Department for Education

Consultation Response Form

Consultation closing date: 16 May 2014
Your comments must reach us by that date

Acoustic design of schools: performance standards 2014

If you would prefer to respond online to this consultation please use the following link: https://www.education.gov.uk/consultations

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The Department will process your personal data (name and address and any other identifying material) in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998, and in the majority of circumstances, this will mean that your personal data will not be disclosed to third parties.

Please tick if you want us to keep your response confidential.	
Reason for confidentiality:	

Name: Ian Noon	
Please tick if you are responding on behalf of your organisation.	x
Name of Organisations (if applicable): National Deaf Children's Society (NDCS)	
Addresses: ian.noon@ndcs.org.uk	

If your enquiry is related to the DfE e-consultation website or the consultation process in general, you can contact the Ministerial and Public Communications Division by e-mail: consultation.unit@education.gsi.gov.uk or by telephone: 0370 000 2288 or via the Department's 'Contact Us' page.

Please mark the box that best describes you as a respondent.

	School		College		HT/teacher
	Trade Union		Other Government Department		LA/Council
	Building Control Body		University	x	Other

The National Deaf Children's Society (NDCS) is the leading charity dedicated to creating a world without barriers for every deaf child. There are over 35,000 deaf children in England. Research has found that 84% of school aged deaf children attend a mainstream school (of which 8% attend a school with a specialist resource provision).

NDCS welcomes the opportunity to respond to this consultation. We have long campaigned for an improvement to school acoustics nationwide and continue to be concerned that too many new schools are being built with poor acoustics. In 2009, following a Freedom of Information request to all local authorities, we found that, overall, one in five local authorities (21%) surveyed were able to confirm that schools in their area were compliant with government standards. We are concerned that poor acoustics in schools is a contributory factor to lower attainment among deaf children.

It is important to remember that good acoustics benefit all children. NDCS's previous campaigning work in this area was supported by a wide range of charities and organisations, including the Special Educational Consortium, NASUWT, National Children's Bureau, National Autistic Society and the British Council for School Environments.

We have shared our response with the National Sensory Impairment Partnership (NatSIP) and the British Association of Teachers of the Deaf (BATOD) and we support the points they have raised in their response.

In our response, we welcome these standards and are pleased to see that the importance of good acoustics has been recognised. However, we believe the standards should go further in three key areas: mandatory pre-completion acoustic testing, tighter restrictions around the use of alternative performance standards and a review of acoustic standards for early year settings. As NDCS are not technical experts on acoustics, our response therefore largely focuses on broader policy issues on the importance of good acoustics.

The following consultation questions relate to the proposed changes.

1. Introduction of standards for refurbishment including where there is a change of use of premises

		BB93 2003 Acoustic Standards	Proposed changes in revised 2012 acoustic standards	Impact
1	Standard for refurbishment	There is quite widespread failure to comply with the Equality Act, the School Premises Regulations and the Independent School Standards during refurbishment work because the current BB93 only provides standards for new build work and in many cases these are not achievable in refurbishment projects. At the moment designers must infer the minimum standards for refurbishment to comply with the Equality Act and the School Premises Regulations from good practice and experience.	The new standards we propose for existing buildings will clarify what the minimum standards are for refurbishment or changes of use covered by the Building Regulations, eg conversion of a building from an office into a school. The setting of a lower baseline for refurbishment and conversion projects will make compliance much more straight forward.	We are consulting on the minimum refurbishment standards which we think are necessary to comply with the Equality Act, the School Premises Regulations and the Independent School Standards. This is a low cost change.

1 Do you agree that the new standards adequately cover the requirements for refurbishment and change of use? **(If not please suggest changes/amendments with reasons.)**

☐	Yes	✓	No	☐	Not Sure

Comments:

It is important to remember that, as the majority of deaf children are taught in mainstream schools, any classroom, in theory, could be one in which a deaf child is taught among their peers. We believe that, from the perspective of a deaf child, they should have the right to expect to be in a classroom with good acoustics, regardless of whether that room has been refurbished or is newly built. We therefore believe the standards for refurbishment should be higher, at the same level for newly built classrooms.

The Department for Education will be aware of the research carried out in Essex which showed that improved acoustics could effectively level the playing field between deaf and other children, and also brought multiple benefits to other users.

Whilst refurbishment may be more challenging, we believe we should be looking to raise the bar for all children so they can listen and learn effectively in the classroom. Compliance in this area may have been poor in the past but this may also be explained by the absence of acoustic testing, resulting in good acoustics seeming to be less of a priority.

The above notwithstanding, we support the proposal to bring schools, where there is a change in use of premises, within the scope of these standards, particularly in light of concerns over free schools opening in a range of different buildings.

2. Indoor ambient noise levels

		BB93 2003 Acoustic Standards	Proposed changes in revised 2012 acoustic standards	Impact
2.1	Indoor ambient noise levels		Room types revised and amalgamated in places, eg ICT rooms and Art included with Electronics/control, textiles, food, graphics, design/resource areas.	This is a no cost change.
2.2	Unit of	A complex unit	The unit of	This is a no cost change

	measurement of airborne sound insulation	$D_{nT(Tmf,max),w}$ was used for the specification of unit of measurement of airborne sound insulation.	measurement has been replaced by $D_{nT,w}$ with a reference RT of 0.5s.	which will make the design standards easier to comprehend and to apply as the units to be chosen are familiar to acousticians.
2.3	Sound Insulation of the Building Envelope	Criteria for sound insulation of the building envelope based on ventilation openings required for peak summertime weather condition.	Revised criteria for sound insulation of the building envelope based on ventilation openings at mid-season weather condition means that more schemes will be able to use opening windows rather than purpose designed acoustically attenuated ventilators or mechanical ventilation and comfort cooling. As the ventilation openings are now sized at the mid-season condition rather than on the hottest day the openings will be smaller and fewer schools will now require sound attenuated ventilation openings.	This change will mean that fewer schools will require sound attenuation of the building envelope as the window openings will be smaller for the same ventilation rate and smaller openings let in less sound and therefore will require less sound attenuation. A study was carried out by BRE Acoustics in 2004 on the proportion of schools in areas with different noise levels. This showed that a large proportion of schools were in areas with high noise levels that required sound attenuated ventilation with the BB93 2003 criteria for summertime ventilation and indoor ambient noise levels. This change will reduce the cost of sound attenuation in new and refurbished buildings.
2.4	Maximum indoor levels	Guidance was given that noise from aircraft and trains should not exceed 55 dB L_{A1} in teaching	This was a duplicate requirement as the 35 dBA requirement ensures this, so the requirement has been dropped.	The criterion has been dropped but this will have no impact on cost or acoustic performance. The requirement was not needed.

		classrooms.		
2.5	Rain Noise	A design target for rain noise of 20 dB $L_{Aeq,30\ mins}$ above the appropriate indoor ambient noise level given in Table 1 was included.	We have reduced this requirement to 25dB above the IANL for new roofs and for refurbishments where the roof or roof glazing is replaced.	Deemed to satisfy constructions will make design easier in the case of heavyweight roofs often used for thermal comfort. (For example they are used in the Department's Baseline Designs being produced by the Education Funding Agency for the Priority Schools Building Programme.) There will be a cost saving for new roofs and refurbishments.

Do you think these changes relating to indoor ambient noise levels are reasonable? If not please suggest changes/amendments with reasons.)

2 a) Changes to indoor ambient noise level room types (2.1)

☐	Yes	☐	No	☐	Not Sure

2 b) Change of unit of measurement of airborne sound insulation between spaces (2.2)

☐	Yes	☐	No	☐	Not Sure

2 c) Change of design conditions for calculation of sound insulation of building envelope (2.3)

☐	Yes	☐	No	☐	Not Sure

2 d) Dropping of 55 dB L_{A1} (2.4)

☐	Yes	☐	No	☐	Not Sure

2 e) Change in standard for rain noise (2.5)

☐ Yes	☐ No	☐ Not Sure

Comments: No response

3. Sound Insulation between rooms

		BB93 2003 Acoustic Standards	Proposed changes in revised 2012 acoustic standards	Impact
3.1	Sound insulation between rooms	D_w requirements were previously given in terms of a 4x4 matrix as a function of noise tolerance and activity noise levels.	$D_{nT,w}$ requirements now given in a 4x3 table using three bands of noise tolerance High, Medium and Low instead of 4. Very Low noise tolerance has been dropped.	This is a simplification and improvement to the standards making them easier to apply and has a minor impact on costs.
3.2	Sound insulation between rooms	No values were included for refurbishment. BB93 standards were intended for new build only.	Refurbishment values are now 5 to 10dB less than new build requirements. This is more realistic for change of use and refurbishment.	This will have a minor cost impact for refurbishment projects.
3.3	Impact sound insulation	A complex unusual unit used for the specification of Impact Noise, $L'_{nT(Tmf,max),w}$	The unit of measurement has been replaced by $L'_{nT,w}$ for reasons given for $D_{nT,w}$	There will be no cost impact from this change.

			above.	

Do you think these changes relating to sound insulation between rooms are reasonable? (If not please suggest changes/amendments with reasons.)

3 a) Changes to Table 2 of airborne sound insulation values (3.1)

☐	Yes	☐	No	☐	Not Sure

3 b) Adoption of lower standard for refurbishment for sound insulation between rooms (3.2)

☐	Yes	☐	No	☐	Not Sure

3 c) Change of unit of measurement of impact sound insulation between spaces (3.3)

☐	Yes	☐	No	☐	Not Sure

Comments:

No response.

4. Sound insulation between teaching rooms and corridors

		BB93 2003 Acoustic Standards	Proposed changes in revised 2012 acoustic standards	Impact
4.1	Sound insulation between	Existing Table 1.3 specifies the	A new table has been added providing composite R_w sound	The changes have a significant effect on the performance of the glazing and the ventilators in

	rooms and corridors	performance of individual elements of the separating wall.	insulation values for the glazing, door and partition wall. This allows for trade-off between elements. Lower values have been added for refurbishment and conversion works.	walls between teaching spaces and corridors. This means that lower performance glazing and ventilators can now be used and there will be a substantial cost saving on new buildings. In addition refurbishments will not cost any more than at present. The EFA baseline designs for the Priority School Building Programme have on average about 3.6m^2 of internal glazing to the corridor walls of north facing classrooms for daylighting purposes and 2m^2 of ventilators. Previously the glazing would need to have been double glazed with two sheets of 6mm glass separated by 90mm or a single sheet of 17mm laminated glass. This can now be reduced in specification to one pane of 6mm glass. This change allows much improved design solutions for daylighting.
4.2	Sound insulation between rooms and corridors		The performance standards for ventilation ducts between classrooms and corridors have been reduced as previous values were unrealistically high. The performance standard for ventilators has been reduced from 45 to 37 $D_{n,e,w}$ -10LogN dB for music rooms, drama rooms, multi-purpose halls and teaching spaces	To meet the previous BB93 performance standards the ventilation ducts would have needed to incorporate a change of direction. Ventilators of very low pressure drop can now be used meaning that night cooling and summertime ventilation can be provided by natural stack ventilation on nearly all schools. These changes make natural and hybrid ventilation systems much more feasible in schools.

			specifically designed for use by students with special hearing or communication needs. The performance standard for ventilators has been reduced from 39 to 32 dBA for all other rooms used for teaching or learning.	

Do you think these changes relating to sound insulation between rooms and corridors are reasonable? (If not please suggest changes/amendments with reasons.)

4 a) Changes to composite R_w values instead of specification of individual elements of wall (4.1)

☐ Yes	☐ No	☐ Not Sure

4 b) Reduction of standard for ventilation ducts between classrooms and corridors (4.2)

☐ Yes	☐ No	☐ Not Sure

Comments:

No response.

5. Reverberation times of teaching spaces designed for students with special hearing or communication needs

		BB93 2003 Acoustic Standards	Proposed changes in revised 2012 acoustic standards	Impact
5	Reverberation times of teaching spaces designed for students with special hearing or communication needs	BB93 required ≤0.4 seconds average across 125 Hz to 4kHz octave band centre frequencies	≤0.4 seconds average (and less than 0.6 seconds in all 125 Hz to 4kHz octave band centre frequencies). High values at low frequencies significantly affect these pupils hence the need for a low RT across the frequency range.	This will have a cost impact for spaces specifically designed for SEN students. However they are benefited by the improved signal to noise ratios that will result in improvements in educational attainment for SEN pupils. In addition, better facilities in Local Authorities for HI and other SEN students will mean that fewer pupils will need to be sent out of authority for their education. In the case of Essex County Council this has resulted in the Council no longer sending any HI pupils out of the LA due to the introduction of improved acoustic standards to cater for SEN pupils. The Consortium for Research into Deaf Education (CRIDE) survey shows that large numbers of pupils are currently educated out of Authority presumably due to there being no suitable education in the Authority. Many of these pupils will be in special schools. Although acoustics is only one of the criteria for appropriate educational provision for HI and SEN pupils it is a key part of it with 90% of SEN pupils benefitting from acoustic conditions above those specified for mainstream pupils.

5 Do you think the change to the reverberation time in teaching spaces designed for students with special hearing or communication needs is reasonable? **(If not please suggest changes/amendments with reasons.)**

☐ Yes	☐ No	☐ Not Sure

Comments: No response.

6. Reverberation time (RT) of indoor sports halls

		BB93 2003 Acoustic Standards	Proposed changes in revised 2012 acoustic standards	Impact
6.1	Reverberation time (RT) of indoor sports halls	RT≤1.5 seconds	The new standard is RT ≤2 seconds.	There is a considerable cost saving on the acoustic wall panels that are generally used as the means of reducing the reverberation time in sports halls.
6.2		Testing of sports halls was recommended in BB93.	Testing is no longer recommended and a deemed to satisfy acoustic design method will be included in guidance to be published by the Association of Noise Consultants and the Institute of Acoustics	Testing often resulted in remedial work that was not really necessary. The change to a longer reverberation time and dropping the recommendation to carry out testing will eliminate the problem and save on

			in 2014. The deemed to satisfy method will be easier to achieve and more realistic than using the previous Sabine formula.	costs of testing and remedial works.

Do you think these changes relating to reverberation time in sports halls are reasonable? (If not please suggest changes/amendments with reasons.)

6 a) Increase in Reverberation Time for Sports Halls from 1.5 to 2 seconds (6.1)

☐	Yes	☐	No	✓	Not Sure

6 b) Testing not recommended for sports halls with deemed to satisfy constructions (6.2)

☐	Yes	☐	No	✓	Not Sure

Comments:

NDCS is concerned by the apparent reduction in acoustic standards here. Principally, we are concerned that, school halls often end up being used for different purposes, such as assembly spaces or exam halls where clear communication is important.

Whether sports halls be tested should depend, in our view, on whether there is any chance that the sports hall may eventually be used for other purposes. We would be keen not to discourage testing for this reason.

7. Alternative Performance Standards

		BB93 2003 Acoustic Standards	Proposed changes in revised 2012 acoustic standards	Impact
7.1	Alternative Performance	BB93 had no lower limit to	In future no relaxation of	There will be an improvement in standards

	Standards	performance for Alternative Performance Standards that could be justified on grounds of particular educational, environmental or health and safety reasons. This led to very poor acoustics standards being adopted in some cases.	minimum recommended performance standards will be allowed that is any more significant than the reduced criteria given for refurbishments and conversion work.	overall by setting the minimum APS at the refurbishment standard. Less technical advice will be needed to apply APS. This will make it easier for designers to make the case for Alternative Performance Standards and for Building Control Bodies to assess the compliance of APS as they simply need to be at least the same standard as is specified for refurbishment and conversion work in existing buildings. This will result in some minor cost savings in Building Control Applications.
7.2	Alternative Performance Standards		The commonly applied APSs that have been found to be useful since BB93 was introduced in 2003 have been included as specific allowable exceptions that no longer require an APS in the new standards.	Use of these commonly applied APS will make design easier as no calculations will be needed to apply these APS. This will result in some minor cost savings in Building Control Applications.

Do you think the changes relating to Alternative Performance Standards (APS) are reasonable? **(If not please suggest changes/amendments with reasons.)**

7 a) Lower limit for APS set at refurbishment standard (7.1)

☐	Yes	☐	No	✓	Not Sure

7 b) Commonly applied APS that have proved successful included as permitted exceptions (7.2)

✓	Yes		No		Not Sure

Comments:

We support the greater stringency in place around the use of APS, in contrast to the lack of any standards in place previously. Previously, NDCS had found that many schools were using APS purposively to circumvent government standards on acoustics. Given how widespread the use of APS was before, we are keen that there are sufficiently strong checks to prevent this from arising again.

NDCS would recommend that the Department go further in the guidance in the following ways:

1) We would like to see paragraph 1.5 be less permissive about the possibility of using alternative performance standards. This could be done by adding the following paragraph:

"Where the use of APS can be clearly justified, it should still only be applied in exceptional circumstances and with full and explicit regard for the implications for disabled users, as required by the Equality Act 2010."

2) We would also like to see an explicit requirement that school governors, staff and parents be given clear information about the practical implications of the use of APS in non-technical terms. It will be important that an informed decision can be made over the use of APS and our concern is that information may be presented in overly technical terms. Information on the use of APS could also be included in the school's published information on special educational needs, as this is likely to be of key interest to parents of children with special educational needs.

3) We would also like to see an explicit encouragement for school governors, staff and parents to consider the potential needs of future pupils. Under the Equality Act 2010, there is an anticipatory duty to consider the needs of disabled pupils. Whilst there may be no deaf children, there may be some such pupils in the future and it will be important to anticipate their needs in any decisions on APS or acoustics more generally.

8. Design of open plan areas

		BB93 2003 Acoustic Standards	Proposed changes in revised 2012 acoustic standards	Impact
8.1	Design of open	Designers were required to submit	Speech Transmission Index, the index of speech	A very similar standard is included as guidance in

	plan areas	STI calculations for all open plan areas to Building Control Bodies (BCBs) for approval. In many cases Alternative Performance Standards were used as a means of derogation and sub-standard open plan learning spaces resulted. BCBs were in a difficult position as designers sometimes claimed the derogations on educational grounds even when the reason was to achieve cost savings.	intelligibility, is to be removed from the Building Regulations requirements as it is too difficult in practice for Building Control Bodies to judge whether the Speech Intelligibility in open plan spaces is suitable for their intended use. School Client Bodies will be responsible under the School Premises Regulations for ensuring that Speech Intelligibility in open plan teaching areas is suitable for the planned educational use of the spaces.	support of the School Premises Regulations and the Independent School Standards to that previously required as part of Building Regulation submissions. Removal of STI calculations from Building Control Submissions will make it easier for Building Control Bodies to assess school designs and make it simpler for contractors to make Building Control Submissions. BCBs will no longer need to try to understand pedagogy and different educational approaches. There will be no cost savings to design teams but making the schools responsible for speech intelligibility will put the onus of responsibility for introducing open plan teaching on the educators which is where it belongs.
8.2	Design of open plan areas	Speech Transmission Index (STI) in open-plan teaching and study spaces of > 0.60 in Table 6 in of BB93	Figures for Speech Transmission Index (STI) are given in Table 7: For instruction or critical listening activity – within group ≥ 0.6 and STI between groups (during critical listening activities) ≤ 0.3 New guidance is being included in *Acoustics of Schools – A Design Guide* to be published by the IoA	Although difficult to quantify this additional guidance should lead to less expensive remedial work to ill-considered open plan teaching spaces. For example a secondary school built in 2002 required £600k of acoustic remedial work only 4 years after construction due to the adoption of semi open plan teaching environments that prevented effective

			and ANC to supplement the standards on Speech Intelligibility for open plan spaces. This will help educators to understand the requirements of open plan and semi open plan teaching spaces which will result in the creation of more effective teaching environments.	listening and communication.

8 a) Do you agree that STI calculations of the Speech Intelligibility in open plan spaces should be excluded from Building Regulations requirements but standards should be included in "Acoustic Design of Schools" in support of the School Premises Regulations and the Independent School Standards? **(If not please suggest changes/amendments with reasons.)**

☐	Yes	☐	No	☑	Not Sure

Comments:

NDCS's only reservation with this proposal is that School Client Bodies should have a clear and precise understanding of the implications of any open plan spaces on deaf children. Given that deafness is a low incidence need, there may be no children with sensory impairment enrolled at the time the school opens, but such children may join in the future. It is therefore important that schools **anticipate** the needs of deaf and other disabled children, in light of their duties under the Equality Act. We would welcome a stronger affirmation on this point in the standards.

8 b) Do you agree with the inclusion of a second criterion in Table 7 relating to the STI between groups of pupils? **(If not please suggest changes/amendments with reasons.)**

☐	Yes	☐	No	☐	Not Sure

Comments:

No response.

9 Have you have any comments on the proposed revision of the performance standards for schools?

Comments:

As already mentioned, under the Equality Act, schools have an anticipatory duty to consider the needs of disabled pupils. It would be helpful if the standards could affirm this point throughout as it is particularly pertinent for schools that do not currently have a deaf pupil enrolled but may do so in the future.

NDCS is strongly of the view that these standards should also apply to all early year settings, including those in the private, voluntary or independent sector. Whilst we recognise that these standards relate to the School Premises Regulations, we hope that the Department will take this opportunity to ensure that all children have access to acoustically appropriate environments whenever they start their education. We recognise that other early year settings have to follow Early Years Foundation Stage standards. However, these standards, surprisingly, make no explicit reference to acoustics and are therefore inadequate.

Good acoustics are especially important during the early years when deaf children begin to develop their speech and language skills. It is important to note that children do not have the same attentive auditory perceptive skills for discriminating small differences in speech (an important aspect of language processing development) as adults. Also, children do not have the same auditory processing abilities for listening to speech in noise as adults. It is therefore especially vital that early year settings have good acoustics.

NDCS is also strongly of the view that there should be a requirement to test acoustics prior to completion. We have previously uncovered clear evidence of local authorities and schools failing to test for acoustics because it is not a statutory requirement. This has resulted in costly remedial work as well as, more importantly, children being

educated in classrooms that are not fit for purpose. Relying on contractual requirement is not a reliable alternative since it relies on acoustic testing being in the contract itself. Whilst we appreciate that the issue of testing may be outside the scope of this consultation, we urge the Department will take the opportunity to look again at the possibility of introducing a requirement for acoustic testing.

It is true that mandatory acoustic testing may generate costs if schools have to delay opening whilst poor acoustics are fixed. However, as an argument for not testing for acoustics, we believe this would be akin to arguing that the police shouldn't look to detect crime as it may generate costs in sending criminals to prison. In addition, NDCS would argue that, where there a requirement to test for acoustics, there would be a much stronger incentive to ensure good acoustics are factored in at design and build phase and so reducing the chances of an acoustics test fail.

Ultimately, NDCS believes that the costs to the Department for Education in having deaf children, and other children, learn in sub-optimal acoustic environments, leading to poorer outcomes, is greater and should drive the Department's thinking in this area.

Regardless of the above, we also strongly believe that there should be greater transparency over acoustic testing. We recommend that school governors, staff and parents and pupils at the school be explicitly informed whether an acoustic test has or has not taken place and, as appropriate, be provided with the results. We believe that the client and users should have an explicit opportunity to consider the risks involved in not testing for acoustics.

10 Is the guidance as short and concise as possible whilst being fit for purpose?

☐	Yes	☐	No	✓	Not Sure

Comments:

We agree that the guidance is short and concise. However, NDCS is of the view that the standards should apply to early year settings and that there be a requirement for acoustic testing in order for them to be 'fit for purpose'.

Thank you for taking the time to let us have your views. We do not intend to acknowledge individual responses unless you place an 'X' in the box below.

Please acknowledge this reply.	x
E-mail address for acknowledgement: ian.noon@ndcs.org.uk	

Here at the Department for Education we carry out our research on many different topics and consultations. As your views are valuable to us, please confirm below if you would be willing to be contacted again from time to time either for research or to send through consultation documents?

☐	Yes	☐	No

All DfE public consultations are required to meet the Cabinet Office Principles on Consultation

The key Consultation Principles are:

- departments will follow a range of timescales rather than defaulting to a 12-week period, particularly where extensive engagement has occurred before
- departments will need to give more thought to how they engage with and use real discussion with affected parties and experts as well as the expertise of civil service learning to make well informed decisions
- departments should explain what responses they have received and how these have been used in formulating policy
- consultation should be 'digital by default', but other forms should be used where these are needed to reach the groups affected by a policy
- the principles of the Compact between government and the voluntary and community sector will continue to be respected.

However, if you have any comments on how DfE consultations are conducted, please contact Aileen Shaw, DfE Consultation Coordinator, tel: 0370 000 2288 / email: aileen.shaw@education.gsi.gov.uk

Thank you for taking time to respond to this consultation.

Completed responses should be sent to the address shown below by 16 May 2014

Send by post to:
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