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Article

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Abstract

This paper provides a summary of selected reports and papers ('grey literature') published by key HE sector organisations in England (and the UK), and 'think tanks' between February and August 2019. These include: Advance HE; The Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (AGCAS); Careers Research and Advising Centre Ltd (CRAC); Department for Education (DfE); Higher Education Careers Services Unit (HECSU); Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI); Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA); The Insight Network/Dig-In; Jisc; Milkround; National Education Opportunities Network (NEON); National Union of Students (NUS); Office for the Independent Adjudicator (OIA); Office for Students (OfS); Onward; Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA); Society of College, National and University Libraries (SCONUL) The Sutton Trust; The Student Engagement Partnership (TSEP); Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS); Universities and Colleges Information Systems Association (UCISA); UK Council for International Student Affairs (UKCISA); UK Standing Committee for Quality Assessment (UKSCQA); Universities and Colleges Union (UCU); Universities UK (UUK); Universities UK International (UUKi); and UPP Foundation.

The themes covered in the paper include: The Augar Review; the Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework; value-for-money and student expectations; teaching quality and assessment; student complaints; the digital experience; learning spaces; learning gain; university admissions; contextualised admissions; clearing; unconditional offers; degree apprenticeships; mature learners and healthcare courses; transition to university; accelerated degrees; equality and diversity; mental health and wellbeing; hate crime, sexual violence and online harassment; the Prevent duty; graduate attainment; destinations of disabled graduates; graduate earnings and value; Longitudinal Educational Outcomes; employability and careers; internationalisation; the civic university; HE management and leadership; transformational change; Athena SWAN; BAME leadership in HE; and BAME library staff.

The Augar Review

An independent panel, chaired by Sir Philip Augar, undertook an extensive review of post-18 education in England, the first to consider the whole of post-compulsory education since the 1963 Robbins report. 53 recommendations were made across six broad areas, and those relating to higher education were:

o   A freeze in the average per-student resource for three years from 2020/21;
o   A reduction (to £7,500) on the cap on the fee charged to HE students;
o   An increase in the teaching grant to replace the lost fee income;
o   A freeze in the fee cap until 2022/23;
o   An adjustment in the teaching grant attached to each subject "to reflect more accurately the subject's reasonable costs and its social and economic value to students and taxpayers" (p. 96), with support for highly specialist institutions that could be adversely affected;
o   Support to ensure disadvantaged students to access and participate in higher education by increasing the amount of teaching grant funding that follows disadvantaged students, and requiring providers to be accountable for their use of Student Premium grant, alongside access and participation plans;
o   Government intervention in courses with poor recruitment, retention, graduate employability and long term benefits by 2022/23, if the sector has failed to address these; and
o   A withdrawal of financial support for foundation years attached to degree courses.

In a report for UUK, Conlon and Halterbeck (June 2019) identified a number of winners and losers of the Augar Review recommendations. The winners were identified as:

o   High earning (predominantly male) graduates;
o   Less well-off students entering HE; and
o   STEM focused HE institutions ("relatively speaking").

The losers were thought to include:

o   Low earning (male) graduates and most female graduates;
o   Students from non-traditional or disadvantaged backgrounds no longer entering HE;
o   Arts, humanities and social sciences focused HE institutions;
o   HE institutions with high volumes of debt;
o   HE institutions outside England;
o   The general taxpayer (owing to "increase in Exchequer costs" associated with the major recommendations);
o   The Student Loans Company;
o   Part-time students; and
o   HE institutions "because of postgraduate fee pressure".

The TEF

In a review of the development of the Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework (TEF), three key recommendations were laid out (UUK, February 2019):

o   The governance of the TEF should be clarified to give students and the sector a clear stake in decision-making;
o   The TEF should be founded on reliable judgements that represent a shared definition of teaching and learning excellence; and
o   A reconsideration of the introduction of subject-level TEF.

Value-for-money and student expectations

Over 14,000 full-time undergraduate (UG) students completed the Advance HE/HEPI

Student Academic Experience Survey 2019 and there were a number of positive shifts in student opinion. Overall, the university experience was considered to be largely a challenging but rewarding one, though some students did not see things in such positive light (Neves and Hillman, June 2019). With regard to value-for-money (VFM), a significant increase in perceptions were noted, up from 38 to 41 per cent, and this was mirrored by a significant decline in perceptions of poor value (down from 32 to 29 per cent). Perceptions of VFM increased significantly among students from England (35 to 39 per cent), and also for Scotland (60 to 63 per cent), which had tended to experience the most positive perceptions overall. EU students' perceptions declined from 47 to 44 per cent, and students from TEF Gold-rated institutions were more likely to perceive VFM (there were no material differences between Silver and Bronze-rated institutions).

Factors influencing high VFM included teaching quality, course content, facilities and resources, the campus and built environment, and the likelihood of getting a well-paid job. Those students who reported poor VFM were more likely to cite tuition fees, poor teaching, contact hours, course content, or cost of living as their reason.

Only just over one in five students (22 per cent) found their experience wholly better than expected, which was higher than the proportion that found their experience wholly worse than expected (13 per cent). The top three reasons cited, in relation to why the experience had been worse than expected, were:

o "Teaching quality worse than expected";
o "Course poorly organised"; and
o "Did not feel supported in independent study".

However, the most significant change related to students 'not putting enough effort themselves', up from 30 to 35 per cent. This was much higher from UK-domiciled BAME (black, Asian and minority ethnic) students (42 per cent).

On students' assessment of their course choices, a high proportion (64 per cent) were happy with their choice and this was broadly comparable to the 2018 results (65 per cent). Students indicated that they would most likely seek a change in their institution rather than the course, but this was most prevalent among Post-92 and specialist institutions. Commuter students were less satisfied with their course and more likely to consider an apprenticeship or not enter HE at all. Further, BAME students were less likely to be satisfied with their course and were more likely to indicate that they would have opted for a different course and/or institution.

Teaching quality and assessment

Neves and Hillman (June 2019) reported improvement in student perceptions of the quality of teaching staff in six areas:

	2018	2019
Encouragement to take responsibility for own learning	78%	79%
Clear explanation of course goals/requirements	65%	67%
Use of contact hours to guide independent study	65%	66%
Helpful and supportive teaching	57%	59%
Subjects made to look more interesting	55%	56%
Motivated me to do my best work	52%	53%
Regular initiation of debates and discussion	37%	36%
Help in exploring own areas of interest	35%	35%

However, on each aspect, BAME students were significantly less likely to be satisfied with the teaching quality. In relation to the type of institution, whilst specialist institutions scored higher, Post-92 institutions were regarded as being particularly strong in motivating students and in helping them to explore their areas of interest. A number of improvements were also noted in assessment practice, including giving general feedback on progress (beyond discussion of marks) and commenting on draft work.

Student complaints

The OIA (April 2019) cited the following trends in their *2018 Annual Report*:

o The rise in complaints in 2018 was fairly distributed across different areas of study, with more complaints from students on business and administrative courses (n=247);

o There was a substantial rise in complaints from students studying subjects allied to medicine (n=237), but significantly lower complaints from those studying law (in previous years, often second to business and administration);

o Comparable to previous years, non-EU international students were over-represented in the complaints received, as were PG students (particularly PhD students);

o In total, 20 per cent of cases were justified, partly justified, or settled in favour of the student, which was four percentage points down compared with 2017; and

o Comparable to previous years, the increase in the number of students experiencing mental health difficulties was reflected in the complaints received.

The digital experience

Jisc, the NUS and TSEP (May 2019) released a 'roadmap' for supporting students to improve their digital experience at university. The roadmap is aimed at helping student representatives to discuss and to review specific aspects of the student experience and the digital environment for learning, and how digital tools and resources are used to support learning.

The DfE commissioned ICF Consulting to review the online learning and artificial intelligence market in the UK (Zaidi et al., June 2019). The study examined online courses where over half the provision was delivered online, and this included analysis of a few HE providers. Overall, it was noted that HE providers delivered few online courses but that many tended to work in partnership with MOOC (Massive Open Online Courses) platforms. The study revealed that both FE and HE providers did not generally regard online learning as a priority with few planning to expand their provision to reach a wider geographical area.

Learning spaces

Advance HE published a series of case studies, inspired by the Flexible Learning Symposium which it hosted in March 2018, that "attempt[ed] to occupy the territory between abstract theorising about space-related issues and technical questions related to space, building design and academic practice" (Elkington and Bligh, February 2019: 4). The case studies reflect the use of space in teaching and learning, and related space design issues, campus design, and organisational and management issues relating to space and teaching.

Learning gain

[Learning gain is] the improvement of knowledge, skills, work-readiness and personal development made by students during their time spent in higher education (HEFCE, 2017).

The National Mixed Methodology Learning Gain Project (NMMLGP) was one of a suite of learning gain pilot projects funded by HEFCE (Higher Education Funding Council for England) during the period 2015 to 2018. A team from Sheffield Hallam University evaluated the experiences and outcomes of the ten NMMLGP institutions, and reported their findings to the OfS (Jones-Devitt et al., July 2019). In addition to understanding the approaches and practices that worked well, or otherwise, the team sought to understand students' experiences and opinions of the NMMLGP. Five recommendations for policy-makers and providers were highlighted (p. 25):

o Abandon a one-size-fits all measure of learning gain (modelled on the NMMLGP questionnaire) as it had "minimal value" for the majority of students and was "not an influential construct" in their decision-making concerning either choice of institution or impact on the curriculum;
o Explore further students' perceptions of learning gain in order to move beyond any "impressionistic findings";
o Consider whose interests are best served by the measurement of learning gain;
o Relate all learning gain work to students' own context and embed at local level within the subject or disciplinary area; and
o Consider developing a repertoire of approaches, as part of a 'learning gain toolkit', which could be accessed by students as part of a flexible and adaptable process "underpinned by

student choice rather than a normative comparison".

Prior to the NMMLGP, in 2015 HEFCE awarded over £4m to 13 pilot projects involving over 70 HE providers, with the aim of testing and evaluating measures of learning gain. In Kandiko Howson's (July 2019) final report of the evaluation of this programme, similar conclusions were noted in relation to the complexity of measuring learning gain (p. 8):

Pilots of standardised tests carried out during the projects have not proven to be robust and effective measures of learning gain due to challenges of student engagement, differential scores across socio-demographic characteristics, subject differences and use of data.

The pilot projects and the NMMLGP sought to develop and test instruments whilst a third strand, the Higher Education Learning Gain Analysis (HELGA), examined existing administrative data on students' experience to evaluate whether it could be utilised to deepen the understanding of learning gain (OfS, July 2019). The OfS confirmed that HELGA had not succeeded in finding a single measure of learning gain that could be used across the sector based on administrative data.

A question on learning gain was first introduced in the *2017 Student Academic Experience Survey* and, in the 2019 results, 64 per cent of UG respondents indicated that they had learnt 'a lot' (Neves and Hillman, June 2019). The study noted differences by institutional type – Russell Group and specialist institutions tended to score higher, and there were stronger perceptions among students at TEF Gold rated institutions. Health subjects stood out as being associated with high levels of learning and, by contrast, for some UGs in social science

subjects (such as business and communications), their courses did not always stretch their knowledge significantly beyond what they already felt they knew.

University admissions

On behalf of The Sutton Trust, Ipsos MORI (August 2019) surveyed 2,809 young people (aged 11-16) across England and Wales on their attitudes towards higher education. Three quarters felt that 'knowing the right people' was important for success in life. In comparison, two-thirds thought that going to university was important, which represented a fall from a high of 86 per cent in 2013: the proportion who felt that going to university was not important rose from 11 per cent in 2013 to 20 per cent in 2019. University was deemed less important for young people from the least affluent families (61 per cent compared with 67 per cent in 'high affluence' households) and white pupils (62 per cent compared with 75 per cent of young people from a BAME background).

Of the young people who said they were unlikely they would go into higher education, the most common reason was not liking the idea, or enjoying learning or studying (62 per cent). 43 per cent cited a financial reason, while 41 per cent thought they were not clever enough or were sceptical on getting good enough exam results to get in. Money concerns continued to be pronounced for young people from the least affluent families (50 per cent compared with 32 per cent in 'high affluence' households) and for girls over boys (44 per cent versus 36 per cent).

Contextualised admissions

The OfS (May 2019b) presented an 'Insight brief' on contextualised admissions (these enable providers to respond to an applicant's personal circumstances by offering a lower entry bar). The brief recognised that contextual admissions alone was not a panacea for fair access to HE in England, but that a "broad spectrum approach" was needed "whereby providers work with schools to shift expectations and improve attainment, establish sophisticated admissions systems… and develop more flexible and varied routes into HE" (p. 8).

1,035 full-time UG students completed the HEPI/Youthsight Monitor on contextualised admissions (Dale-Harris, July 2019). Most students (72 per cent) thought that HE admissions should take account of an applicant's backgrounds. However, there was a near equal split between those students supporting making lower grade offers to those from disadvantaged areas, and those opposing such measures: support for contextualised offers was stronger among those at the most selective (Russell Group) universities. 54 per cent of the respondents thought that students admitted with lower grades would be able to keep up with the course requirements.

Admissions and clearing

UCAS (August 2019) reported that a record 58,240 people had been accepted through clearing (July to August 2019), compared to 52,990 in 2018. In England, for this particular point in the cycle, a record 34.4 per cent of all 18 year olds had been accepted through UCAS compared to 33.4 per cent in 2018. Further, and verifying another record, 20.9 per cent of 18 year olds from the most disadvantaged backgrounds (POLAR4 quintile 1) in England had been accepted – a rise of 1.2 percentage points on 2018. 237,770 18 year olds in the UK were accepted, a rise of one per cent, which came alongside a 1.9 per cent drop in the number of 18 year olds in the UK population.

Unconditional offers

UCAS's (July 2019) *Unconditional Offers*, published within 22 working days of the 30 June 2019 application deadline, showed that 97,045 students who had yet to complete their qualifications received an offer with an unconditional component. This represented a rise from 2018, when 87,540 of these applicants received an offer of this type. Applicants from the most disadvantaged backgrounds were slightly more likely to receive a 'conditional unconditional' offer than those from the most disadvantaged backgrounds.

Degree apprenticeships

The twin aims of the apprenticeship policy agenda across all countries in the UK are to increase productivity and social mobility. They are intended to raise productivity by driving up skills levels in the UK to maximise national competitiveness (QAA, July 2019: 3).

In a report for the OfS, Engeli and Turner (June 2019) presented the findings of their survey to degree apprentices (n=269). Degree apprenticeships were introduced in 2015, as part of a package of reforms to the apprenticeships system in England, and were identified as an important tool for enhancing social mobility by the government. The study found that 25 per cent of the sample would not have pursued any other form of qualification or training if it had not been for the degree apprenticeship offer. The value of vocationally oriented degree apprenticeships was identified as a key motivation: 90 per cent of Level 6 and 78 per cent of Level 7 respondents thought that a degree apprenticeship would help them advance more quickly in their career than if they had completed a traditional degree.

The OfS (March 2019) conceded that although degree apprentice take-up was relatively low they could be expected to grow further in the future as "the necessary infrastructure" had been established, with growth in nursing and policing studies expected to show particular growth. The QAA (July 2019) produced a 'characteristics statement' that outlined the distinctive features of apprenticeships in the UK where they include an HE award, where they are in an HE programme, and where they include higher level learning delivered through a provider.

UUK (July 2019a) focused on the development of degree apprenticeships in England. The study comprised engagement with 13 'trailblazer leads', 49 employers, over 60 universities, 11 schools, 747 students, and 93 parents. Employers signalled their enthusiasm and demand for higher level apprenticeships to address pressing needs in, for example, digital skills, engineering (where "significant skills shortages" were identified), and public sector employment (such as nursing, social work and policing). With reference to the value of the degree, employers noted how it could give apprentices equal status alongside graduates, be an internationally recognised qualification, help attract apprentices, and offer reassurance about the quality of the provision through having university involvement. However, prospective apprentices and their parents demonstrated a significant lack of information and understanding about degree apprenticeships. UUK noted a concern about whether apprenticeships involved too narrow a career choice too early on, and whether they lacked the support and wider experiences and opportunities that going to university entails.

Page | 52

Recruitment of mature learners to healthcare courses

In a report to the OfS, Marketwise Strategies Ltd (February 2019) reported on a project that attempted to gain a better overall understanding of mature learners entering nursing, midwifery and allied health (NMAH) courses in England. The study comprised 50 in-depth interviews and five focus groups (across universities, further education (FE) colleges and NHS trusts). In particular, and stated as a secondary aim, the study shed a light on the barriers to NMAH applications from mature male applicants, and BAME (male and female) mature applicants, and offered recommendations on how these barriers could be overcome.

Transition to university

The OfS (May 2019a) revealed that the number of students studying Access to Higher Education Diplomas ('Access courses', almost entirely taught at FE colleges) had been declining, while there had been an increase in the number studying on integrated foundation years (predominantly taught at HE institutions). In 2017/18, the number of entrants to Access courses was approximately equal to the number of entrants to integrated foundation year courses. The number of entrants to Access courses declined by 18 per cent between 2012/13 and 2017/18, from 36,880 to 30,410, while the number of integrated foundation year entrants almost tripled from 10,430 to 30,030.

The OfS noted the similarities between Access to HE Diplomas and integrated foundation year courses, but also important differences. For instance, it was surmised that the wider geographical spread of Access courses meant that they were suitable for a wider range of potential HE students and enabled progression to many different courses, whereas foundation years were likely to attract students with a higher level of commitment to taking degree-level study at a specific provider. The report also recorded the following:

o Two-fifths of Access students held a qualification equivalent to A-levels before taking the course, compared with four-fifths of foundation year students;
o Most Access course entrants were over 21, whereas the majority of those taking foundation years were aged 20 or younger;
o Subjects allied to medicine were the most common subject area for entrants to Access courses, whereas business and administrative studies were the most common for integrated foundation years;
o The proportion of students who progressed to a degree programme in the four years following an Access course (62 per cent) was lower than the proportion who progressed after a foundation year (79 per cent) (students from both courses sometimes went on to a degree course after two or more years, rather than immediately);
o Students who started without A-level or equivalent qualifications had a lower rate of progression to degree-level study (55 per cent for Access courses, 61 per cent for foundation years), than those with A-levels (71 and 89 per cent respectively);
o Those who progressed to full-time degree-level study after foundation year were more likely to complete their degree within four years (63 per cent) than those on a degree after an Access course (53 per cent); and
o Of those who qualified with a degree, a slightly higher proportion of Access course students achieved a first or upper second class degree (70 per cent) than those who studied a foundation year (67 per cent).

Atherton and Mazhari (February 2019), in a NEON report, presented findings on the participation of white students from areas of low HE participation and how this varied by HE provider in England. The study revisited issues examined in the 2016 report *About a Boy* and, in addition to analysing Access and Participation Plans (APP) and provider case studies, administered an online survey between December 2018 and February 2019.

o Over 70 per cent of all white students from low participation neighbourhoods attended Post-92 universities (LJMU, with 1,140 students, recorded the second highest number of acceptances) but white students were found in the highest percentages in FE colleges.

o In over half of university providers, less than five per cent of their students were from white and from low participation neighbourhoods. (The report authors calculated that if these providers raised the level of participation of HE in their institutions to five per cent there would be nearly 10,000 more white students from low participation neighbourhoods studying in HE.)

o Of all applications to HE by white students from low participation neighbourhoods, only 22 per cent were accepted, though the chances of being accepted differed greatly by provider.

o Less than 20 per cent of all HE institutions had targets in their APP related to white students from low participation neighbourhoods.

o Most HE providers did not target outreach work explicitly aimed at white students from low participation neighbourhoods. Over 70 per cent of those who responded to the survey indicated trying to ensure that existing projects reached students from this background. However, less than 40 per cent were doing work specifically aimed at male students and less than 12 per cent with female students.

o More than 90 per cent of respondents to the survey indicated that they were engaged in work to support the progression of white students from low participation neighbourhoods to HE (an increase from 40 per cent when compared to the previous 2016 survey). However, the report authors cautioned, "those delivering this work understand that there are limitations to what they can so and they see as their biggest challenge. The relationship between education and white lower socio-economic communities is a complex one and to re-orientate it requires long term work to address social and economic inequality" (p. 4).

A new question on how students felt when they began university was introduced in the *Student Academic Experience Survey* (Neves and Hillman, June 2019). Only around one in five students (22 per cent) felt unprepared. However, Chinese students were the least prepared demographic group – and LGBTQ+ and disabled students were also less prepared than average. Strong variations on preparedness were recorded by subject. For instance, languages and medicine/dentistry recorded the lowest levels of unpreparedness.

Part-time provision

In a report for the OfS, CFE Research and HESA (March 2019) published evidence on effective part-time provision for UGs from under-represented and disadvantaged backgrounds. Applying secondary data analysis and primary research with part-time students and provider staff, the study explored: trends in access to part-time HE; the factors that influence whether different groups of disadvantaged and under-represented students choose to study part-time; the factors that motivate HE providers

to offer and/or focus on part-time provision; and the characteristics of effective provision of part-time HE for disadvantaged and under-represented students.

Despite the dramatic fall in part-time student numbers overall, the proportion of students from disadvantaged groups had remained relatively stable (at around ten per cent). However, a significant dip in numbers was registered amongst mature learners, in particular the over 40s. The cost of part-time HE was recognised as the main barrier to access, and funding reforms had done little to mitigate this. Whilst a lack of awareness of the availability of financial support was cited as a factor, the report authors also indicated that mature students were reluctant to take advantage of the funding available as they were more debt-averse or fearful of not achieving a return on their investment.

Aside from cost, other barriers included: time constraints; lack of confidence and study skills to study at HE level; lack of opportunities to integrate into the wider student community; and lack of facilities tailored to part-time students' needs. In addition, some survey respondents expressed particular dissatisfaction with the social, emotional and pastoral support available for part-time students. The report authors posited that this raised an important question about how engaged part-time students were in the National Student Survey and the extent to which their voices influenced providers' decision-making.

The analysis identified a number of 'cold spots' in provision in several regions of England, and the survey findings highlighted a perceived lack of choice for part-time students. Part-time students are typically less mobile and a lack of provision restricts student choice and can limit part-time students to certain courses at certain types of provider – which can perpetuate disadvantage. The study recognised the long-standing role of The Open University and new providers, such as the University of Derby, in delivering online and distance learning.

Accelerated degrees
A question relating to accelerated degrees was introduced in the *Student Academic Experience Survey 2019* (Neves and Hillman, June 2019). Overall, 62 per cent of respondents were either positive or very positive towards the concept with 29 per cent being negative towards it, and a further 24 per cent neutral. The concept was much more appealing to mature students, or those employed in excess of ten hours or more per week, or those who travelled ten miles or more to campus. (Note: students were given an illustrative example which described a two-year degree costing around £11,000 each year in tuition fees, thereby representing a saving in the region of £5,000 against a three-year course.)

Equality and diversity
In a report to the OfS, Stevenson et al. (February 2019) collated information on 'targeted interventions' aimed at students from under-represented and disadvantaged ethnic backgrounds. Data collection comprised: a sector-wide survey to HE providers; a survey to key stakeholders (academic staff, students, 'academic managerial' staff and policy experts, and community or third-sector organisations); analysis of 2018/19 access agreements; sector-wide case study data; and a 'summit event' (hosted by Sheffield Hallam University) that was aimed at enabling the contribution of further stakeholder perspectives. Findings from analysis of HE providers indicated that:

o Targeting was largely focused on outreach and access interventions, and that targeted interventions in relation to retention and success were few, whilst those related to progression were almost non-existent;

o The vast majority targeted more than one ethnic group and "cross-cutting disadvantages" alongside ethnicity; and

o Of those providers not targeting, they either did not see it as a priority, or were uncertain as to how to address inequalities, or lacked evidence of what worked, or highlighted difficulties in accessing or sharing data.

Findings from stakeholders raised further concerns in relation to (p. 6):

o A lack of discussion on discrimination as well as insufficient or ineffective mechanisms to capture disclosures of implicit racial bias and/or discrimination;

o Insufficient BAME leaders and/or critical minds in leadership positions;

o A lack of understanding of what targeting is and, in particular, the belief that targeting and/or positive action is illegal;

o A lack of transparency as to how HE providers are spending money, or not, on targeted interventions and activities;

o The perception of deficit models with interventions built on racist stereotypes;

o The lack of inclusion of BAME students in the design, development and implementation of interventions; and

o A lack of diversity in the curriculum.

TSEP (May 2019) published a 'research framework' arising from a 2018/19 project. The framework was designed using the principles from critical race theory "with the aim of enabling student engagement staff to work with students to assess the extent to which student engagement practices were inclusive and accessible to BAME students" (p. 2). The framework, therefore, encourages reflection on biases and structures of power, identifies barriers faced by students, and helps clarify ways of overcoming these.

Arnold et al. (February 2019) presented the third instalment of a five-year longitudinal study for Advance HE, tracking the experiences and aspirations of women working in higher education. Using data from over 1,500 women in the UK and Ireland, the report highlights opportunities and challenges for women's leadership. In the third year of the study a further 658 women who were just starting the Aurora programme were surveyed. The Aurora programme, which is Advance HE's leadership development initiative for women, continued to be associated with women's reported engagement with leadership and career self-management, though the latter was thought to dissipate over time.

Regarding ethnic groups, there were some signs of differential proportions in different professional services and academic departments. On average BAME respondents were more ambitious and career-focused than others, especially white British, but in certain respects reported less support and less previous career development. There were few signs that LGBT respondents experienced any more difficulties than other respondents. In contrast, those who reported having a disability or significant health impairment reported consistently less positive career and development opportunities.

Ortus Economic Research and Loughborough University examined the effectiveness of Athena SWAN, the charter that recognises the advancement of gender equality with regard to representation, progression and success (Graves et al., April 2019). The report authors noted that 70 per cent of UK HE providers had engaged with the Athena SWAN Charter and a significant

majority felt that it had impacted positively on career progression, recruitment and flexible working practices. Further, there was strong evidence to suggest that the Charter processes and methodologies had supported wider cultural and behaviour change and impacted on equality and diversity in all its forms rather than just gender equality.

Fook and Nath (April 2019) sought to understand the lessons learned from the experiences of senior BAME leaders (n=12) and how they attained their positions in HE. Whilst there was satisfaction felt in achieving recognition as senior leaders for all, there was a strong recognition that discrimination and barriers still existed in subtle, and not so subtle, ways. The study describes 'mindsets' ("the ways of thinking people felt they had deliberately developed in order to cope with experiences of failure or of personal slights") and the report authors recommended establishing training programmes, action learning sets or support groups to assist BAME people "to create their own story path" (p. 14). The study noted,

> …*creating a mindset and identity which preserves a person's sense of who they are, personally, socially and cultural, that also incorporates facets which they recognise are needed in order to gain positions of leadership in British higher education would be a vital component of such training* (p. 4)

These themes and ideas were evident in Fook et al.'s (May 2019) evaluation of Advance HE's Diversifying Leadership programme, which was considered to be "highly positive". The authors noted that participants in the programme had experiences of frustration, were aware of racism, discrimination and hidden pathways to formal progression in academia (either personally and/or against other BAME

colleagues). The participants also reported experiences of aggressive behaviours including harassment, bullying, shouting and undermining professional status and achievements. These were recognised to be internalised over time and had contributed to participants' perceptions of lack of confidence. Specific types of 'microaggressions' (including prejudicial interpretations of behaviour), difficulties in generating systematic level changes and "a hidden workplace culture that was inaccessible to BAME staff" (p. 4) were also noted.

Ishaq and Hussain (June 2019), in a study for SCONUL, explored BAME staff experiences of academic and research libraries. The study noted the lack of ethnic diversity in the library profession and in a survey (n=273), 44 per cent indicated that they had experienced racism "at the hands of either a work colleague or service user or both" (p. 5). Whilst over half of the respondents felt that their workplace valued equality and diversity or had an inclusive culture, 80 per cent of those staff who had reported racism thought that the matter had not been resolved to their satisfaction. Among the data from focus groups and face-to-face interviews:

o Staff indicated feeling under greater pressure to perform to a higher standard than their white peers, and felt that they were more intensely monitored;
o There was a view that lack of diversity in academic libraries was not being acknowledged or taken seriously by senior managers; and
o Participants noted that senior roles were dominated by white individuals, whilst BAME staff were perceived to be over-represented at the lower end of the job ladder (e.g. para-professionals or library assistants).

Mental health and wellbeing

The Insight Network and Dig-in (March 2019) published findings from a large-scale survey of UK university students' mental health. The data were collected from over 37,500 students from 140 universities, comprising a range of nationalities, ethnicities, genders and ages, including applicants due to commence university in 2018 through to 5th year+ students. More than a fifth of respondents had a mental health diagnosis: the most common diagnoses were depression and anxiety disorders, with more than half of those with further complex diagnoses. In addition, more than one-third of respondents reported having experienced a serious psychological issue for which further professional help was required.

A number of "alarming features" were noted in the report. For instance, thoughts of self-harm were "relatively common" (twice as high as reported rates in 2017), and students disclosed high levels of substance misuse, suggesting that they are "not equipped with more adaptive strategies" (p. 6). While many students with a mental health diagnosis reported that their difficulties had commenced at school, almost a fifth reported that the issue had emerged in their time at university.

The research also identified at-risk sub-populations from within the student population. Second and third year students were at significantly higher risk than first years for feelings of worry and loneliness, substance misuse for coping, and thoughts of self-harm. These students were also the most likely to have a diagnosed mental health condition. The report authors surmised, "Perhaps the fact that support initiatives trail off after the first year, or that academic pressure intensifies or a combination of these and other factors are the basis for [these students] finding life

more difficult" (p. 6). Those who identified their gender as 'other' were disproportionately at-risk: about three in five reported a past serious psychological problem for which they needed professional help.

In general, those who most often reported mental health difficulty identified as female, in their first year of university, were aged between 18 and 20, from the UK, and ethnically white. However, the report authors acknowledged that it is possible, for example, that some overseas students are less likely to report psychological difficulties owing to coming from countries with more stigmatising attitudes to mental illness.

Anxiety among students was identified as "an increasingly serious problem" by Neves and Hillman (June 2019: 47). Their study also noted a clear difference in wellbeing levels by sexuality, with students who identify as LGBTQ+ reporting significantly lower levels of wellbeing "to a concerning extent" (p. 48). Neves and Hillman also noted that 66 per cent of students were happy for their parents to be contacted in the event of extreme circumstances.

In a policy note for HEPI on measuring wellbeing and mental health, Hewitt (May 2019) made the following recommendations:

o The sector should be consistent in the application of terminology and clearly distinguish between mental health and personal wellbeing;
o There should be a commitment to measuring wellbeing to understand the broader health of those studying and working at universities;
o More should be done to collect and publish information on the wellbeing of staff in HE institutions;
o Wherever possible, collection of wellbeing data should be consistent across the UK, with a commitment to

collect data from students, staff, applicants and graduates over a number of years; and

o Data collectors should work together to enable tracking of cohorts, to track the same cohorts of students and staff over time.

Morrish (May 2019) examined mental health from a staff perspective. In data obtained from 59 HE institutions, on referrals to counselling and occupational health services, there was an escalation of poor mental health among university staff in the period 2009 to 2016. The study suggested that work-related stress resulted from "pressure on staff to enhance the student experience" (especially after 2012 and implementation of the Browne Review funding arrangements). The following were highlighted as causes of mental health in HE institutions (pp. 9-10):

o Excessive workloads and workload models which frequently under-count time necessary for fulfilling tasks (many of which are invisible to workload assessors);
o The domination in working lives of audit and metrics, which have been repurposed as instruments of performance management;
o Reliance on existing on a succession of precarious contracts; and
o Performance management that is linked to short-term outcomes and expectations that are often unattainable to many.

Hate crime, sexual violence and online harassment

The OfS (June 2019a) published an overview of a 'catalyst fund', where £4.7 million was distributed to 119 projects across 71 HE institutions and 14 FE colleges. 63 one-year projects addressed safeguarding students on campus (mainly focused on addressing sexual violence and

misconduct); 45 projects examined ways of tackling hate crime and hate incidents and online harassment on campus; and 11 providers received funding to address hate crimes directed at students on the grounds of religion or belief.

The Prevent duty

The OfS (June 2019b) released analysis of accountability and data returns (ADRs) covering activity relating to the Prevent duty for 2018/19. The Prevent duty became a legal requirement for HE providers under the Counter Terrorism and Security Act 2015, whereby providers have been required to 'have due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism'. In all but two cases (i.e. two out of 307), providers "[undertook] appropriate activity in essential areas of the Prevent duty" (p. 8). There were a total of 83,419 welfare cases "referred for specialist advice and support", 174 Prevent-related cases "escalated to the point at which the Prevent lead became involved", and 122 Prevent-related cases leading to external advice being sought from local Prevent multi-agency partners. The number of referrals to the Channel programme reported to the OfS in 2017/18 was 15, which represented a decrease from 24 in 2016/17, and 30 in 2015/16. A total of 53 events and speaker requests were rejected, covering 17 HE providers.

> *The freedom within the law of academic staff at English higher education providers – (i) to question and test received wisdom, and (ii) to put forward new ideas and controversial or unpopular opinions, without placing themselves in jeopardy of losing their jobs or privileges they may have at the providers.* (Section 2(8)(c) of the Higher Education and Research Act 2017)

In an 'occasional paper' for HEPI, Corey Stoughton (June 2019) (Advocacy Director

of Liberty) claimed that the government's Prevent programme represented the biggest threat to free speech on campus.

Graduate attainment

In OfS (July 2019b) analysis of full-time first degree graduates attaining a first class honours degree from an English HE provider, it was noted that this had increased from 16 per cent in 2010/11 to 29 per cent in 2017/18 – an overall increase of roughly 80 per cent over the period. For the same graduate population, the proportion attaining a first or an upper second class degree increased from 67 per cent in 2010/11 to 79 per cent in 2017/18. In the 2017/18 analysis of 148 providers, 105 (71 per cent) showed a statistically significant unexplained increase in first class degree attainment relative to both the sector and their own level in 2010/11. This compares with 82 providers in 2016/17 (55 per cent) showing a statistically significant unexplained increase relative to both the sector and their own level in 2010/11.

UKSCQA (May 2019) published a 'statement of intent' aimed at "protecting the value of qualifications in the interest of students – past, present and future" in order that they "deserve qualifications that they can take pride in" (p. 2).

Destinations of disabled graduates

On behalf of the AGCAS Disability Task Group, Allen and Coney (August 2019) examined the destinations of disabled graduates from UK universities, providing an insight into the impact of disability on a graduate's prospects subsequent to their studies. The report made comparisons with the destinations of non-disabled graduates, at both UG and postgraduate (PG) level (PG Taught – PGT; PG Research – PGR),

and identified the destinations for different disability types:

o At all qualification levels, disabled graduates were less likely to have obtained full-time employment and more likely to be unemployed than non-disabled graduates;

o The gap between the proportion of disabled and non-disabled graduates entering full-time employment decreased at both first degree and PGR levels but increased at PGT level;

o At all qualification levels, disabled graduates were more likely to enter part-time employment and more likely to pursue further study than graduates with no known disability;

o At all qualification levels, graduates disclosing a social communication/ASD (autistic spectrum disorder) condition were least likely to be in full-time employment and most likely to be unemployed;

o At all qualification levels, graduates disclosing an SpLD (special learning difficulty) were the most likely to be in full-time employment and least likely to be unemployed;

o At PGT level, those who had disclosed two or more conditions were most likely to have opted for further study, whilst at PGR level graduates with a mental health condition were most likely to be in further study;

o At all qualification levels, disabled graduates were generally more likely to be self-employed or in the process of starting their own business than non-disabled graduates;

o At first degree and PGT levels, disabled graduates were less likely to be employed on a permanent basis, though this was not the case at PGR level where several disability groups had higher proportions than non-disabled graduates; and

- At all qualification levels, graduates disclosing a social communication/ASD condition were least likely to be in permanent employment (this group also had the highest proportions in voluntary work, at all levels).

Graduate earnings and value

In a 'research note' published by Conservative think tank Onward on the relationship between graduate earnings and universities' characteristics, Tanner et al. (February 2019) asserted that:

- Universities issuing more unconditional offers deliver lower earnings for graduates;
- Earnings from universities issuing the most "conditional unconditional" offers were also lower;
- Vice-chancellors overseeing universities with lower graduate earnings experienced the sharpest pay increases; and
- Onward research had shown that up to one in four students studied degrees "that may not be economically worthwhile for themselves or the taxpayer" (p. 1).

Longitudinal Educational Outcomes

In a parliamentary briefing, UUK (March 2019) explored the limits to using LEO data – which has been applied in TEF calculations. LEO data provides information on how much UK graduates of different courses at different universities are earning one, three or five years after graduating. UUK highlighted ten risk areas if applying LEO as a "blunt instrument" to drive funding to institutions. The briefing included the assertion that "LEO does not account for the social and cultural value added by a university degree" (p. 3).

Employability and careers

Milkround's (July 2019) *Candidate Compass Report* is aimed at helping businesses and recruiters understand the work behaviours and preferences of UK students and graduate jobseekers. The 2019 report comprised a survey sample of 7,000 candidates and was conducted between April and May 2019 (68 per cent of respondents were female, and 40 per cent were born in 1998 or 1999). The study included the following trends:

- 24 per cent expected a starting salary of £20,000 or less and, therefore, acknowledged that "low starting salaries can be part of today's economic situation, and more acceptance that they may have to start low to get their foot in the door" (p. 6);
- Only 13 per cent believed that university had prepared them greatly with "job function specific skills", and just 18 per cent thought that university had prepared them to be confident in the workplace;
- A greater proportion of females (33 per cent) cited a lack of confidence as a barrier to a "dream career" compared with 23 per cent of males and, overall, mental health continued to emerge as a key barrier;
- A growing number of graduates (45 per cent) indicated being more open to considering taking a role outside London;
- 78 per cent indicated that their personal interests (as opposed to pure monetary gains) were the largest influence on their career path; and
- 83 per cent were concerned that Russell Group university graduates would be prioritised when applying for graduate jobs.

In 2015 the Department for Business, Innovation & Skills and HEFCE, augmented by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, made funds available to

English HE institutions to develop pilot conversion courses at Masters level in engineering, data science, cybersecurity and computing. The aim was to explore whether conversion courses at this level could contribute to increasing the number and diversity of highly-skilled graduates entering careers in engineering- and computing-related sectors. CRAC (March 2019) carried out a formative evaluation of the institutions' activities (n=28) under this funding.

The engineering- and computing-related pilot conversion courses scheme was judged to be, at least, partially successful in terms of achieving a range of its intended outputs (e.g. over a third were mature students, over 30 years old, some of whom studied part-time while in employment). However, the courses had not secured the number of students projected in funding proposals. By contrast, several of the data science courses achieved large numbers of students very quickly though, in large part, this was attributed to current perceptions of very healthy career prospects for those qualified in this area. CRAC suggested that graduates were basing decisions to undertake further study on perceptions of labour market potential: many used the conversion course to re-skill or up-skill from existing employment.

Prospects HECSU published several reports of projects it had funded.

o Craig (February 2019) (of recruitment specialists, JobTeaser) released a white paper that discussed how careers services could be more responsive to 'Gen-Z' students. Mowforth (March 2019) examined how Gen-Z students at Coventry University thought about the notion of a career, their concerns and expectations, and the motivating factors behind these. Kapadia (March 2019) assessed the way in which students at

Buckinghamshire New University interacted with the careers and education services available to them. The findings shed light on students' preferences for career exploration and the areas where they most commonly sought support and advice. Whistance and Campbell (April 2019) analysed pre-existing data to show how Southampton Solent University's career development model (Solent Capital Compass) had impacted on graduate employability.

o Abbott (March 2019) explored the life science graduate labour market in England, providing an overview of the sector's recruitment procedures, employment opportunities, skills requirements and potential challenges. Also focusing on life sciences, Abbott (April 2019) explored the demographic variations in work placement choices made by bioscience and chemistry students at Sheffield Hallam University.

o Kerley (April 2019) focused on UG students on humanities and social science courses at Sheffield Hallam University who were hesitant about career planning. The study touched upon several points, such as the availability and access to information whilst highlighting that students' "overreliance" on Google left them overwhelmed. Altariva (June 2019) also focused on the humanities and interviewed academics' perceptions, experiences, values and understandings, as well as their expectations relating to the graduate employability of humanities students.

o Simkins and Coney's (April 2019) study consisted of semi-structured interviews (n=41) with UK-based graduate employers, with the aim of creating a user-friendly rubric for curriculum vitae creation, informed by participants' views on the elements of a CV that were likely

to lead to shortlisting and which lead to rejection.

o Standage (March 2019) focused on the teaching of employability. The research indicated how this should be done in terms of who should teach it (i.e. academics or careers staff) and the best methods (i.e. practical and skills-based or theoretical approaches).

o Highlighting experiences at Writtle University College, Yates (June 2019) evaluated how two distinct (FE and HE) cohorts of both staff and students viewed employability.

o Using questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and focus groups, Pyke (June 2019) explored how a group of MA Media Production students at the University of Salford responded to the possibility of utilising digital notebooks (such as OneNote) to develop soft skills alongside their academic studies.

o With the North West of England experiencing significant transformation through initiatives such as the Northern Powerhouse and Greater Manchester Spatial Framework, Cunningham and Christie (July 2019) sought to understand better the reasons why new graduates might stay in the region. Qualitative interviews were conducted with, and a survey distributed among, graduates from five universities.

Internationalisation

Using data from the HESA student record for 2017/18, UUKi (July 2019a) released a snapshot of the international dimensions of UK higher education.

o International students accounted for 19.6 per cent of the total student population in the UK (or 14 per cent of all UGs, and 35.8 per cent of all PGs).

o Citing OECD data, the UK was the second most popular destination in the

world for international students in 2016. However, the UK's growth rate was low, dropping from 0.5 per cent in 2015 to 0.3 per cent in 2016. By contrast, the numbers of international students who chose Australia, Canada, the US, and Germany grew by 13.9 per cent, 10.4 per cent, 7.1 per cent, and 6.9 per cent respectively from 2015 to 2016.

o In 2017/18 the top five 'sending countries' for international students were China, India, the US, Hong Kong and Malaysia (Chinese students at UK HE institutions accounted for 23.2 per cent of all international students).

o In 2017/18, international student numbers were highest in business and administrative studies (accounting for 37.1 per cent of the cohort), engineering and technology (accounting for 31.9 per cent of the cohort), and social studies.

o In 2017/18, 139 UK universities delivered some form of transnational education (TNE), largely through collaborative provision, to nearly 700,000 students in 225 countries. These data highlighted the UK as a world leader in TNE and showed that there were 1.5 times as many students studying for a UK degree overseas than the number of international students studying in the UK.

UCAS (August 2019) in, their summer 2019 admissions report, noted that a new high of 39,200 international students from outside the EU had been accepted on a UG course, up six per cent in 2018. However the 29,430 EU students accepted represented a decline of one per cent on 2018.

In UUKi's (June 2019) fifth *Gone International* annual study it was noted that 18,510 UK domiciled graduates (that responded to the 2016/17 Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education survey) had experienced at least "one period abroad" (i.e. a week or

longer) as part of their UG first degree, equating to 7.8 per cent of the UG population. In other words, a record number of students were going abroad.

Whilst a greater number of students from lower socio-economic backgrounds, BAME students and disabled students were going abroad, the report noted that the gap between more advantaged and less advantaged students had endured. 9.5 per cent of students from more advantaged socio-economic backgrounds were mobile, compared to 5.6 per cent from less advantaged backgrounds. The mobility rate for white students was 8.3 per cent, which was higher than that of Asian students (5.5 per cent) and black students (5.1 per cent). 4.4 per cent of students from low-participation neighbourhoods went abroad, compared to 8.3 per cent of graduates from higher participation neighbourhoods. Those on part-time courses participated in mobility at a rate of 0.6 per cent, mature students at a rate of 3.4 per cent, first-in-family at a rate of 5.4 per cent, and care leavers (students who had been in the care of their local authority as minors) at a rate of 4.5 per cent.

Additionally, subjects such as social work, computer science, sports science and nursing continued to record low mobility. (Excluding linguistics students, the highest mobility rates were recorded in combined subjects [32.8 per cent], medicine and dentistry [30.8 per cent], and veterinary science [17.2 per cent]). Students from Northern Irish institutions were most mobile (13.2 per cent), followed by students from Scottish (11.6 per cent), Welsh (9.7 per cent), and English (7.2 per cent) institutions.

Almost half the opportunities for students to go abroad during their second year (2015/16) were facilitated through the Erasmus+ programme though a greater number of students had engaged with short-term and provider-led programmes. As with

the previous reports, mobile graduates from the 2016/17 graduating cohort were more likely to be in graduate employment or further study, more likely to obtain a first-class honours, or to have a higher average starting salary, and less likely to be unemployed than their non-mobile peers.

International Graduate Outcomes 2019 (i-GO), conducted by iGraduate, was the first study which specifically explored the career outcomes of a large sample (n=16,199) of international graduates (at 58 participating institutions) who studied in the UK (UUKi, July 2019b). Among the findings:

o 82 per cent of graduates considered the UK degree to be worth the financial investment, and 62 per cent felt that having a UK degree enabled them to progress more quickly in their chosen career;
o 90 per cent of graduates were satisfied with their learning experience and the support received from their universities, which was seven per cent higher than their peers' satisfaction "across nine unique career support elements";
o Over half (53 per cent) of respondents working in their home countries believed that they earned above average or well above average compared to peers that studied in their home country; and
o 36 per cent of graduates planned on doing further study in the UK.

In London Economics' report for HEPI and Kaplan International Pathways, it was recognised that international graduates (2016/17 cohort) entering and remaining in the UK labour market post-graduation (Conlon et al., March 2019):

o Contributed £3,173m to the UK Exchequer (the largest component was contributed by first degree holders [£1,119m] and Master's graduates

[£1,591m], with a further £300m contributed by PhD graduates); and

o Played a significant role in reducing labour market gaps, and addressing the "acute" skills shortages in many sectors of the UK economy, rather than displace domestic graduates.

UUKi (2019a) noted that the net economic impact of the 2015/16 cohort of international students over the course of their studies was estimated at £20.3bn. Students in the North West of England were expected to have a net economic impact of £1.91bn (roughly equal to Scotland [£1.94bn]): students based in London were expected to have a net economic impact of £4.64bn.

UUK (July 2019b), on behalf of numerous mission groups and sector organisations, outlined proposals for a revised student visa system which would improve the international student experience. (In September 2019, the UK government announced that it would allow international students to stay in the UK for two years after graduation to find a job, thus reversing the 2012 decision whereby overseas students were required to leave four months after finishing a degree.)

The civic university
UPP Foundation (February 2019) released the final report of the Civic University Commission. The Commission was launched in March 2018 to explore and understand what a 'modern civic university' is and what it should do. Among the recommendations was the establishment of The Civic University Agreement, co-created and signed by civic partners (e.g. "several universities or educational institutions coming together in a single agreement"). The report also advocated a special focus on developing public sector staff, addressing

adult education, spreading good civic practice (via a Network for the Civic University), and establishing new funds (such as the Civic University Fund, which was launched in September 2019).

Casualisation
In a survey of casualised staff (n=3,802) the UCU discovered that, on average, part-time and hourly paid teachers were doing 45 per cent of their work without pay. 71 per cent of respondents reported that they believed their mental health had been damaged by working on insecure contracts.

67 per cent of teaching staff indicated that they did not have enough paid time to enable them to prepare adequately for classes, whilst 73 per cent thought that they did not have enough paid time to complete their marking, and a similar proportion posited that they did not have enough paid time to give their students the feedback they deserved. Three-quarters of teaching staff did not have enough paid time to undertake the scholarship necessary to stay on top of their subjects.

HE management and leadership
In 2016/17 Advance HE (in its then guise of the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education, Equality Challenge Unit, and Higher Education Academy), supported by the UK HE funding councils, commissioned work to inform strategies to improve practices in leadership, governance and management in HE, based on previous best evidence of 'what works'. Following this, Media FHE (June 2019) reviewed the evidence to provide insights related to 'what works' in promoting positive cultural and behavioural change. The study identified ten main interventions in promoting behavioural change:

o Talent management and career support
o Devolved or collegiate leadership
o Performance management and goal setting
o Staff development and training
o Coaching and mentoring
o Communication and feedback
o Collaboration, team-working and networks
o Workload management and staff wellbeing
o Staff engagement for teaching
o Staff engagement for research

Transformational change

Mowles et al. (May 2019), in a study funded by Advance HE, reflected on 'transformational' change initiatives within six HE institutions across the UK. The projects chosen ranged from closing campuses and building construction through to "more inchoate culture change agendas" (p. 3), and the study comprised 40 interviews. Among the findings was a recognition that change projects in HE are not just about visions, plans and metrics, but are complex social processes" entailing the more or less open exercise and negotiation of power and politics" (p. 4).

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