



BIBB / DEQA-VET

Action Plan

For the 1st German peer review at system level in
November 2022 with the topic

Quality assurance in continuing vocational education
and training

July 2024



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Introduction

In view of the current challenges - advancing digitalisation, demographic change, a worsening shortage of skilled workers and the need to restructure the economy and society towards CO₂ neutrality - there is widespread agreement in Germany that continuing vocational training is becoming increasingly important. It is seen as a key factor in managing structural change, both at an individual and societal level.¹ In order to ensure the quality of continuing education programmes in Germany, functioning quality assurance structures and processes are required at system, provider and intermediary level.

In comparison to initial vocational training, the quality assurance of continuing vocational training in Germany is largely unregulated, apart from nationally standardised provisions such as the regulated continuing training regulations in accordance with the Vocational Training Act (BBiG) and the Crafts Code (HwO) - unless the continuing training offer is financially supported by the public sector.

At the same time, there are long-established standards and procedures that are of central relevance to quality assurance in continuing vocational education and training. These include the Distance Learning Protection Act (FernUSG), in addition to the process for developing the nationally valid further training regulations in accordance with the BBiG/HwO and the further training regulations themselves. Since 1977, this has regulated the quality of distance learning, which also includes continuing vocational training programmes, in the interests of consumer protection. In addition to the BBiG, the Accreditation and Authorisation Ordinance for Employment Promotion (AZAV) and the Upgrading Training Assistance Act (AFBG) also play a key role in the context of state control of quality assurance in continuing vocational education and training programmes.

Against the background of this initial situation, the German peer review process 2022 aimed to obtain information and recommendations from European colleagues on the status quo of quality assurance in continuing vocational education and training at federal level.² As a result, the peers identified potential for further development in this area.

After receiving the feedback report agreed upon by the peers, the German Reference Point for Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training (DEQA-VET) first systematised the feedback and assessments contained in the report and reflected on the potential of the individual recommendations against the background of the specific circumstances of the German system. In addition to the strengths emphasised by the peers (including: the high level of formal further training, the sometimes long tradition of quality assurance regulations, which are determined by consensus with the involvement of many stakeholders), the points of criticism formulated in connection with the identified weaknesses were also processed and disseminated by the Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (BIBB) via various channels (newsletter, website). These include a whole series of points, some of which are of a more general nature (efforts to achieve a holistic continuing education sector with coherent quality assurance), but also specific recommendations on concrete instruments such as the Distance Learning Protection Act. A selection of these points are addressed in this Action Plan (see p. 3 ff.)

In consultation with the direct managers at BIBB, DEQA-VET considered it most sensible to publicise the results of the peer review in relevant places and thus make them potentially usable for national activities already taking place. DEQA-VET informed the BIBB management and other managers about

¹ See for example: OECD (2021), BMAS/BMBF (2021a, pp. 56f.), BMAS/BMBF (2021b), COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION (2021).

² Regulations, standards and procedures at the level of the 16 federal states in Germany are being focussed on in the newly launched EQAVET project.

the most important contents of the feedback report (official management template, 04.04.2023). DEQA-VET also initiated notifications via X (formerly Twitter) and the BIBB newsletter.

In addition to the operational measures, DEQA-VET discussed thematic links to the peers' feedback at expert level and fundamentally reflected on the question of how the peers' recommendations should be categorised. Against this background, planned and ongoing projects were analysed, processed and placed in the context of the European feedback (see below).

This report provides an overview of measures, projects and initiatives already initiated at national level - independently of the peer review process - that address the points raised by the peers. The peers' suggestions can therefore be seen as a confirmation of ongoing activities in Germany.

National continuing education strategy

The topic of continuing vocational education and training is currently high on the education policy agenda in Germany. In 2019, the National Continuing Education Strategy (NWS) was initiated by the German federal government in order to promote and strengthen continuing vocational education and training more effectively and efficiently and to encourage more people to take part in more and better-suited continuing education and training.

"The joint commitment of the NWS partners is embedded in and interlinked with other national and international strategy processes to which references must be made. This applies in particular to the Skilled Labour Strategy, the Alliance for Initial and Further Training, the National Decade for Literacy and Basic Education, the Digital Strategy, the national implementation of the EU 2030 goals, the National Implementation Plan for the Osnabrück Declaration and the Council Recommendation on Initial and Further Vocational Education and Training." (BMAS/BMBF 2022, p. 12) (this is not an official translation of the BMAS and BMBF)

Partners from politics, business and other interest groups (federal government, federal states, social partners and the Federal Employment Agency) work together in the NWS and thus take up EU 2030 objectives, among others. The aim is to increase participation in continuing education to 65% (cf. [National Continuing Education Strategy - BMBF](#)). The partners are generally in favour of a user-oriented perspective (BMAS/BMBF 2022, p. 12). The BMBF has commissioned the BIBB (AB 4.2) to provide technical and organisational support for the NWS (cf. [BIBB / Nationale Weiterbildungsstrategie](#)), whereby this is the same working area in which DEQA-VET is also located.

The NWS brings together political decision-makers at federal and state level in various committees: All 17 NWS partners participate in the so-called NWS Implementation Committee and in the various working groups. In addition, the political exchange format Federal-Länder Committee has been established. This was done against the background that educational sovereignty in Germany lies with the federal states, which are therefore also key stakeholders in the further development of the vocational education and training sector.

As part of NWS 1.0, 10 fields of action were identified for which the partners agreed on activities (BMAS/BMBF 2021b, p. 18)³. While the focus in the context of NWS 1.0 was only on continuing

³ "1. support the transparency of continuing education opportunities and offerings; 2. close funding gaps, create new incentives, adapt existing funding systems; 3. network lifelong continuing education counselling across the board and strengthen qualification counselling, especially for small and medium-sized enterprises; 4. strengthen the responsibility of the social partners; 5. review and strengthen the quality and quality assessment of continuing education offerings; 6. Making the skills acquired by employees in vocational education and training visible and recognising them; 7. Developing continuing education qualifications and continuing education courses; 8. Strategically developing educational institutions as competence centres for

vocational education and training, NWS 2.0 focuses on vocational and general continuing education and training. The following four cross-cutting topics are therefore currently at the centre:

- 1) Facilitating access to counselling, funding and continuing education opportunities;
- 2) Deepening cooperation in regions and sectors;
- 3) Further develop concepts;
- 4) Strengthening digital continuing education.

The topics for the five working groups were derived from these four cross-cutting issues:

- 1) Literacy and basic skills;
- 2) Future and key competences;
- 3) Qualification concepts in the technological and ecological transformation;
- 4) Access, counselling and skills assessment for underrepresented groups;
- 5) Working and employment conditions for continuing education staff. (BMAS/BMBF 2022, P. 11)

BIBB also supports the following projects, which are relevant to varying degrees in the context of the NWS:

- "Decade of Literacy for an Improved Basic Education Level
- Innovat WB - innovative approaches to future-oriented continuing vocational education and training for a modern continuing education and training system
- InnoVET innovation competition for excellent vocational education and training
- INVITE innovation competition for a digital and secure educational space
- Inter-company training centres as partners for in-company training and continuing education
- Continuing education mentors" ([BIBB / National Continuing Education Strategy](#)) (this is not an official translation of the NWS)

What initiatives is Germany already implementing and to what extent do they address peer feedback?

Against the background of the peer feedback, specific projects are presented in more detail below, to which the recommendations made by the peers appear to be applicable, as the initiatives are based on similar assessments by national stakeholders. These are extensive national measures that were already underway and being implemented at the time of the peer review and are still being implemented.

Unintended consequences of the new designation of regulated training qualifications

Feedback:

The peers found the renaming of qualification titles confusing (EQAVET NETWORK 2023, p. 7). In their feedback report, they point out that unintended consequences of the new qualification designations for regulated further training in accordance with the BBiG and HwO should be investigated (EQAVET NETWORK 2023, p. 9).

Background:

The amendment to the BBiG introduced new designations for further training qualifications in higher-qualification vocational education and training: the first level of further training is the "Vocational Specialist", the second is the "Bachelor Professional" and the third is the "Master Professional". During the main peer review meeting in Bonn in November 2022 and in their feedback report, the peers raised the question of whether this new introduction would not lead to confusion. In the opinion of the peers, the [sole] marketing of (traditional) further education qualifications such as the "Meister" would be easier, as this already has a very good reputation (EQAVET NETWORK 2023, pp. 7f.).

Current status:

BIBB is currently implementing a research project to evaluate some of the newly introduced elements of the BBiG:

"The amendment to the Vocational Training Act (BBiG) of 1 January 2020 provides for an evaluation clause (Section 105), (...). On this basis, the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) commissioned the Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (BIBB) with a joint evaluation (...) in a letter dated 29 March 2021 (...)" (BUNDESINSTITUT FÜR BERUFSBILDUNG 2023, p. 4)

The BIBB research concept also envisages evaluating the effects of the new qualification designations. The following research questions will be investigated in this context:

- What is the level of awareness of the new qualification designations among the relevant target groups?
- How are the new degree titles assessed by the various stakeholders?
- Do the new degree titles have an influence on career choices or further training decisions?
- Do the new qualifications make them more attractive (e.g. in comparison to academic qualifications)?

- How have the numbers of graduates from further training courses under the BBiG/HwO with new title designations developed (particularly in the case of regulations where no changes have been made to the content)?
- Do the new qualification titles have an impact on the recruitment behaviour of companies or the employment prospects of graduates? (...)" (BUNDESINSTITUT FÜR BERUFSBILDUNG 2023, p. 22) (this is not an official translation)

The final report on this part of the evaluation project is expected in the first half of 2026 (BUNDESINSTITUT FÜR BERUFSBILDUNG 2023, p. 24). The feedback report was submitted to the department in charge of the evaluation at BIBB (department head of A 2) for information purposes.

Utilisation of the versatile data to improve the professional development offer

Feedback

The peers raised the question of whether the excellent data available on the German labour (and training) market is being used systematically in the area of continuing education.

Background:

Germany has complex data at both federal and state level, which is regularly collected for systemic purposes. During the Peer Review, the Peers were made aware of this and were impressed by what they saw as the excellent availability of data on qualifications and employment, including in the area of skills expectations. However, they wondered whether this data was being used systematically to match training supply and skills demand in the labour market (EQAVET NETWORK 2023, p. 9). The rich data could be utilised for decision making in the area of CVET to ensure that CVET helps to address the skills mismatch and address skills shortages (EQAVET NETWORK 2023).

Current status:

With regard to CVET data, the following project addressed the issue of improving the data basis for evidence-based education policy decisions:

The project "Integrated reporting on continuing vocational training - development of systematic reporting on continuing vocational training (iWBBe)" (duration 2020-2022) aimed, among other things, to "strengthen strategic foresight [in continuing vocational training] and optimise continuing training statistics" (MÜNCHHAUSEN u. a. 2023, p. 13). The investigation of the system of previous reporting in the area of continuing vocational education and training was initiated in the context of the NWS, and the project is therefore directly linked to the national initiative described above.

"[T]he aim was not to develop a completely new reporting system, but rather to bring together previously rather selective and partial data from existing reporting systems to form an overall picture, to analyse intersections and, if necessary, to identify potential for expansion." (MÜNCHHAUSEN u. a. 2023, p. 13). (this is not an official translation of the authorship)

The project thus points to gaps in data collection and, at the same time, information contexts that are considered necessary for the preparation of political decisions. The implementation of the proposed recommendations for the further development of the data basis and reporting would provide political decision-makers with an improved evidence-based data basis for political implementation plans. A total of 20 core indicators were defined in the project, which should be mapped through integrated reporting on continuing education in order to generate an evidence-based database for political decisions.

A comparison with the EQAVET framework has shown that the project results point to many indicators that are not explicitly or more broadly mapped by the framework.

On the way to a holistic vocational training sector

Feedback:

In the opinion of the peers, the lack of transparency in the CVET system (in addition to the lack of a coherent quality assurance system for CVET) should be seen as the greatest challenge (EQAVET NETWORK 2023, p. 9). Efforts should be made to achieve a holistic CVET sector with coherent quality assurance (EQAVET NETWORK 2023, p. 10).

Background:

In connection with the criticism of the lack of transparency in the continuing vocational education and training sector, the peers referred to the fact that binding quality assurance systems at federal level only cover some areas of continuing vocational education and training. These include formal continuing education as well as formal and non-formal continuing education programmes - insofar as they fall under the Distance Learning Protection Act and/or the regulations in the area of state-subsidised continuing education (AFBG, AZAV). It was also noted that the two subsystems of quality assurance do not appear to be linked. According to the peers, this gap appears to be closed by the issuing of company certificates. This gave these companies a great deal of power without them being in dialogue with state institutions about training content and the quality of training (EQAVET NETWORK 2023, p. 9).

Current status:

The feedback from the peers is similar to the conclusions of the 2021 OECD report, although the call for more coherence relates more generally to the continuing education sector and less to established quality assurance.⁴ With regard to quality assurance in the area of continuing vocational education and training, reference should be made to the 2019 evaluation of the AZAV, which in principle led to a positive result, but which also identified selective deficiencies in the area of process transparency (PFEIFFER u. a. 2019).⁵

⁴ See: "Germany needs a more coherent continuing education system that takes better account of the needs of low-skilled workers", (Press - Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development ([oecd.org](https://www.oecd.org)), accessed 27.10.2023) (this is not an official translation);

"Establishing a stakeholder working group that systematises the connections between guidance, validation and partial qualifications. This working group would explore links between the different policy areas, develop a systematic approach and make recommendations to the German Government on further action to be taken." OECD (2021, p. 18).

⁵ The statement of the AZAV Advisory Board states:

"6. Information on accreditation and authorisation is provided by the various stakeholders. In principle, all relevant information is available online. However, it is not always formulated, edited or easy to find in a way that is appropriate for the target group. It therefore makes sense to bundle all information on a central portal and organise it in a target group-oriented manner. Within the scope of their responsibilities, all stakeholders are required to prepare their documents in a way that is appropriate for the target group and to provide additional information where necessary. The Council believes that the Federal Ministry of Labour, as the programme owner, is particularly responsible for setting up and maintaining a central platform.

7. the exchange between the stakeholders should be intensified. The evaluation has shown that there is still room for improvement, particularly with regard to the review activities of the various stakeholders. Proven

Currently, the topic of transparency and coherence in the area of continuing vocational education and training is being addressed at a higher level.

For example, the Federal Ministry of Education and Research is working on the development of a digital tool called "My Education Space". It states:

"Imagine being able to seamlessly organise your individual learning journey digitally from educational offer to educational offer - for a lifetime. You would receive the personal data, learning statuses and educational certificates that are generated in the process digitally in your personal repository, for example on your smartphone, so that you can share them with the educational programmes you want to use for your next learning step as required. Whether it's to register and gain access or to personalise an educational offer so that the most suitable content for you - in your current situation - can be used directly. Other functions provide orientation to the offers networked in the digital education space or help you to find like-minded people with similar profiles, interests or other shared characteristics. This digitally supports collaborative learning across the boundaries of educational sectors and institutions." ([Digitaler Bildungsraum - Digital Education Space \(meinbildungsraum.de\)](https://meinbildungsraum.de), 23.11.2023) (this is not an official translation)

The Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs is currently working on the development of the digital service "mein NOW". It states that:

"The aim of the portal is to offer a centralised and low-threshold online entry portal on the subject of continuing vocational training. "mein NOW" thus offers orientation and makes the complex system of continuing vocational training digitally accessible to the target groups in one place." ([BMAS - National online portal for continuing vocational education and training, 23/11/2023](https://www.bmas.de/SharedDocs/Pressemitteilungen/DE/2023/11/online-portal-fuer-berufsbildung-und-ausbildung.html)) (this is not an official translation)

Both initiatives show that the German ministries have already recognised the difficulty for citizens in gaining an overview of continuing vocational education and training opportunities and are currently investing in testing appropriate solutions.

Clear communication about possible career paths to increase attractiveness

Feedback:

The peers noted that the attractiveness of formal CVET can be increased by clearly communicating the benefits of CVET, as formal CVET is an important pathway to upskilling (EQAVET NETWORK 2023, p. 9).

Background:

Against the backdrop of declining participation rates in initial VET, the peers understood that the German authorities want to counteract the declining numbers of young people entering VET by increasing the attractiveness of highly skilled VET pathways. The peers noted in the context of higher qualification vocational education and training (CVET) provision that systematic information on career paths and wages in both systems could lead to greater clarity for young people and their parents who need to decide on an education and training pathway and career at an early stage (EQAVET NETWORK 2023, p. 8).

formats can be used here, such as the exchange of experience between the DAkKS and the competent bodies. In addition, the Federal Employment Agency, the Federal Ministry of Labour and representatives of training providers and job centres should also be more closely involved in exchange formats." AZAV-BEIRAT (2019, p. 3).

Current status:

This aspect is addressed as part of the NWS in that the partners have jointly agreed in their updated 2022 strategy paper to publicise career advancement prospects more strongly (BMAS/BMBF 2022, p. 17).

"The partners of the NWS want to strengthen their counselling activities and thus promote a broadly established culture of continuing education.

(...) In addition, awareness and utilisation of existing funding instruments are to be further increased in the area." (BMAS/BMBF 2022, pp. 16f.) (this is not an official translation of the BMAS and BMBF)

Vocational career models for higher-qualification vocational education and training are to be examined by the economic and social partners in order to enable consistent development opportunities. In addition, the federal government is bundling corresponding projects in a "Vocational Education and Training Excellence Initiative" (BMAS/BMBF 2022, p. 17). Among other things, the two digital platforms mentioned on page 7 are to be developed for this purpose in order to create user-orientated transparency about the qualifications of the German education system. The first version of "mein NOW" went live on 1 January 2024 ([BMAS - Nationales Onlineportal für berufliche Weiterbildung](#), 18.01.2024). Mein Bildungsraum is currently in the beta phase and is being tested by a limited number of users ([Interest in the beta test programme - Digitaler Bildungsraum \(meinbildungsraum.de\)](#), 27.11.2023).

Counselling and guidance for people with low qualifications*Feedback:*

In their feedback report, the peers pointed out that all quality assurance considerations should also ensure that vulnerable groups have access to continuing education programmes, including through counselling.

Background:

The peers noted that guidance and counselling are important for adults to make a well-informed choice between different CVET options. Low-skilled workers and jobseekers in particular cannot be expected to have detailed knowledge of their training needs and the options available (EQAVET NETWORK 2023, p. 10).

According to the peers, existing quality assurance measures should place more emphasis on ensuring that training provision and related guidance services are inclusive (e.g. taking into account the needs and pedagogy of older workers, low-skilled workers, etc.) (EQAVET NETWORK 2023, p. 10).

Current status:

The consideration of vulnerable groups in the area of continuing vocational education and training is addressed by the NWS in the working groups "Access, counselling and skills assessment for underrepresented groups" and "Literacy and basic education".

Projects on in-company continuing education mentors have been implemented since 2020. While the Federal Employment Agency, for example, offers vocational further training counselling, the further training mentors in companies are intended to reach low-skilled colleagues in their day-to-day work and raise awareness of the topic of further training. The approach aims to break down barriers for low-skilled employees with regard to the topic of further training and further training counselling.

The aim is to introduce the heterogeneous target group to continuing education at a low-threshold level so that corresponding offers are taken up in the first place. These are four individual projects of the trade unions IG Metall, Ver.di, NGG and the social partners IG BCE and BAVC.⁶ BIBB is providing scientific support for these projects.

A national system for the validation of non-formal or informal learning and previously acquired qualifications

Feedback:

The peers recommended that consideration be given to developing a nationwide system for validating non-formal and informal learning and recognising prior learning (EQAVET NETWORK 2023, p. 10).

Background:

The peers were of the opinion that the process of validating prior experience was unclear. In this context, they pointed to the fact that there is no nationwide validation system (EQAVET NETWORK 2023, p. 8). In 2012, the member states of the European Union were called upon to introduce a system for the validation of non-formal and informal learning by 2018. In Germany, various approaches to validating previously acquired knowledge exist in parallel (e.g. external examinations, as well as training reductions by the chambers, individual instruments such as the ECDL computer driving licence).

Current status:

In the project "Introduction of procedures for the validation of non-formal and informal learning - requirements and options for action", scenarios for the validation of previously acquired knowledge were modelled in a multi-stage process (GUTSCHOW u. a. 2019).

Together with its partners, the German Confederation of Skilled Crafts (ZDH) and the German Chamber of Industry and Commerce (DIHK), the BMBF has set up competence centres at the chambers to implement the standardised validation procedure developed in ValiKom via the ValiKom transfer initiative (ValiKom stands for "Abschlussbezogene Validierung nonformal und informell erworbener Kompetenzen"). Qualification-related validation procedures for selected professions can be carried out at these centres (Valikom).

In addition, the NWS aims to expand skills assessment, validation and development. Among other things, the validation instrument is to be anchored nationwide (BMAS/BMBF 2022, p. 16).

A planned Vocational Training Validation and Digitisation Act (BVaDIG) - currently in the statutory consultation process - provides for the creation of a low-threshold procedure for the identification and certification of individually acquired vocational skills that have been acquired independently of a formal vocational training qualification. The experiences from the Valikom projects (see above) were integrated into this process.

The draft stipulates that in future, the competent authorities should determine the individual's professional competence in a reference occupation upon application in a tandem of employer and

⁶ The abbreviations stand for: Industriegewerkschaft Metall (IG Metall), Vereinte Dienstleistungsgewerkschaft (Ver.di), Gewerkschaft Nahrung-Genuss-Gaststätten (NGG), Industriegewerkschaft Bergbau, Chemie, Energie (IG BCE), Bundesarbeitgeberverband Chemie e. V. (BAVC).

employee representatives. If the professional ability to act is only partially determined in this procedure, the precise differentiation of the skills achieved in terms of the reference occupation should help to ensure that individual qualifications can be made up for and subsequently taken into account in a supplementary procedure. If this supplementary procedure is successful, the competent body can certify the full comparability of the qualification with the reference occupation (BUNDESMINISTERIUM FÜR BILDUNG UND FORSCHUNG 2023, p. 28).

Conclusions from the national EQAVET peer review

The feedback contained in the feedback report illustrates the technical and analytical depth with which the peers approached the presented areas of quality assurance in continuing vocational education and training at federal level. The feedback from the German side is considered to be comprehensible, understandable and relevant. The recommendations and points of criticism are also useful as feedback in that they are often thematically linked to existing in-house projects and can therefore be used as reinforcement and argumentation aids. The European feedback thus proves to be largely a reassurance of national assessments and in this sense can be considered very helpful as an opportunity for reflection. The National Strategy for Continuing Education and Training (NWS) in particular combines many of the above-mentioned points thematically, which is expressly welcomed by the OECD.⁷

The activities in Germany listed as examples with reference to the peers' feedback report show the comprehensive efforts being made by Germany to improve and strengthen the continuing education sector against the backdrop of the transformation issues of "digital and ecological restructuring of the economy and society". These efforts are currently being driven forward in the second round of the NWS.

Outlook: In their feedback, the peers pointed out that there are hardly any requirements for non-formal, non-state-funded programmes that do not fall under the Distance Learning Protection Act (EQAVET NETWORK 2023, p. 9). However, the German peer review 2022 deliberately focussed on the regulations at federal level, which is also the area of responsibility of the BIBB and the participating institutions (ZFU). As many educational competences lie with the 16 federal states, the peer review did not examine the corresponding requirements at this level. However, there are numerous approaches to quality assurance in continuing education. A systematic survey of these regulations at federal state and regional level is to be carried out by DEQA-VET as part of the ERASMUS+ project 2023-2026. This project is in line with the feedback from the peers, as it aims to make the regulations at state level that have not yet been listed transparent. The aim of the project is to provide an overview of all quality requirements in Germany.

Overall, it can be said that DEQA-VET experienced the first peer review as a constructive and profitable supranational exchange format. The peers' opinion that Germany should continue to participate in this format is therefore shared and actively implemented (EQAVET NETWORK 2023, p. 10).

⁷ "Launched in June 2019, the National Skills Strategy (Nationale Weiterbildungsstrategie, NWS), aims to address some of these historical challenges. In bringing together federal ministries, federal states, the Federal Employment Agency, the social partners (trade unions and employer organisations) and the economic partners (chambers of commerce and trade, chambers of skilled crafts), it is an important step towards greater co-ordination and collaboration in this policy area. By taking a joint-up approach along 10 overarching objectives, it moves towards more coherent and strategic policy-making on CET. This report is intended to support the implementation of the National Skills Strategy." OECD (2021, p. 12)

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