

# “We’re coming from different worlds”: exploring student identity during transition



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# Overview

- Scotland has 19 universities with **130,000** undergraduate home students
- People from deprived communities are less likely to enter university



## Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework

SQA qualifications  
(taken at College)

University  
Qualifications

Masters Degree

Year 4

Honours Degree

Year 3

Ordinary Degree

Higher National  
Diploma

Year 2

Diploma of Higher  
Education

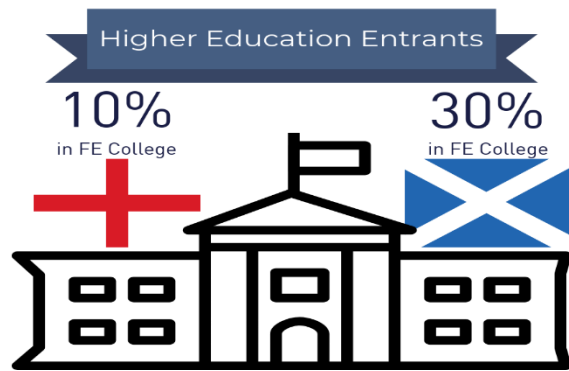
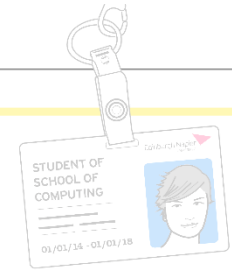
Higher National  
Certificate

Year 1

Certificate of Higher  
Education

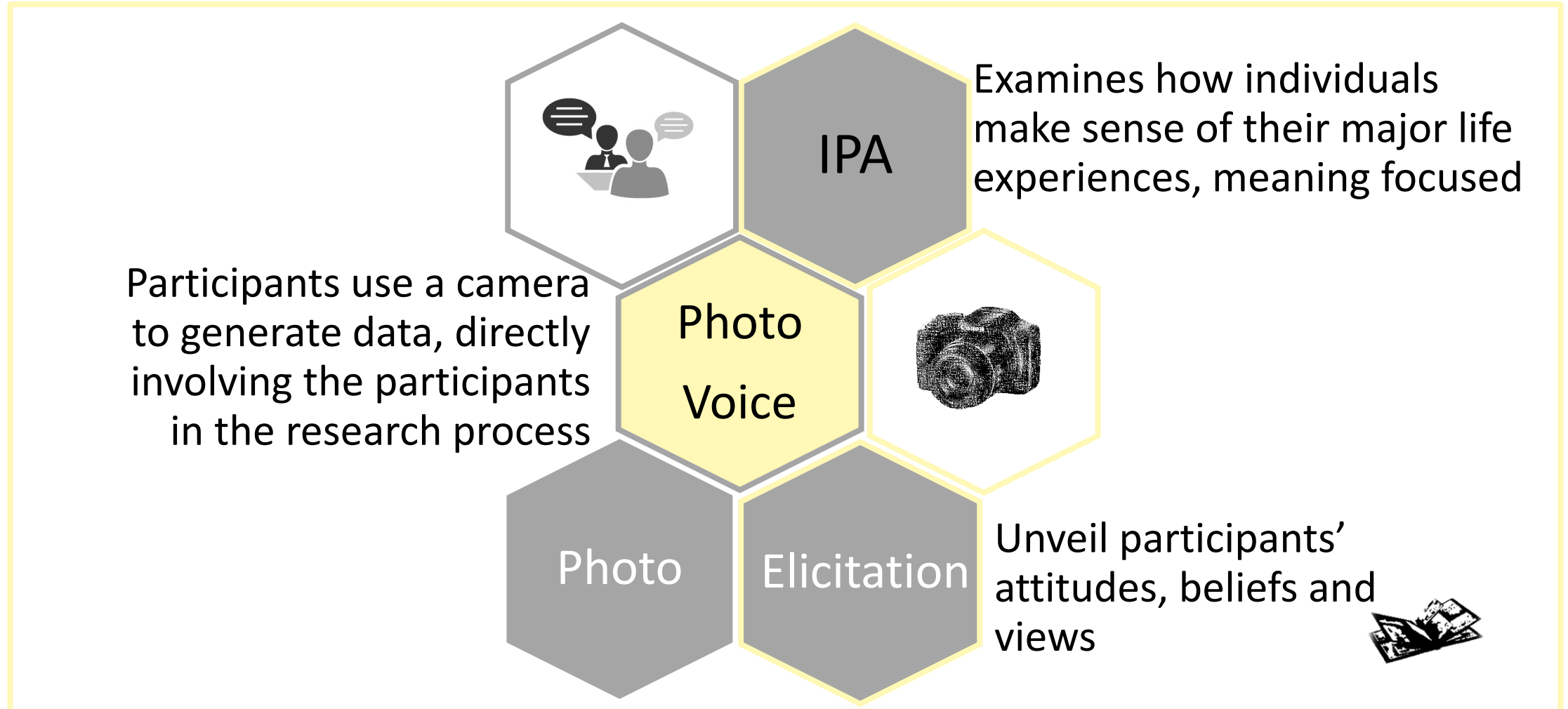


# Challenges around transition



Additional funded places  
Scheme (SFC, 2013)

challenge  
belonging  
difference  
social  
integration  
identity  
participation  
preparation  
crisis  
bridging  
academic  
friendship  
widering  
mind  
student  
ability  
space  
motivation  
transition



# IPA Interviews

- Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is a qualitative research method which examines how individuals make sense of their major life experiences, meaning focused; it is committed to understanding first person experiences from a third person position.
- As the participants are trying to make sense of their world, the researcher is trying to make sense of the participants trying to make sense of their world (J.A. Smith, P. Flowers, and M. Larkin, 2009)

"My first big deadline I had a massive anxiety attack and it wasn't nice!"

"I did 84 days straight between work and uni and then I need to really think about what I need to give up."

"I felt like a college student, there has been a big gap between college and university."

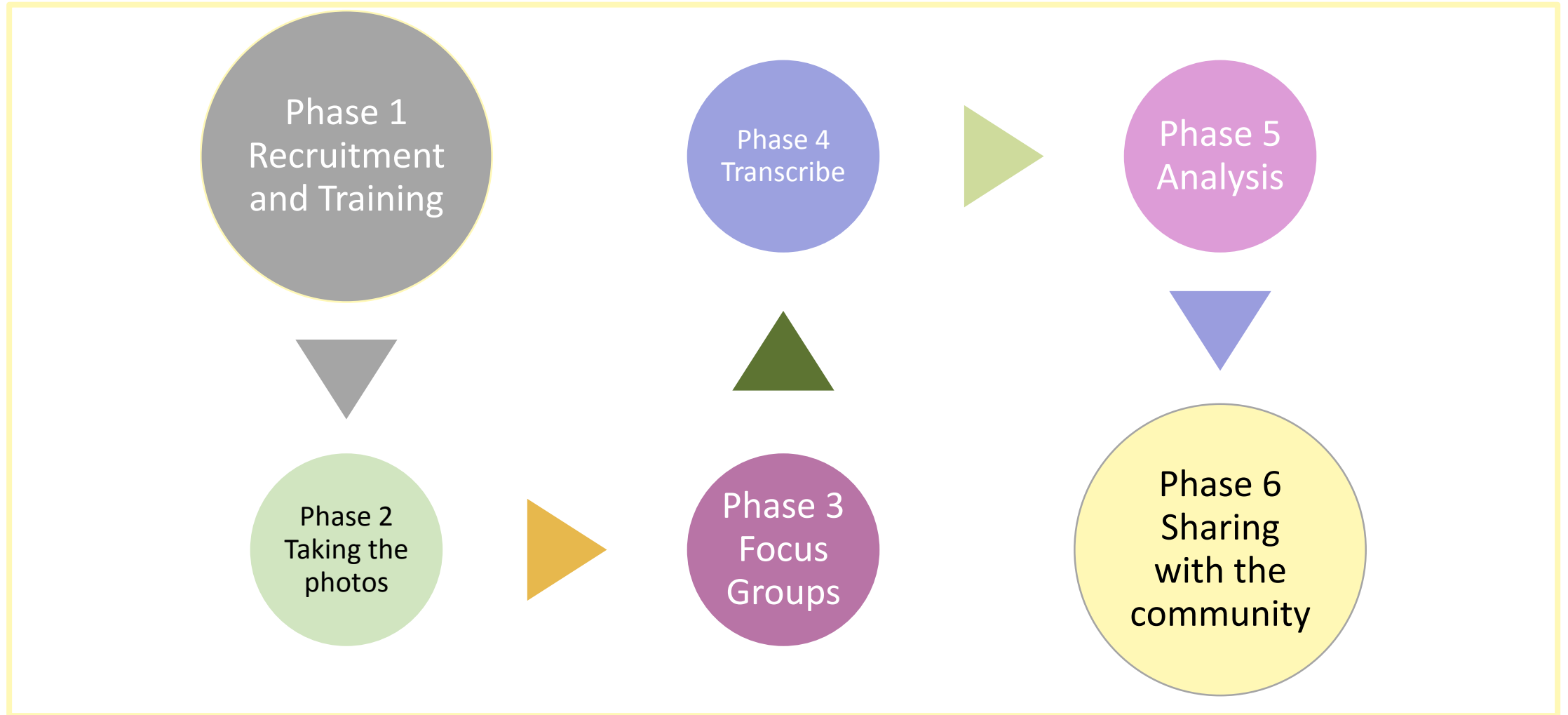
"It is just trying to find your way around a new building, with it being so big basically, and trying to find all the different ways you can go from one side of the building to the other."

"I stressed myself the first few weeks, it was a different experience and I kinda felt a bit scared."

"I don't come here to have happier life, to cry because I feel lonely. I come here to improve my knowledge. The knowledge gap, is the gap."

"It's totally different to college. It's a small class, we all know each other. We don't have to think about it, or even put up our hand. We just talk and ask questions. Its more relaxed."

"Well the culture is so different."







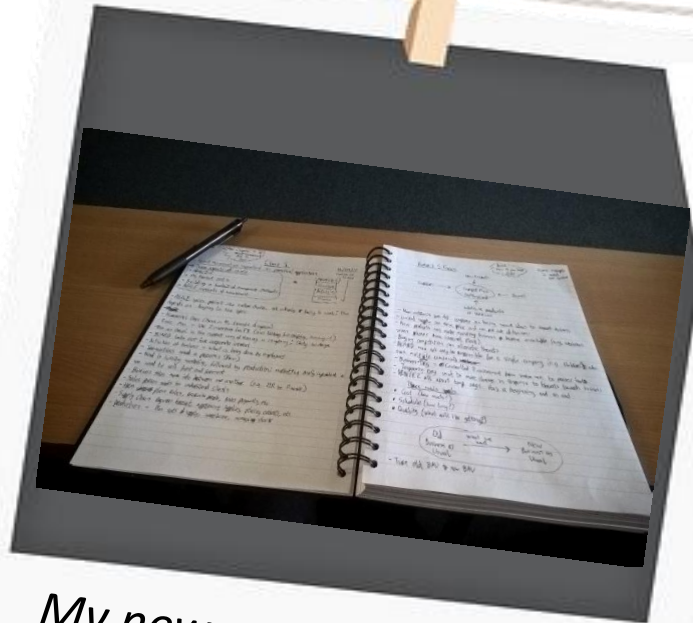
*A mix of old and new: some things are new here but obviously some things are the same as my old institution.*



*New path, new journey, not knowing the destination*



*A new way to see, a new way to learn*



*My new normal: a regular day of note-taking.*



*My friends hiking up Arthur's Seat: like in study, the path may be hard but we know the destination is going to be beautiful so we keep going.*



*New beginnings: moving into a new home.*



# Photo-Elicitation

- Photo Elicitation is ‘based on the simple idea of inserting a photograph (or photographs) into a qualitative interview’ (Harper, 2002) in order to elicit data.
- The photographs are used to trigger responses and unveil participants’ attitudes, beliefs and views (Meo, 2010).

*“I’m really excited to get the opportunity but I’m also terrified. I don’t think I’m the same as the uni students, probably less prepared.”*



# Process of analysis for a single case

- Step 1: Reading ,re-reading and examination of the photograp
- Step 2: Initial noting
  - Descriptive comments
  - Linguistic comments
  - Conceptual comments
  - Deconstruction
- Step 3: Developing emergent themes
- Step 4: Searching for connections across emergent themes
- Step 5: Moving to the next case
- Step 6: Looking for patterns across the cases

Emergent	Line Number	Original Transcript	Exploratory comments
		I: What has being an associate student been like for you?	
Multiple identities – college student	1	P1: I felt like a college student, there has been a big gap	Dissatisfied with college year prior to entry - Is this personal reflection? Talks of access to Napier but still describing/identifying as a college student in the 3 <sup>rd</sup> year. - My own comparison of college/university They are a 3 <sup>rd</sup> year student but they do not feel ready  Contradiction – not a third year but now doesn't change
	2	between college and university, this year I consider a useless	
Bridging the gap	3	year, compared with this year, last year could be much more	
	4	helpful. Just with small changes. All time we had access to	
Negative – college didn't prepare me	5	Napier but we have been college student and when we	
	6	arrived in third year you are a college student coming into	
	7	third year. You are not a third year student. So we have to	
	8	bridge in subject, specifically for the guys from the college,	
	9	to fill the gaps. You came from the college but you were	
Multiple identities – university student	10	already a Napier student so basically it doesn't change that much.	
		I: Ok so you talked about two different things there, You talked about being a college student and a university student.	
		P1: Yes	
		I: How do you see them being different, or the same? So if we start with the college student. What is a college student?	
Academic differences	11	P1: The way of studying of the subjects are totally different.	Academic challenge – lecturers as experts in their field. Inspiration for learning. Enthusiasm for subject area - Motivation for learning  Dissatisfied with college teaching. Comparison between college lecturers and university lecturers.
	12	Here we have Tom, he know what he is teaching, you can	
	13	see him, he knows what he is teaching. xxxxx, he really	
Motivation for learning	14	really knows what he is doing. Last year that didn't happen.	
	15	I mean, they were teaching us php and I had to tell the	
	16	teacher – we need a server. Because php is server-side.	
Lectures as experts – visible	17	They said no, that will compile, note++ will compile, I said,	
	18	the things on the web will not compile, it is not c++. They	

# Early Findings

<b>Academic Differences</b>	Challenge, differences, results driven, expectations, format of teaching, pace of learning, routine, self-direction, workload
<b>Motivation</b>	Aspiration, common goals, motivation for learning, peer insight, sense of achievement
<b>Persistence</b>	Dedication, persist, won't give up
<b>Physical Environment</b>	Lost on campus, physical space, vastness, learning resources
<b>Preparation</b>	Attending events, college advantages, familiarity, college didn't prepare me, time management
<b>Self-Concept</b>	Ability beliefs, confidence, future self, individual growth, mindset, subject knowledge
<b>Social Aspects</b>	Friendship - relationship with classmates, Friendship - relationship with lecturers, impersonal, isolation, loneliness, settling in, peer support, social integration
<b>Student Identity</b>	Multiple identities, age differences, associate student, college, university, new
<b>Transition</b>	Adjustment, benefits, changes, gap, route, shock, struggle, barriers

# Conclusions

- Photovoice allowed the students themselves to become the agents for change – they will shape the interventions and frameworks deployed for future cohorts of transfer students
- The use of photovoice surfaced insights into student life beyond the classroom and outside of the campus.
- This personal access could not have been replicated through surveys or structured interviews, confirming the PV method as particularly relevant for gathering the student's voice

# Thank You

## “We’re coming from different worlds”: exploring student identity during transition

### BACKGROUND

- ❑ In Scotland, almost 30 per cent of higher education entrants are enrolled in FE college
- ❑ Many of these student continue their journey to degree level qualifications through direct-entry opportunities, joining university programmes in their 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> year
- ❑ These rates of entry continue to rise and offer universities opportunities to widen access and enhance the student demographic
- ❑ The barriers these student encounter and how they identify and fit-in during this transition can impact upon their future success

Scottish universities worst in the UK for admitting poorer students, despite having no tuition fees



Poorest pupils face 'shocking' barriers to university



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### METHODS



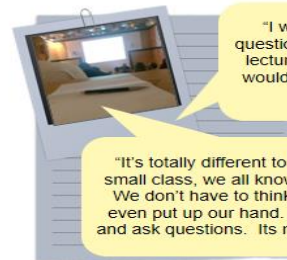
Photo Voice



IPA

scary

exciting



“I would never ask a question in that place. The lecturer is too far away, I would never put my hand up.”

“It’s totally different to here. It’s a small class, we all know each other. We don’t have to think about it, or even put up our hand. We just talk and ask questions. It’s more relaxed.”

Photo Elicitation

### EMERGENT THEMES

<b>Academic Differences</b>	Challenge, differences, results driven, expectations, format of teaching, pace of learning, routine, self-direction, workload
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<b>Persistence</b>	Dedication, persist, won’t give up
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### CONCLUSIONS

- ❑ Graphical research methods were found to be particularly relevant to this study
- ❑ Allowing the students themselves to become the agents for change
- ❑ Use of photos and IPA surfaced insights into student life beyond the classroom and outside of the campus



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