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Report of External Evaluation and Review

Unique New Zealand

Highly Confident in educational performance

Highly Confident in capability in self-assessment

Date of report: 26 July 2017

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Purpose of this Report

The purpose of this external evaluation and review report is to provide a public statement about the Tertiary Education Organisation's (TEO) educational performance and capability in self-assessment. It forms part of the accountability process required by Government to inform investors, the public, students, prospective students, communities, employers, and other interested parties. It is also intended to be used by the TEO itself for quality improvement purposes.

Introduction

1. TEO in context

Name of TEO:	Unique New Zealand (Unique)
Type:	Private training establishment (PTE)
First registered:	27 October 1995
Location:	1 Clyde Road, Browns Bay, Auckland
Delivery sites:	1 Clyde Road and 24-26 Clyde Road, Browns Bay, Auckland
Courses currently delivered:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• General English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)• English for Academic Purposes• English for Further Studies• English for Young Learners• Unique New Zealand English Adventures
Code of Practice signatory:	Yes, since 27 October 1995
Number of students:	International: 1,391 in the 2016 calendar year (204 equivalent full-time students) Nationality (percentage of total): Japanese 23, Thai 13, Chinese 11, New Caledonian/Tahitian 11, South Korean 10, South American nine, Other 23 Age (percentage of total): 41 were over 18 years of age, 47 were aged 13-17, 12 aged 10-12 Visas (percentage of total): 54 visitor visas, 20 student visas, 26 other visa categories

Domestic: 28¹

Number of staff: 15 full-time equivalents

Scope of active accreditation: Consent to assess these domains up to the stated level:

- English for Speakers of Other Languages (level 3)
- English Language (level 3)
- English Written Language (level 2)
- Financial Capability (level 3)
- Interpersonal Communications (level 4)
- Introductory Communication Skills (level 3)
- Legal Studies (level 3)
- Personal Financial Management (level 3)
- Reading (level 3)
- Self-Management (level 3)
- Work and Study Skills (level 3)
- Writing (level 3)

<http://www.nzqa.govt.nz/providers/nqf-accreditations.do?providerId=979949001>

Distinctive characteristics: Unique is a 'pure' English language school offering a range of English programmes including General English at multiple levels and IELTS (International English Language Testing System) examination preparation for adults. The school offers English for further studies to:

- 'Teens' (13–17 years); many of them pathway to Rangitoto or other secondary colleges
- 'Juniors' (10–12 years); some pathway to Northcross Intermediate.²

Unique, Rangitoto College and Northcross Intermediate collaborate at times in marketing their schools. The PTE is located adjacent to a North Shore beach, and the school organises a range of related sports and social activities. Enrolments peak in the months of January and June. There are four terms of 12 to 13 weeks each year. Most

¹ These are recent migrants to New Zealand who have pre-purchased English Language Tuition (PELT): <http://www.tec.govt.nz/funding/funding-and-performance/funding/funder/pelt/>

² Classes for individuals in the age group 10-11 years will be phased out from July 2017.

students are accommodated nearby with a homestay family.

Recent significant changes: Unique changed ownership in October 2015. The management, student support and sales and marketing team structures were revised in September 2016. However, there was no change to the academic staff structure. Unique has developed part-time English for vocational purpose modules in 2017, as part of the General English programme. It also offers a part-time English class at Rangitoto College to support international students enrolled there.

Previous quality assurance history: The most recent external evaluation and review (EER) of Unique took place in November 2013. NZQA was Highly Confident in both the educational performance and capability in self-assessment of the school. Unique does not assess against NZQA unit standards or qualifications listed on the New Zealand Qualifications Framework, and so is not required to participate in a standard-setting body external moderation process.

The school is no longer a member of English New Zealand. The last audit by English New Zealand took place in July 2013, four months before the previous EER site visit by NZQA. Unique met all the quality standards at that time.

In February 2016, Immigration New Zealand audited the online student visa processes that Unique manages. Unique 'met the requirements of the audit to a very high standard'.

2. Scope of external evaluation and review

The lead evaluator reviewed a range of Unique documents, including a summary of their self-assessment, as well as NZQA-held data. A scoping meeting took place on site with the leadership team. The three focus areas selected and the rationale for their selection were:

- International students: support and wellbeing – this a mandatory focus area for tertiary organisations delivering education to international students. It

includes reviewing compliance with the Education (Pastoral Care of International Students) Code of Practice 2016.³

- General English for Speakers of Other Languages made up 80 of the 155 currently enrolled students (52 per cent of the total). Students are 18 years of age and older, and have various post-course goals such as enrolling in tertiary education in New Zealand, returning home to study or work, or travel around New Zealand.
- English for Further Studies classes made up 50 of the 155 currently enrolled students (32 per cent of the total). They are aged 13 to 17 years, and their pastoral care needs are greater than older students. They generally pathway to a New Zealand school.

3. Conduct of external evaluation and review

All external evaluation and reviews are conducted in accordance with NZQA's published policies and procedures. The methodology used is described fully in the web document Policy and Guidelines for the Conduct of External Evaluation and Review available at: <http://www.nzqa.govt.nz/providers-partners/registration-and-accreditation/external-evaluation-and-review/policy-and-guidelines-eeer/introduction>. The TEO has an opportunity to comment on the accuracy of this report, and any submissions received are fully considered by NZQA before finalising the report.

A team of two evaluators visited Unique for two days. The evaluators met with the managing director, the academic director, the operations manager, the international sales and marketing manager, the deputy academic manager, student services staff, as well as the tutors and students from the two programmes that were selected as focus areas. The evaluators also interviewed international education managers from Rangitoto College and Northcross Intermediate School, and the owner of Mana Tours which offers off-site activities. The lead evaluator met with two agents resident in Auckland and interviewed another overseas agent by phone.

The evaluators reviewed a wide range of documentation. Fifteen student files were sampled to assess their compliance with the Code of Practice. Other key documents included: recent annual reviews of the Code of Practice, annual academic self-audits, academic results, graphs showing key outcomes, various surveys, evaluations and feedback collected from students, agents, teachers and homestay providers. The provider's website was also viewed. After the site visit, the lead evaluator interviewed three graduates who were studying at New Zealand universities, and reviewed some additional documentation.

³ <http://www.nzqa.govt.nz/providers-partners/education-code-of-practice/>

Summary of Results

Statements of confidence on educational performance and capability in self-assessment

NZQA is **Highly Confident** in the educational performance and **Highly Confident** in the capability in self-assessment of **Unique New Zealand**.

Unique provided a wide range of convincing evidence that the most important needs of students and other key stakeholders are consistently being met over time. Key internal processes are robust and effective. The school reviews all key operational activities. The quality of these reviews is high and informs evidence-based decision-making that often leads to widespread improvements. The key points that support these conclusions are:

- Unique has a clear and consistent purpose: to provide excellent language tuition to students with a range of motivations, and an overall satisfying experience. There is strong evidence from the weekly tests and the six weekly student reports that students consistently improve their language proficiency; for some that is also seen in an improved IELTS band. Unique estimates that around 80 percent of the students who stay, progress onto a higher-level class. Comprehensive internal surveys show that 89 per cent of all students were satisfied or very satisfied with their overall experience. Similarly, the average satisfaction rating in the external i-graduate survey was 86 per cent. There is clear evidence gathered that students achieve their goals, such as further study at intermediate, secondary or tertiary level in New Zealand. Feedback gathered from teachers, agents, homestay providers, business partners confirms that the important needs of students, as well as key stakeholders, are being consistently met.
- These outcomes are achieved by an organisation that robustly identifies and responds to needs with detailed, well-established and tested systems and procedures across all key business activities. The school effectively manages its sound and ongoing relationships with agents, homestay providers, partner schools and other stakeholders. The needs of individual students are thoroughly assessed and Unique responds to these needs through: offering relevant programmes and supportive learning environments; high quality teaching delivered by typically experienced and capable academic staff; pastoral care processes that are well organised and robust; and effectively managing compliance responsibilities and mostly addressing the few gaps. The leadership has supported consistently high levels of educational performance at the school. Areas for improvement are clearly identified and credible plans put in place to address any concerns or to mitigate issues.
- Unique has a highly reflective organisational culture. This is demonstrated by the review systems seen throughout all levels of the organisation. Formal

feedback is regularly sought from students and teachers, and periodically from homestay providers and agents. The quality of the information collected is consistently high, and there was strong evidence that it informed action plans and brought about numerous meaningful and positive changes. Key improvements included: the addition of afternoon English classes preparing students for specific occupations, ESOL support classes offered at Rangitoto College, speaking included in the weekly testing, amended six-weekly reports, revamped student support services, and significant investment in facilities and new technology.

Findings⁴

1.1 How well do students achieve?

The rating for performance in relation to this key evaluation question is **Excellent**.

The rating for capability in self-assessment for this key evaluation question is **Excellent**.

There is a range of clear, detailed and reliable evidence that students improve their English while studying at Unique. Robust weekly tests assess what has been taught in the week, and individual student files clearly show the progress being made over time. Unique recently enhanced this testing by adding speaking to the existing grammar and writing test. Formal academic reports are written every six weeks which demonstrate the students' improving ability in the four key language skills. An aggregate of the weekly tests has recently been included in the report to better measure achievement. Around 80 per cent of the longer-term students typically progress to a higher-level class at the end of a term. Student evaluations carried out at the end of each term consistently show over 95 per cent of the students rate their classes as 'very good' or 'excellent'. Similarly, over 90 per cent of the students rated the key learning areas as satisfactory or very satisfactory in the recently conducted external i-graduate survey. There is good evidence that students in the examination classes are achieving their desired IELTS band.

Unique has a broad and in-depth understanding of individual and overall student achievement. This understanding is reflected in the weekly test results, six-weekly academic reports, end-of-term student evaluations and teacher observations. Academic management and teachers use this rich information – often gathered in the form of reports, charts, graphs and tables – when making decisions about teaching, developing lesson plans, and deciding on learner progression to a higher class level. Unique has investigated class level statistics, but with rolling enrolments has found limited value in this analysis to date. Teacher evaluations have identified potential benefits in using the same language assessment tool when a student enters and exits the school. Some initial work has begun with the junior classes.

⁴ The findings in this report are derived using a standard process and are based on a targeted sample of the organisation's activities.

1.2 What is the value of the outcomes for key stakeholders, including students?

The rating for performance in relation to this key evaluation question is **Excellent**.

The rating for capability in self-assessment for this key evaluation question is **Excellent**.

Unique has a clear and ongoing mission: to provide excellent language tuition to students who have a range of goals, and offering them a very good overall experience. There is a convincing case that Unique is systematically meeting the important needs of its students and other key stakeholders. Unique has identified four key outcome areas that reflect the organisation's mission, and has collected a wide range of reliable feedback from its key stakeholders. The four outcomes are:

- Academic results. This outcome was addressed above in Findings 1.1, which concluded there was a high level of learner achievement.
- Student satisfaction. End-of-term student evaluations across all key classes typically show well over 90 per cent of students rate their overall experience as 'very good' or 'excellent'; in term one of 2017, for example, the result was 97 per cent. The November 2016 i-graduate survey had a 'great'⁵ (high) response rate of 81 per cent and an overall average rating of 86 per cent. The areas with ratings below 80 per cent included learning resources, online resources and facilities. Unique has responded by purchasing new learning resources, significantly renovating campus two, and developing credible and substantive action plans to further address these areas in the near future.
- Pathways. Unique methodically tracks destination outcomes of its students, which are collated each term. Around 55 per cent of students in 2016 continue their studies in their home country, 14 per cent go on to a New Zealand college or intermediate school, 3 per cent enrol in a New Zealand university, and 8 per cent gain work and travel in New Zealand. The remainder of the students go on to work in their home country or some form of personal or professional development.
- Goals met. Students identify on day one their key goals for their studies at Unique. Nearly all of the students who plan a New Zealand destination achieve this goal. For example, all 51 students planning to go on to a New Zealand school in term three of 2016 achieved this goal. Unique does not formally enquire how well students are prepared for these New Zealand destinations. There is, however, regular contact with the two local schools to ensure the successful transition of Unique students.

Unique provides valued outcomes for other key stakeholders. Feedback and interviews with agents, homestay providers, two local schools and a tour group

⁵ Email from i-graduate representative 16 December 2016.

operator consistently describe Unique as providing a well organised and professional service. For example, in a recent survey of agents (10 per cent response rate), nearly all of the 46 respondents were 'extremely happy' or 'above average' (in their satisfaction) when rating the 'professionalism and efficiency' of Unique's services. These stakeholders all derive valued and often significant income from the language school's activities, as does the Browns Bay community providing services to the many students residing in the area.

1.3 How well do programme design and delivery, including learning and assessment activities, match the needs of students and other relevant stakeholders?

The rating for performance in relation to this key evaluation question is **Excellent**.

The rating for capability in self-assessment for this key evaluation question is **Excellent**.

The design and delivery of the Unique programmes consistently match the needs of students well. There is also clear evidence that the organisation regularly and robustly reviews and makes improvements to programmes and related activities.

The school uses an industry recognised approach for identifying and responding to the language needs of enrolling students which has proved effective. Students are assessed using the Oxford placement test, observed in class, and changes made where required. Progression to higher-level classes occurs at half-term or at the end of term. These decisions are informed by the weekly grammar, writing and more recently, speaking tests. The moderation of the speaking and writing assessments is currently informal and could be strengthened.

The size of the school enables Unique to offer a broad range of classes suited for different English proficiency levels, ages and purposes. For example, in term one of 2017 there were nine General English and three examination preparation classes for adults, and three English for Further Studies classes for teenagers, and one for juniors. Unique has responded to student demand by offering 'getting ready for work [in New Zealand]' classes. The school has piloted in 2017, English for nursing and English for customer skills in its afternoon classes; student evaluations provided positive feedback and suggestions for improvements. Unique offers an after-school English class for ex-students enrolled at Rangitoto College, who need extra support but do not want to return to Unique for reasons of peer perception. Unique also offers tour groups and individuals an English class plus activities. Evaluations over time of this package of English and social activities consistently state that most participants were 'very satisfied' and nearly all were at least 'satisfied' with the experience.

Each class level has a clear curriculum with clearly defined learning outcomes and industry approved texts. Unique is progressively introducing significant technology (class sets of tablets and Smart Boards) into the classroom, supported by regular

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staff training. End-of-term teacher and student evaluations, the students the EER team interviewed, were clear about the benefits of this technology. For example, students interviewed said the SmartBoards enable them to be more attentive in class, as the board notes are electronically distributed later. A self-study centre has been developed enabling self-study after class, and a teacher is available to support students. More generally, well over 90 per cent of students were satisfied or very satisfied with their classes and teaching. The most common negative feedback was regarding access to books and learning materials, and this gap is being progressively addressed. There was clear evidence of numerous changes resulting from regular teacher and student feedback. Unique has continued with an annual and comprehensive academic self-audit based on the English New Zealand standards. The academic director is well qualified to conduct the audit, having previously been an English New Zealand auditor of other language schools.

1.4 How effectively are students supported and involved in their learning?

The rating for performance in relation to this key evaluation question is **Excellent**.

The rating for capability in self-assessment for this key evaluation question is **Excellent**.

Unique is effective in guiding and supporting nearly all students to stay engaged in and complete their planned studies. Internal student evaluations and a recent i-graduate external survey consistently report high levels of overall satisfaction. For example, the highest i-graduate student rating was the 97.5 per cent rating for 'friendly' staff. The randomly selected adult and teenage students that the EER team interviewed were also very positive about the school and all of them would or have recommended the school to others. If a student is not happy in their class they are often moved to another class. Very few students withdrew from the classes. The few formal complaints had been thoroughly addressed.

Unique has retained for many years a core group of experienced teaching staff with relevant qualifications for their role. There is a well-organised system that effectively records and monitors class and individual student activity, showing a range of lessons supporting students to be involved in their learning. The academic team actively monitor teacher performance through the detailed weekly class records and the formal and informal student feedback received; there was evidence of regular feedback being given. The annual peer observation process is detailed and systematic and contributes to teacher appraisal that in turn led to specific actions. Professional development is appropriate and relevant; the key recent focus has been on using new technology in the classroom. The teachers interviewed particularly valued informal and ongoing collegial sharing in the teacher staffroom. Teachers rate and provide detailed and reflective feedback at the end of each semester on their teaching, the facilities, student support services and the support received from management. It is clear that numerous actions result from

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the feedback teachers provide. For example, a request for some payment for time on administration has recently been agreed to by management. The evaluators randomly selected some student evaluations and found that typically student rate teachers as 'excellent' on a four-point scale⁶, and nearly all provided numerous compliments about the teachers. Ninety-eight per cent of the students rated their 'classes and teaching' as 'excellent' or 'very good' in the most recent evaluation.

Pastoral care procedures are comprehensive, well organised and effective. Dedicated student support staff arrange homestays, visas and insurance. The student feedback consistently states that nearly all students are satisfied or very satisfied with the support they receive. The highest student ratings in the recent i-graduate survey was the support received when they first arrived; over 95 per cent were satisfied or very satisfied with the homestay welcome, support on the first night, and the school orientation. A recent restructure of the student support unit has seen student satisfaction rates remain high. Student evaluations of the homestay services have seen an increasing proportion of students rate the homestays as 'fantastic' or 'enjoyable'; and consistently a very small proportion (2 per cent) who were not satisfied. The issues identified were addressed. Evaluations completed by homestay families indicate that they are mostly very satisfied or satisfied with the support that Unique offers. Some students also clearly valued the support provided to find work.

1.5 How effective are governance and management in supporting educational achievement?

The rating for performance in relation to this key evaluation question is **Excellent**.

The rating for capability in self-assessment for this key evaluation question is **Excellent**.

There is convincing evidence that the leadership of Unique has been effective over time in supporting this school to consistently meet the important needs of students and key stakeholders. Unique has maintained a clear purpose: providing excellent English language tuition and offering students a satisfying overall experience. They have put in place detailed, well organised and tested quality management systems that are successful in identifying and responding to the needs of students, agents, homestay providers and partner schools.

Unique has retained effective leadership and capable teaching staff over an extended period. There are clear roles and responsibilities, and the changes the new managing director made to the school environment, student support and sales are coherent, considered and gradual. The school has developed and sustained ongoing relationships with many agents, homestay providers, partner schools and other stakeholders. The school is viewed as highly organised and professional by

⁶ The four point scale is: 1 – Excellent; 2 – Very Good; 3 – Okay; 4 – Poor

the stakeholders interviewed. Significant resources have been invested in renovating campus two, buying new technology to support classroom delivery and, most recently, introducing a student management system to meet Unique's specific requirements.

There is a distinct and recurring pattern of strong and authentic self-review taking place across all key areas of this education provider. Feedback is regularly collected from students, teachers, homestay providers and agents. This self-assessment information is consistently used to inform specific action plans that seek to improve performance. Often these have contributed to improvements in diverse areas noted in this report, and include: assessment, student reporting, use of technology, new afternoon classes developed, revised organisational structure, and procedures being modified. This approach has significantly contributed to key needs typically being well identified, effectively responded to and consistently met.

1.6 How effectively are important compliance accountabilities managed?

The rating for performance in relation to this key evaluation question is **Good**.

The rating for capability in self-assessment for this key evaluation question is **Good**.

Unique has been mostly effective in managing its compliance accountabilities. The organisation has detailed and well-established policies and procedures (described in the quality management system) to ensure consistent performance and activity that is compliant. There was good evidence of these systems being implemented, and changes being made when issues are identified. The school has clear and defined roles and responsibilities for managing compliance. Unique has recently purchased and just implemented a new student management system designed to better meet its compliance requirements.

There was good evidence that Unique was complying with relevant NZQA rules and regulations. The organisation met the NZQA requirements for an ownership change in 2015. The key NZQA requirements for the English language programmes have been implemented as approved. Unique presented annual programme schedules that confirm these programmes are being delivered. There is a well-organised attendance system and an attendance officer to ensure that students attend classes.

A primary regulatory accountability for Unique is to be compliant with the Code of Practice. A range of documentation was presented as evidence of compliance, such as curriculum documents, class schedules, agent agreements as well as agent and student handbooks that describe applicable policies and requirements.

The EER team sampled 15 current student files to assess whether they met Code of Practice requirements. A gap was identified in the insurance cover for two

students while they were enrolled at Unique. The school then provided a spreadsheet of all current student files⁷; and there were no apparent further gaps in insurance cover. The new student management system was able to be immediately modified so that this gap would be identified in the future.

There was evidence of detailed and meaningful annual reviews of the Code of Practice taking place since the last EER. Key documentation such as agent agreements have been reviewed and revised to align with changes to the code. Unique stated that all of the previous code procedures have been maintained and requirements arising from the new code have been added to current practice. For example, Unique currently police vets all of their homestay providers and not (as the code states) just those providers who accommodate students who are under 18 years of age. Unique has communicated the new requirements to all agents. An agent survey (10 per cent response rate) showed that 86 per cent of the respondents stated they were familiar with the code. Unique has sent out a number of agent newsletters which outline the key responsibility of agents. The school is updating all agent agreements and expects to complete this process by August 2017.⁸ The three agents interviewed during the EER were familiar with their key code responsibilities.

No evidence was sighted during this EER process of other legal or ethical issues. Unique said it faced no significant issues of this kind.

⁷ Just over 150 students were enrolled at the time of the EER site visit.

⁸ Unique has currently around 400 agents with whom they are actively engaged. All current agreements state that the agent must comply with Code of Practice requirements.

Focus Areas

This section reports significant findings in each focus area, not already covered in Part 1.

2.1 Focus area: International Students: Support and Wellbeing

The rating in this focus area for educational performance is **Excellent**.

The rating for capability in self-assessment for this focus area is **Excellent**.

2.2 Focus area: General English

The rating in this focus area for educational performance is **Excellent**.

The rating for capability in self-assessment for this focus area is **Excellent**.

2.3 Focus area: English for Further Studies

The rating in this focus area for educational performance is **Excellent**.

The rating for capability in self-assessment for this focus area is **Excellent**.

Recommendations

NZQA recommends that Unique New Zealand:

- Continue investigating entry and exit assessment of students' language proficiency for all students.
- Assess how well Unique prepares those students who pathway onto further education or employment in New Zealand.
- Formalise the internal moderation process for the weekly testing of writing and speaking.
- Strengthen the existing internal audit process of student files to ensure compliance with Code of Practice requirements. Maintain a record of these audit results, including key issues identified and any changes made to procedures.

Appendix

Regulatory basis for external evaluation and review

External evaluation and review is conducted according to the External Evaluation and Review (EER) Rules 2013, which are made by NZQA under section 253 of the Education Act 1989 and approved by the NZQA Board and the Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills and Employment.

Self-assessment and participation in external evaluation and review are requirements for maintaining accreditation to provide an approved programme for all TEOs other than universities. The requirements are set through the NZQF Programme Approval and Accreditation Rules 2013, which are also made by NZQA under section 253 of the Education Act 1989 and approved by the NZQA Board and the Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills and Employment.

In addition, the Private Training Establishment Registration Rules 2013 require registered private training establishments to undertake self-assessment and participate in external evaluation and review, in accordance with the External Evaluation and Review Rules (EER) 2013, as a condition of maintaining registration. The Private Training Establishment Registration Rules 2013 are also made by NZQA under section 253 of the Education Act 1989 and approved by the NZQA Board and the Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills and Employment.

NZQA is responsible for ensuring non-university TEOs continue to comply with the rules after the initial granting of approval and accreditation of programmes and/or registration. The New Zealand Vice-Chancellors' Committee (NZVCC) has statutory responsibility for compliance by universities.

This report reflects the findings and conclusions of the external evaluation and review process, conducted according to the External Evaluation and Review (EER) Rules 2013.

The report identifies strengths and areas for improvement in terms of the organisation's educational performance and capability in self-assessment.

External evaluation and review reports are one contributing piece of information in determining future funding decisions where the organisation is a funded TEO subject to an investment plan agreed with the Tertiary Education Commission.

External evaluation and review reports are public information and are available from the NZQA website (www.nzqa.govt.nz).

The External Evaluation and Review (EER) Rules 2013 are available at <http://www.nzqa.govt.nz/assets/About-us/Our-role/Rules/EER-Rules.pdf>, while information about the conduct and methodology for external evaluation and review can be found at <http://www.nzqa.govt.nz/providers-partners/external-evaluation-and-review/policy-and-guidelines-eer/introduction/>.

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