7, 8, 9, 10, 11
c) outline a plan for sampling which is appropriate to the research objectives and research design	7, 8, 15, 16, 17
d) describe the data collection methods chosen to address the stated objectives and chosen sample	7, 8, 11, 12, 13
e) describe the data collection tool(s) most appropriate to their stated collection methods	7, 8, 13, 14
f) outline a plan for analysing the data in a way that is appropriate to the data collected, the sample and the research objectives	7, 8, 18, 19
g) describe how findings will be reported and/or presented, taking into account client needs, the data collected and the research objectives,	7, 8, 20, 21, 22
h) describe how resources (people, time and money) will be allocated across the project	6, 7, 8

Guidance on the general assessment criteria for each grade can be found in the following Integrated Assignment Grade Descriptors.

## Pass requirements

You are given a grade (Distinction, Merit, Pass or Fail) for the IA.

Integrated Assignments which fail to meet pass criteria may be re-submitted for assessment when appropriate improvements have been made a maximum of one time. If the IA fails to meet the pass criteria on second submission, the third submission must be a new IA topic.

## Integrated Assignment: Grade Descriptors

The following descriptors define the assessment criteria that an assignment needs to meet to achieve a Pass grade. They also define how higher grades (Merit; Distinction) are achieved. The descriptors also highlight the key features of a Fail grade.

	Pass	Merit	Distinction	Fail
<b>Structure &amp; Language</b>	<b>The assignment:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>structure is appropriate to the task format</li> <li>organisation of information is appropriate to the task format</li> <li>language is appropriate to a task written for a professional context</li> <li>language puts little or no strain on the reader</li> <li>respects the word limit</li> </ul>			<b>The assignment:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>structure and organisation of information put strain on the reader</li> <li>is written in language which is inaccurate or inappropriate to the topic</li> <li>language puts inappropriate strain on the reader</li> </ul>
<b>Content</b>	<b>The assignment:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>meets the information requirements of the specification</li> <li>demonstrates an adequate overall awareness of the links between the various research processes described.</li> <li>identifies all international and national key legal, ethical and regulatory issues and outlines how these can be addressed</li> <li>provides an appropriate rationale for most of the choices made.</li> </ul>	<b>The assignment:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>meets or exceeds the information requirements of the specification</li> <li>demonstrates a clear awareness of the links between various research processes described.</li> <li>demonstrates a clear awareness of all relevant potential international and national legal, ethical and regulatory issues relating to the research project and identifies how these can be addressed</li> <li>provides clear and appropriate justification for the choices made.</li> </ul>	<b>The assignment:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>meets or exceeds the information requirements of the specification</li> <li>demonstrates a high level of awareness of the links between the various research processes described.</li> <li>demonstrates a high level of awareness of all potentially relevant international and national legal, ethical and regulatory issues relating to the research project and plans how to best to manage these issues.</li> <li>provides clear and appropriate justification for the choices made and, where appropriate, with evaluation of those choices.</li> </ul>	<b>The assignment:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>fails to meet a number of the information requirements of the specification.</li> <li>fails to demonstrate an awareness of the links between the research processes described.</li> <li>fails to identify relevant key international and national legal, ethical and regulatory issues.</li> <li>is in conflict with current legislation, regulation and/or ethics advice for research and data practice</li> <li>fails to explain why the selected research methods have been chosen</li> </ul>



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