



National College for  
Teaching & Leadership

# **School business manager learning programmes evaluation**

**Final summary report**

**Research report - September 2014**

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## Preface

Since this research was completed and the reports finalised, proposals for how school business management (SBM) programmes will run in the future have changed. They will not move to a licensed approach as set out previously.

This new approach brings the SBM programmes into line with the ambition to create a self-improving, school-led system. It represents an exciting opportunity for the profession to take ownership of its leadership development and ensure that the role of school business managers remains as a critical element of effective school leadership and school improvement.

Content from the Certificate of School Business Management (CSBM), Diploma of School Business Management (DSBM) and Advanced Diploma of School Business Management (ADSBM) will be made freely available with the expectation that a number of training providers will run the programmes independently. NCTL will no longer manage the programmes and accreditation will be overseen by the Institute of Leadership and Management.

NCTL used the findings of the evaluation to further develop the school business manager programmes prior to the decision to make the materials freely available. The reports are now being published in order to share the findings with potential training providers.

## Structure of reports

This document is one of a set of reports from the school business manager learning programmes evaluation.

This report is the summary report, which reviews the evidence from all the research in the light of 3 key questions: the impact on participant development; the impact on participants' schools, and the delivery strengths and weaknesses.

We recommend that you read all the reports to understand the research fully. These documents are available from gov.uk. The complete set of reports includes the following:

- **Case study report - School Business Manager Programme**

Three case studies focused on the impact of the programmes upon the participants and their role in school or college.

- **Case study report – School Business Director (SBD) Pilot Programme**

Four case studies aimed at providing a cross-section of early experiences in the pilot SBD programme.
- **Case study report - School Business Directors (SBD) in Schools/ Federations in Receipt of a Primary Partnership Grant**

Four case studies aimed at supplementing the early case studies by focussing on those undergoing development as SBDs but also within school collaborations awarded primary partnership grants.
- **Technical annexe – Primary Partnership Data**

High level analysis of the NCTL survey of recipients of primary partnership funding focusing on the understanding the impact of the primary partnership grants.
- **Technical Annexe - Review of SBM/D end of programme satisfaction surveys**

Overview of the end of programme satisfaction surveys administered by NCTL and training providers, completed by participants of the Diploma of School Business Management (DSBM), the Advanced Diploma of School Business Management (ADSBM) and the School Business Director (SBD) programmes.
- **Technical Annexe – Interim report on the evaluation of the school business management (SBM) programme**

The first of the interim analyses from the research, originally written in 2011 and published now to provide supporting information to the final report.
- **Technical Annexe – Final evaluation report of the school business directors pilot**

The final evaluation of the school business directors pilot, written in 2011, focusing on the experience of the two entry cohorts of the SBD pilot programme.
- **Technical Annexe – Impact Assessment**

An assessment of the impact of the Certificate (CSBM), Diploma (DSBM) and Advanced Diploma for School Business Managers (ADSBM) and the School Business Directors (SBD) Programme on the individuals that had undertaken the learning and on their employing institutions.

## Executive Summary

In 2010, HOST Policy Research (HOST) was retained to undertake a three year project to evaluate the implementation and impact of the School Business Manager/Director (SBM/D) learning programmes. The evaluation process has been flexible to meet the changing information needs of the National College for Teaching and Learning (NCTL). The evaluation process has been modular and mixed mode, with different programmes requiring different evaluation activities.

The key evaluation questions are:

- Do the programmes give the participant the skills, knowledge and experience to work as a school business manager or director?
- Are the programmes making a difference in terms of the professional development of the participant?
- What difference are the programmes making to the schools involved?
- What are the delivery strengths and weaknesses of the programmes?

For participants, there are three main areas where the SBM/D programmes are helping them in their careers:

- Developing the knowledge and confidence to do the school business manager (SBM) job.
- Accrediting knowledge and skills with a recognised qualification, thus validating the role and raising its profile in schools.
- Increasing the knowledge of the participant and accrediting their skills then lead to rewards in terms of increased pay, status and respect.

In purely monetary terms, there is evidence that SBM/D participants have reduced costs and sourced extra funding for their institution. Both participants and headteachers could see the contribution of the SBM/D programmes in achieving this impact, not least from knowledge acquisition.

In less tangible terms, many participants highlighted an increase in knowledge and confidence which has enabled them to offer more to their employers. In some cases, headteachers are clear that they have been freed up to concentrate on improving teaching and learning because the SBM is able to undertake more general management tasks - a key objective for the programmes overall.

In terms of delivery, the key strengths of the programmes are content at all levels, the face to face sessions, the opportunities to network with other SBM/Ds and the ability of the programmes to develop individual's confidence in themselves and their knowledge and skills. The main delivery weaknesses are issues with the website, consistency in assessment and guidance (particularly guidance on assessment), and timetabling.

# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Background

Over a decade ago, the National College for Teaching and Learning (NCTL) started to develop a professional qualification structure to meet the needs of a range of job roles concerned with school business management. Ensuring the professional knowledge of the range of activities in school business management among those undertaking the role was seen as a way of improving school effectiveness and releasing headteachers to focus on teaching and school improvement through pedagogy.

A suite of qualifications has been developed and implemented:

- Certificate in School Business Management (CSBM).
- Diploma in School Business Management (DSBM).
- Advanced Diploma in School Business Management (ADSBM).
- School Business Director programme (SBD).

In 2010, HOST Policy Research (HOST) was retained to undertake a three year project to evaluate the implementation and impact of the SBM/D learning programmes. The evaluation process has been flexible to meet the changing information needs of NCTL. The evaluation process has been modular and mixed mode, with different programmes requiring different evaluation activities. A series of reports have been produced throughout the evaluation process focusing on different qualifications in the SBM/D learning suite, and different methodologies to gather evidence to support the key evaluation questions.

While priorities and focus have changed through the life of the evaluation, the key evaluation questions are:

- Do the programmes give the participant the skills, knowledge and experience to work as a school business manager or director?
- Are the programmes making a difference in terms of the professional development of the participant?
- What difference are the programmes making to the schools involved?
- What are the delivery strengths and weaknesses of the programmes?

The first three evaluation questions determine the impact of the programme on participants and schools, in terms of professional development and what that increased professional knowledge can do for the individual and for the employing institution in terms of improved performance.

## **1.2 Methodology**

As indicated above, the evaluation process has used a variety of methods, each tailored to the programme(s) of interest, utilising existing data collections where possible, and targeted to the specific evaluation questions posed.

To look at satisfaction with the programmes overall, HOST has reviewed NCTL management information, analysed the NCTL's programme start and end survey data, and undertaken three longitudinal case studies. In addition, HOST undertook a specific exercise to look at the change in the CSBM programme to modular delivery, including survey data and follow up qualitative interviews.

To evaluate the SBD programme, HOST has undertaken a number of qualitative interviews with workshop attendees and a provider, and eight longitudinal case studies, as well as reviewing NCTL management information. HOST also reviewed the primary partnership (PP) grant allocations, through analysis of NCTL survey data and also through a number of SBD case studies (four of the eight cited above).

Finally to understand the impact of the SBM/D programmes on participants and schools, and in addition to the longitudinal case studies, HOST undertook a depth survey with graduates of all the SBM/D programmes, and used the results of a smaller survey of headteachers of participants' schools to see what difference participation had made.

Each of these individual sub-projects has been written up separately and the results shared with NCTL on a rolling basis. This final summative report draws together all the findings to respond to the overarching evaluation questions and raise some issues for future consideration.

## 2 Findings - impact on participant development

As set out in Section 1, there were four overarching evaluation questions. Two relate directly to the experiences of participants and are set out below:

- Do the programmes give the participant the skills, knowledge and experience to work as a school business manager or director?
- Are the programmes making a difference in terms of the professional development of the participant?

The evidence to demonstrate the generally very positive response to this comes from a wealth of sources including NCTL's own programme end surveys, as well as the graduate impact survey (HOST, October/November 2012) and the SBM/D longitudinal case studies.

For participants, there are three main areas where the SBM/D programmes are helping them in their careers:

- Developing the knowledge and confidence to do the SBM job.
- Accrediting knowledge and skills with a recognised qualification, thus validating the role and raising its profile in schools.
- Increasing the knowledge of the participant and accrediting their skills then lead to rewards in terms of increased pay, status and respect.

There can be little doubt from the evidence collected that the suite of programmes has given many the skills, knowledge and confidence to undertake successfully the SBM/D role in schools. In addition, HOST has gathered evidence of individuals progressing through the qualification levels to improve their knowledge on a continuous basis. There is also evidence that achievement of qualifications has improved the status of the individual in their organisation in terms of recognition, with headteachers prepared to delegate non-teaching and learning management responsibility.

The evidence of financial benefit to participants is less clear cut, partly due to funding constraints and staffing structures in the sector. In some cases graduates may need to change employer to achieve financial gain. However the accredited qualification does enable graduates to gain SBM roles elsewhere - with individuals commenting that achievement of one or more qualifications has enabled them to become an SBM.

The rest of this section draws out the key findings from the individual reports that evidence the impact on individuals participating in SBM/D programmes.



## 2.1 Graduate impact survey

- In 78% of cases, achievement of an SBM/D qualification is seen by the graduate as increasing the perceived value of their role and this perception is matched by evidence from the headteachers survey.
- In 86% of cases, achievement of an SBM/D qualification has helped the graduate in their day to day work and in only 2% of cases has achievement been perceived to hinder the graduate in their work.
- While 55% of respondents expected a salary increase on achievement of their SBM/D qualification, only 45% of respondents actually received an increase. Not all those that expected an increase actually received one, with 20% of respondents being disappointed.
- Where a salary increase was obtained, for 34% the increase was up to 4% but for 19% the increase was 20% or over.

## 2.2 School business director case studies

- Case study participants all saw some early benefits for themselves and/or their job role and this helped sustain the momentum of participation. A common and continuing impact was on self-confidence in working within senior leadership teams and making more active contributions.
- Participants found they developed greater knowledge and theoretical understanding and that this was a benefit, giving them tools to use particularly for systems leadership.
- The school business director (SBD) programme offered an opportunity to gain greater awareness of the implications of the wider policy context within which schools are developing, enabling them to better advise and support the headteacher.

## 2.3 School business director primary partnership case studies

- From the SBD case studies, two participants were relatively new to their posts and both had been directly supported in their transition by the 'fast-learning' curve provided by the SBD programme and inter-action with experienced SBMs.
- Although coming from different contexts, all saw benefits for their improved theoretical understanding. Most commonly this was of systems leadership and policy issues which had particular relevance to their partnership development.

- Opportunities for networking within the group of participating SBMs were valued and have provided a continuing knowledge and resource asset to SBD graduates, particularly in relation to partnership development and academy conversion.
- Confidence building was widely reported as a personal impact, along with developing a systematic approach to reflective practice.
- SBD participants had an extended role in the school leadership team - or had moved jobs to secure greater responsibility, and the greater 'systems' knowledge and theoretical understanding (eg on emotional intelligence) was welcomed by senior colleagues.
- Three SBD graduates had either moved to SBD advocate roles, chairing local SBM groups or been designated as specialist leaders of education (SLE).

## 2.4 School business manager case studies

- A particular impact for individuals was an increase in their confidence and competence to undertake the SBM role as a result of the SBM programmes.
- Participants also cited increasing involvement in aspects of senior leadership including *the administrative and pedagogic life of the school*.
- Many found an extra impact in support after the completion of programmes through the informal network of participants
- The breadth of involvement was summarised by one participant as follows. The programme had made redundant the '*but you're not an educationalist*' staffroom argument.
- However when no promotion or increased remuneration occurs disillusion may be the outcome and was evident in one of the SBM case studies.
- The programmes were seen as having the potential to make a difference to individuals and to their working lives. In two of the SBM case studies this potential had been realised within the same educational setting.

## 2.5 Certificate in school business management modular review

- A third of participants who responded to the end of programme survey had seen concrete changes in their role, or changes were planned for their role, another third are confident that change will happen in the future (a further 26% of respondents cited personal changes for example to confidence).
- Achieved changes included promotions including into an SBM role, successful applications to SBM roles, expanded work roles and responsibilities, and becoming a member of the school leadership team (SLT)

- Over half of participants had seen a change or had a planned change in the way their working time is spent.
- The greatest impact on the individual was increased confidence in their ability to do their job.

The next section looks at impact on schools to respond to the third evaluation question.

### 3 Findings - impact on participants' schools

As set out in Section 1, a key evaluation question was:

#### **What difference are the programmes making to the schools involved?**

This is fundamental as if NCTL cannot evidence that participation in and achievement of an SBM/D qualification has a positive impact on the school where the participant works, schools are unlikely to fund or provide support participants. The main evaluation sources to respond to this question are the graduate impact survey (October/November 2012), the headteacher survey (NCTL, July 2013) and the SBM/D longitudinal case studies.

In purely monetary terms, there is evidence that SBM/D participants have reduced costs and sourced extra funding for their institution. These savings and extra funding have enabled improvements to the infrastructure of the school (grounds, buildings, furniture), as well as funding new projects and extra facilities for pupils/students including field trips and outings, out of school clubs and activities, and breakfast clubs. Both participants and headteachers could see the contribution of the SBM/D programmes in achieving this impact, not least from knowledge acquisition.

In less tangible terms, many participants highlighted an increase in knowledge and confidence which has enabled them to offer more to their employers. In some cases, headteachers are clear that they have been freed up to concentrate on improving teaching and learning because the SBM is able to undertake more general management tasks – a key objective for the programmes overall.

The scale and nature of the impact does vary by the level of SBM/D qualification achieved, and SBD participants have given more complex examples of where they have been able to make a difference.

It was not part of the evaluation exercise to establish a counterfactual for the value to schools of the SBM/D programmes.

The rest of this section draws out the key findings from the individual reports that evidence impact on schools.

The main relevant findings from the graduate and headteacher surveys were:

- Over 80% of respondents<sup>1</sup> to the SBM/D questionnaire said they had achieved cost savings for their school/collaboration of schools.
- Two thirds of respondents to the SBM/D questionnaire said they have won additional income for their school/collaboration of schools.

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<sup>1</sup> See report for more details, overall 1,072 respondents, 38% response rate.

- The sum of specified income generated by respondents amounts to nearly £32 million, rather more than the £22.5 million estimated in the PriceWaterhouseCoopers report of 2010.
- In over 50% of cases, cost savings and income achieved had been able to support buildings and grounds development and maintenance.
- Over 80% of respondents said the programmes had been useful in helping them to achieve cost savings and 72% said the programmes had been useful in helping them source additional income.
- Headteacher assessments of the achievements of the programmes were broadly in line with those of graduates<sup>2</sup> (85% said cost savings had been achieved, and 81% said the qualifications had helped this, 60% said extra income had been generated and 62% said the qualifications had helped this).

The main findings from the SBD case studies were:

- The opportunity to customise project and research work in the programme to relate to specific school needs allowed for early impacts – on diverse issues, but all of immediate relevance to schools. This is also provided an early demonstration of SBD potential to others on school leadership teams.
- Where schools were engaged in partnership developments and collaboration, participants were able to make a more systematic contribution to building collaborative frameworks, often using systems leadership principles learned through the SBD programme.
- SBD programme engagement with emerging national policy issues had a particular impact for some participants for guiding non-teaching school improvement.
- Participants were all more outward looking, and two had substantial success in securing external funds for school capacity building, or contributing to academy conversion.
- SBDs' wider capabilities and extended roles had productivity gains for schools particularly in releasing headteachers to focus on teaching and learning improvements. This was especially important for one school facing an Ofsted notice to improve.

In addition, in school groups where primary partnership grants had been received, interviewees noted the following impacts:

- Some partnerships had not been sustained but have developed (under the SBD's influence) in other directions and with different membership.

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<sup>2</sup> Note that these headline statistics come from a very small base.

- Systems leadership knowledge had a particular impact in informing partnership working arrangements, or in new partnerships foundations.
- The grant had meant that two of the case studies had been able to sustain funding for the SBD's collaborative role at a crucial time of partnership development. One had now gone on to partnership self-funding of the role.
- SBDs took a lead in developing partnership systems and it was felt that development had occurred faster as a result of the grant and SBD knowledge than would have occurred.
- Two had seen significant direct cost benefits arising for partner schools from best value purchasing and/or common procurement arrangements.
- After recognising that the SBM qualifications had had an impact on career opportunities, one participant noted that as a result it had become possible to make a difference to the whole college.
- Not all developments had been positive and in one case there had been an impact on the partnership composition, with accelerated moves towards closer collaboration and common systems exposing tensions between partner school leadership and the effective abandonment of cluster working.

This last bullet point brings out a rare point that impacts are not always positive. Other negative impacts expressed more often by headteachers include that SBMs may move on to new jobs elsewhere once they have completed their qualifications, leaving the school with the costs of having supported the learning but not benefitting from it.

The review of the CSBM Modular programme had a main focus on programme delivery, but also included some analysis of perceptions of impact. This found that overall 84% of respondents said that completing the CSBM programme had had a positive impact on the efficiency of their school. When given the option to describe the impact, 28% had either improved financial management systems or achieved cost savings, 7% had improved staff management or structure and 6% had improved general practice or policies in their school (not related to staffing or finance). The qualitative interviews undertaken for the review of CSBM Modular include some detailed examples of financial management changes undertaken following completion of the programme. The impact can be considered to be evidence of additionality as from the telephone interviews, CSBM was seen not only to have guided the participant in knowledge but also gave them the confidence to tackle a major project single handed.

The next section looks at satisfaction with the SBM/D programmes.

## 4 Findings - delivery strengths and weaknesses

The final core evaluation question was as follows:

### **What are the delivery strengths and weaknesses of the programmes?**

HOST has reported on this regularly throughout the evaluation programme, so that NCTL has been able to adapt the programmes as required, and where there have been major changes, such as making the CSBM programme modular delivery, evidence was available to inform the changes and a specific report looked at how well the changes had been received by the participants. Early evaluation reports by HOST focused as well on the pilot stages of the SBD qualification and how that was received by participants.

The on-going end of programme satisfaction surveys run by NCTL and analysed on an annual basis by HOST have also been used to ensure that the programmes are generally well received, and identify any areas for improvement where these are clearly required.

In general programmes are viewed positively and meet the expectations of participants. There have been teething problems with the newer programmes (SBD and ADSBM) as would be expected, but these have been addressed and ADSBM satisfaction ratings have improved. DSBM ratings have remained static between 2012 and 2013, as would be expected from a more mature programme.

The change in delivery methodology to modular for CSBM had an impact on satisfaction ratings, which fell slightly, while still remaining relatively high among those who responded to the end of programme surveys.

Key areas for attention are the quality, accessibility and timeliness of on-line materials and facilitation.

The rest of this section draws on key findings from separate evaluation reports to draw out programme satisfaction.

### 4.1 Management Information

- Satisfaction with the programmes remains high with well-motivated participants. Typically approaching nine-out-of-ten express satisfaction on a range of indicators on programme content and delivery. Those on ADSBM and SBD have particularly high expectations of the delivery and benefits of the programme, but the survey and case study evidence among those graduating suggests these are widely met.
- Analysis of data returns for 2012 and 2013 for DSBM show that overall programme evaluations ('met my expectations' and 'enabled me to have a

positive impact within school') have both remained stable. Ratings of individual aspects of the programme have generally improved slightly.

- The end of programme returns for ADSBM for 2012/13 show a generally high level of satisfaction with the programme, with significantly improved ratings for programme delivery over 2011/12.
- Participant feedback suggests the programmes at all levels are well designed and robustly delivered, and that participants' expectations of relevance continue to be met or exceeded.
- Features of programme delivery which are widely seen to be particularly effective are the opportunities for face-to-face activity on programme for both group and teamwork, and the greater personalisation of content (eg choice of placements and assignment themes in ADSBM and SBD).

## 4.2 CSBM modular

- While commanding good overall satisfaction scores, individual aspects of the delivery of the programme have shown a significant drop since the last review of end of course questionnaires in spring 2012. There were particular falls in learning from others which had been the highest rated factor (a change from 1.5 to 2.1<sup>3</sup>), and whole group learning opportunities received the worst score (2.2), but relevance to current needs maintained a high satisfaction rating (1.7).
- There were some significant differences in satisfaction between providers, with respondents with one provider giving lower satisfaction scores for quality and effectiveness of facilitator support online, whole group learning opportunities, learning with and from others and opportunities for personal reflection. However given that 96% of respondents would recommend the programme to colleagues, any remedial action is likely to be minor.
- The key improvement areas for the programme as identified by respondents are better website and website technologies (14%), increased or more consistent tutor support (12%), more face-to-face sessions (12%), and improved timing of the programme to avoid the financial year end or take account of the school year and school day (11%).
- When asked whether they were considering undertaking the Diploma or Advanced Diploma in School Business Management, 44% said that they were.

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<sup>3</sup> Responses were on a 4-point scale from exceeding expectations (1) to below expectations (4), and average scores calculated so that the nearer an average is to 1, the more likely that expectations were exceeded.



### 4.3 Impact survey

- One in five respondents identified gaps in the learning programme that they had undertaken, and identified two main areas - finance and accounting, and gaining funds and bid writing.

### 4.4 SBM cases

- Support from other SBMs was identified as a strength, which had helped participants to establish a network of peers and often an informal e-mail group to share learning and discuss the programme.
- However there were criticisms of the programmes' on-line communities, which at times felt as if they were unsupported by the central team. Criticism was also made of the on-line materials and the user-unfriendly NCTL website. One previously positive commenter on the website felt that it had become *very awkward* to use after extensive change.
- A strong feature for participants was the face-to-face events, which provided opportunities for networking and shared learning through discussion.
- Some criticism of the use of WebEx for presentations and telephone interviews contrasted with the support for group activity at a central venue.

### 4.5 SBD pilot evaluation and cases

- Programme content was relevant, stretching but also widely well-received, although some had early problems with the clarity and pace of the programme. Experience of past SBM programmes and/or higher education experience helped participants cope, but candidates do need to be well prepared for the intensity and demands of this programme.
- Many aspects of SBD were valued but most commonly these included: the integration of face to face sessions and scenario-based group work; research skills and critical reading; and (where conducted) also the placements and reciprocal visits.

- The 'blended' programme approach was welcomed by all as was the personalised focus which allowed (some) of the content to be selected and designed to reflect current school or partnership development issues in their own schools.
- Experience of tutor support was generally good although in some cases there had been some initial 'mismatching' of individuals with tutors. In contrast, others felt the coaching support to be a highlight of the programme.
- Opportunities for informal learning and networking within the group of participating SBMs were also valued and have provided a continuing knowledge and resource asset to SBD graduates.

The final section offers some conclusions and some issues for consideration.

## 5 Conclusions and issues for further consideration

HOST have offered conclusions and recommendations for action or consideration as part of each of the interim reports. Here we offer only some final summary comments on the suite of SBM/D qualification programmes as a whole.

The suite of SBM/D learning programmes is useful to the sector, bringing benefits to participants and to their employing organisations. Therefore the simple answers to the first three evaluation questions set out in Section 1 could be summarised as 'yes'.

Benefits are both financial and in improved knowledge and working practices, which may also in due course bring financial benefits.

In terms of delivery, the key strengths of the programmes are content at all levels, the face-to-face sessions, the opportunities to network with other SBM/Ds and the ability of the programmes to develop individual's confidence in themselves and their knowledge and skills. The main delivery weaknesses are issues with the website, consistency in assessment and guidance (particularly guidance on assessment), and timetabling.

The challenge is now for NCTL and its delivery providers to maintain the achieved quality of programme, by ensuring all materials continue to be relevant and that web technology is used to the best effect to support programme delivery. Given the numbers who have already taken CSBM and (to a lesser extent) DSBM, the market for these qualifications may be reaching maturity, although there is evidence from interviews that graduates of these programme are encouraging younger and/or more junior staff to undertake them.

From the work undertaken by HOST on analysing data from the primary partnership grant recipients, it would appear that not all headteachers are convinced as to the value of SBM/Ds for schools, which may also impact on the take up of programmes in the future. Some of the positive messages contained within the project reports may be used to disseminate this message.

There is a wealth of data collected by NCTL on programme participants, including basic management information as well as start and end surveys. This intelligence is invaluable in maintaining the quality of the programmes, as well as highlighting participation patterns, and matching performance and participation data. NCTL needs to streamline its participant survey activity to ensure that the data collected can be analysed and used in-house in a timely manner to monitor continued satisfaction and address any issues as they arise. There is also potential for data matching and extensive analysis to further explore the value of the programmes.



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