Youth Guarantee Pathways and Profiles Project

PROJECT REPORT – THEMES

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Visit the project page to download the June 2018 Summary report and the December 2017 Interim report at: https://ako.ac.nz/knowledge-centre/youth-guarantee-pathways-and-profiles-project/

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The Youth Guarantee Pathways and Profiles Project (YGPP) gathers the experiences and perspectives of young people in government-funded Youth Guarantee Fees Free training programmes, and their education providers. The project is co-funded by Ako Aotearoa and research is carried out by The Collaborative Trust with data collected from the 2015 Youth Guarantee cohort at Community College, YMCA and Unitec. The project explores the value of Youth Guarantee Fees Free for young people and whether it contributes to positive outcomes. It also seeks to find out more about the longer-term pathways of young people and their experiences of transition. This report provides an update of the main themes in the education, employment and transitions experiences of participants which were first discussed in the Interim Report. These themes have been identified from five rounds of interviews carried out with young people from 2015 to 2017.

1. Main themes

The five key themes of *Self-development*, *Control*, *Fit*, *Networks and Support* and *Direction and Stability* encapsulate the iterative process of transition and development experienced by the young people in this project. The theme of *Self-development* recognises participants' desire for growth and access to opportunity, *Control* is about being an active participant in transitions and *Fit* acknowledges participants' need for belonging and their search for alignment between self, current context and planned pathways. *Networks and Support* act as a stable base for participants' transitions and development while *Direction and Stability* provide a sense of purpose and a framework to guide these transitions. Detailed descriptions of these themes are provided in section 1.2, followed by a short discussion of how these themes influence participants' education, employment and transitions experiences.

These themes were developed through cross-sectional and longitudinal analysis of the interview data. This provided information on the main characteristics of participants' experiences at each time point, and helped us identify overarching themes which impacted upon participants at all stages of their transition from school to education, work and other activities. The themes discussed in this report differ somewhat from the main themes identified in the interim report for this project. Initially the themes centred on participants' experiences of Youth Guarantee Fees Free, and were concerned with overall experiences in school and Youth Guarantee contexts, in terms of what helped and didn't help for engagement and success. The five new themes in this report take a broader view of participants' experiences. These new themes and the initial themes are tightly connected and provide complementary perspectives of the transition experiences of this group of young people. The five themes discussed in this report focus on what helps, hinders and influences our participants as they transition between contexts; and provide a framework for interpreting participants' experiences and actions. The themes in the interim report detailed what worked for participants within the specific context of Youth Guarantee Fees Free. The initial themes are now seen as a subset of the main themes as shown in Table 1 on page 6.

1.1 Key considerations

In addition to the five main themes discussed in this report, we identified several factors which relate to all themes and to all participants' experiences. The themes should be understood in the context of these key considerations.

1.1.1 Identity development

It was not the intention of this project to explore identity development; however, there is a clear and inextricable link between our participants' experiences and their identity development. The themes in this report, discussed in terms of our participants' education, employment and transitions experiences, also strongly relate to identity development. The connection between transitions and identity development is well recognised in existing youth transitions literature (Higgins, 2012; Stokes & Wyn, 2007).

1.1.2 Complexity and Context

The context in which each participant lives, learns, works and makes decisions about the future has an impact on how they experience the themes discussed in this report. The themes are complex and interconnected and their role in participants' experiences varies according to individual needs and characteristics, as well as context. It is important to note that what works for one young person may not work for others. Furthermore, what works for a young person at a particular point in time in a certain context may not work for that same young person at a different time or in a different context. The complexity of participants' experiences and the varied impact of these on their transitions, education, and employment experiences have become increasingly apparent as we track them through multiple contexts.

1.1.3 Multiple transitions

Although this project is focused on the education and employment transitions of young people engaged in Youth Guarantee Fees Free programmes, it is important to acknowledge that these were not the only transitions experienced by participants. Participants experienced changes in their independence, their relationships and their identities. Some common examples include: getting a drivers' licence, moving out of home, becoming financially independent, entering into serious intimate relationships, changing friend groups and becoming a parent. Many participants spoke about gaining maturity and self-awareness as they took on more responsibility and became independent young adults.

1.1.4 Iterative transitions

While, in the earlier interviews, many participants spoke of their intention to follow a linear pathway through education or employment, very few actually did so. Participants experienced transition as an iterative process which was influenced by a range of factors. Most participants tried out a range of pathways as they searched for a route which matched their current needs and ideas about who or what they wanted to be.

1.2 Defining themes

The key considerations discussed above provide a context for interpreting these themes and their role in participants' transitions. These themes influence and are influenced by participants' developing identities and changing contexts. We began the analysis of interview data by thinking about what characterised participants' education, employment and transitions experiences. Looking specifically at what worked, or was positive, and what didn't work, or was negative in these experiences. As the themes developed, it became clear that this binary approach could not capture the essence of our participants' transitions. The themes were not simply about what worked or not in specific contexts, they were related to overall influences and motivations in participants' transitions, regardless of context. In other words, the themes help interpret not just what happened, but may also provide insight into why it happened.

The table on page 6 shows how the current themes were developed from the initial themes. The current and initial themes are displayed on the left of the table. The right-hand column notes some changes to themes and connections between initial and current themes.

Table 1: Development of main themes from initial themes

Current main themes and definitions	Initial themes and sub-themes	Links between current and initial themes
Self-development • Change and growth • Identity development • Control over future success • Confidence and self-efficacy	*Learning and Achievement* • Broader view of opportunity • Identity development • Source of control and motivation • Confidence and self-efficacy	There is a direct connection between *Self-development* and *Learning and Achievement*; this is shown in the consistency between the main ideas within each theme. *Learning and Achievement* is integral to *Self-development*; in this project, participants' initial positive experiences of learning and achievement have provided a base for further self-development.
Fit • Belonging • Confidence and self-efficacy • Linking present and future	*Connections* • Support, relationships and belonging • Feeling valued • Being present • Understanding needs • Respect • Fitting in	The sub-themes within *Connections* are the mechanisms which support participants to experience and find *Fit*. The extent to which participants experience *Connections* helps explain positive and negative experiences of *Fit*. In post-YG interviews, the idea of *Fit* as linking present and future has emerged as a subtheme.
Networks and Support • A secure base • Source of confidence and motivation • Provides information and access	*Connections* • Support, relationships and belonging • Feeling valued • Being present • Understanding needs • Respect • Fitting in • Valued currency	The theme of *Connections*, along with its sub-themes, continues to account for the main elements of *Support* in the main themes. The sub-themes indicate what effective support can look like from a young person's perspective. *Networks* are developed through support and are a source of valued currency. The sub-theme *Valued currency* was initially aligned with the theme of *Control,* however further interviews have showed that it is a better fit with *Connections* as it is accessed through *Networks and Support*.
Control • Control over self and pathways • Independence and self-responsibility • Gain and maintain direction • Provides agency and stability	*Control* • Control over education • Preparation for future • Self-responsibility • Taking and ensuring control	There is consistency in the key ideas within the main and initial themes of *Control*. In particular, the idea of independence and the use of control to gain security and freedom. In the initial theme of *Control*, the sub-themes were related to the context of leaving school and entering Youth Guarantee, while in the current themes, they encompass the whole transition experience.
Direction and Stability • Forward momentum • Framework to guide pathway • Provides purpose • Stability for direction	*Control* • Control over education • Preparation for future • Self-responsibility • Taking and ensuring control	*Direction and stability* are closely linked to *Control*. *Stability* allows participants to control their current context and future pathways. Having *Direction* supports participants to take control over their choices. In addition, participants' desire for control over themselves and their pathways influences their direction.

1.2.1 Self-development

For the young people who took part in this project, self-development was about growth, change and ensuring future success. Whether gained from Youth Guarantee, other education, employment or personal experiences, participants said that the confidence gained from self-development created positive momentum for continued development. For participants, self-development included gaining practical skills for employment and further education, changes in mind-set and behaviours, and academic achievement. This was an iterative and self-reinforcing process; participants reported that the confidence gained from learning new skills and achieving in education prompted them to see themselves and their futures in a different light and encouraged further development.

The longitudinal interviews show that participants' approach to self-development changed over time. Initially many participants thought about self-development in general terms. For example, they enrolled in Youth Guarantee to gain qualifications and skills towards 'a better future' and were looking to increase control over their current trajectory through improving their access to 'opportunities'. As participants gained confidence and strategies for development, they adopted a more focused approach to self-development. They began to evaluate how their current skills and interests aligned with their chosen pathway, and consider which skills they could develop to increase their chances of success. They also sought opportunities for development which were directly connected to their desired pathway and assessed the value of particular pathways according to their potential for future development. This change in participants' approach to self-development was more visible after they left Youth Guarantee and began to manage themselves in new contexts.

Although participants' main focus for self-development was increasing access to, or success in, education and employment, personal growth had an integral role. Participants' capacity to increase access and success was enhanced through their personal growth and improved personal skills which they gained through self-development. This included increased confidence and self-awareness, improvements to interpersonal, communication, time-management, and study skills and changes to mind-set.

1.2.2 Control

Participants' desire to have control over themselves, their choices and decisions which involved or affected them was a strong and consistent theme in interviews with young people for this project. For these young people, control was about independence, self-responsibility and forging their own path. They used control to gain and maintain independence, to access opportunities, and to reject situations which undermined their sense of self-efficacy or identity.

The role of control in participants' experiences varied according to their individual needs, aims and contexts. Most participants used control to ensure future independence through developing themselves, their skills, and choosing pathways that provided stability and/or flexibility. Some reported choosing a course of study or a career that offered diverse pathways and opportunities for progression; and focused on gaining the skills, qualifications and experience which would allow them capitalise on this and ensure long-term financial stability and engagement. Others employed control to achieve immediate independence and stability, for example finding a job to pay for living expenses, which sometimes resulted in a narrowing of options in the longer-term. Overall, most participants were keen to gain independence and relished the chance to take control of their

choices; however, a few reported feeling uncertain about making decisions and were afraid of making the wrong choice.

Some participants, particularly those without a clear idea of what they wanted to do in the future, found that self-development helped them retain a sense of purpose and control in the present. These participants focused on developing skills with broad applications to ensure they were flexible and could maintain their independence despite their current uncertainty about the future. A small number of participants were more inward focused, and used control to protect themselves against potentially damaging experiences. For example, not applying for jobs to avoid the 'inevitable' rejection or not attending class because they were expecting to fail. As these participants experienced stability, success, or access to appropriate support, their use of control became more outward focused. The few participants whose mind-set did not change seemed to become more isolated as they slowly reduced their options by rejecting activities which did not fit within their comfort zone.

As participants experienced success in various contexts they appeared to become more proactive in setting their future direction and searching for education or employment that met their needs. A number of participants reported that self-development enabled them to take control as it increased their confidence and gave them the skills they needed for independence and self-responsibility, for example time-management, communication and interpersonal skills. This approach to control was a change for some participants. In the first few interviews, these participants gave many examples of how they had asserted their autonomy in order to regain control over a situation. For example, leaving school because they felt that they were not achieving or not fitting in, or leaving employment because of unpleasant work conditions. In these cases, the decision to remove themselves from the context appeared to participants to be the only avenue available to retake control. As participants gained skills and confidence, they continued to use control to reset their direction and remove themselves from unsatisfactory or negative contexts. However, overall this was a more informed choice, taken in conjunction with other actions, like seeking other opportunities for development or the strategic use of networks.

1.2.3 Fit

Finding fit was a central part of participants' education, employment and transition experiences. Participants mentioned two types of fit, one was related to belonging in their physical environment; being accepted and valued, and feeling confident and competent when carrying out tasks. The other was about participants finding alignment between their current activity and planned path and how they saw themselves now and in the future. To achieve fit, participants sought to match their current and future needs, interests, preferences, pathways and aspirations. Both physical fit and fit with a pathway provided stability for participants and guided their future development.

Most participants who experienced physical fit reported feeling engaged and confident about their future choices. Those who had found fit with a pathway also reported engagement and confidence, as well as a sense of purpose. In both cases, fit provided stability which allowed participants to focus on self-development and explore future options. Participants who had found fit with a particular pathway used this to guide their self-development, for example, gaining certain skills and

qualifications required to enter a particular career. For participants who had yet to decide on a path, the process of finding fit informed their ideas about their future direction.

Participants used their experiences of fit, or a lack of fit, to assess the likelihood of fit in other contexts. Positive experiences of fit tended to broaden the future options considered by participants as these increased their self-efficacy and provided stability to explore a range of pathways. In some cases, participants' strong sense of fit with a particular pathway restricted their future options as they did not consider other possible pathways. Negative experiences of fit could limit or broaden participants' future options. Some participants reported that negative experiences led them to re-evaluate their trajectory and seek alternative pathways. Others ruled out certain careers, industries or activities, for example continuing in education, after experiencing a lack of fit. Regardless of whether they had a desired path, participants who lacked networks or knowledge to find alternative pathways when they experienced a lack of fit faced limited future options.

Like self-development, the process of finding fit was iterative rather than a one-off event. Changes in participants' contexts, for example moving from Youth Guarantee to higher level study or employment, and changes in participants' ideas about themselves and their future pathways contributed to this process. Each positive or negative experience of fit influenced participants' ideas about what was right for them and what they were capable of achieving. Most participants experienced physical fit before searching for, or refining, their ideas about fit with a certain pathway. However, for a few participants, their strong identification with a particular pathway or career helped them find physical fit.

1.2.4 Networks and support

Networks and support provide a foundation from which participants can search for a suitable pathway or activity. Participants said that their networks and support base influenced their ideas about suitable pathways and were a source of motivation. Support was a strong theme in the initial interviews and continues to play an integral role in participants' post-Youth Guarantee experiences. Networks act as sources of information and participants reported using these to access opportunities.

We observed that participants received two types of support from family, friends and other sources. Some participants received 'active support' for example, a parent helping them create a C.V or signing up to an education programme with a friend. Moral support, i.e. general encouragement, was received by most participants and was an important source of motivation however this was not always enough to help participants do well in education or employment, or successfully navigate their transitions.

As participants move between contexts, the role of support and networks has evolved. In Youth Guarantee, support was far more important than networks. Participants reported that connections with their tutors and peers, and the help they received with learning and personal issues were vital to their engagement, sense of belonging, and success in Youth Guarantee. After leaving Youth Guarantee, participants' use of networks increased as they searched for opportunities and pathways. Some participants had benefitted from networks to gain employment or access education prior to Youth Guarantee, however, after Youth Guarantee the value of networks became clearer to

participants. They began to think about how existing networks could guide their transition and leverage opportunities, and they sought to access or create new networks.

The main elements of support identified in the themes from interviews one and two continue to be important for participants in maintaining and developing connections. Participants said that having access to ongoing supportive relationships where they felt valued, respected and their needs were understood provided them with stability and fit, and supported them to take control over the direction of their lives. The idea that access to information and opportunities is 'valued currency' for participants is supported by participants' use of networks. Participants reported using their networks to find and interpret information, and used their own skills along with connections available through their networks to access education and employment opportunities. These networks continue to shape participants' values and ideas about what is possible and practical for them.

1.2.5 Direction and Stability

Having direction and experiencing stability during their transitions was important to the young people who took part in this project. For these young people, direction is about forward momentum, and can involve a next step plan, a longer-term goal or idea, a clear plan or path, or a general sense of moving towards 'the future'. Having direction in any form had a positive impact on participants' transitions. According to participants, it supported self-development, contributed to their self-confidence, their sense of purpose and stability. Participants gained stability from a variety of sources including a stable home and personal life, ongoing supportive relationships, finding fit with a particular employment or education context or pathway, and having overall direction. Our qualitative analysis identified that, for this cohort, stability is integral to direction; overall, participants who lacked stability struggled to find or maintain direction.

In many participants' experiences, direction and stability were closely linked. Throughout their transitions, participants found that having stability allowed them to focus on finding direction. A number of participants reported that having stability in their Youth Guarantee programmes allowed them to plan their next step and develop the skills to achieve this. Post-Youth Guarantee, stability came from following an education pathway, finding a job and having a general sense of direction. Some participants reported that having direction provided stability as it guided their choices and brought meaning to these. In these cases, direction was used as a framework to help participants judge the usefulness of certain activities, pathways, networks and self-development. To some extent, participants used their direction to demonstrate that they were engaged and experiencing a successful transition. Some participants who had stability and were currently engaged in meaningful activities but did not have a future plan, reported feeling as though they were not succeeding because they had no overarching purpose or direction to guide their future choices.

While most participants used stability to search for direction or alternative pathways, for a few participants, having stability was their direction. These participants said that they did not feel the need for further direction as maintaining their current stability was their principal concern. In addition, participants who lacked stability in their lives found it difficult to set a direction as their energy was concentrated on finding stability and managing their lives. It was also noted that a small number of participants had a longer-term direction but this did not feed into their choices in the present, this was mainly participants who had to or wanted to wait until a certain age before

pursuing their career. Having a goal gave them a sense of purpose but as they were not actively working towards this, they were unable to assess fit and engage in self-development to achieve this goal.

Over the course of their transitions, most participants gained stability from a variety of sources, and changed direction at least once. These changes in stability and direction were closely connected to changes in fit, self-development, and identity development.

1.3 The role of themes in participants' experiences

Overall, when these themes are present, i.e. when participants experience fit and self-development, have a sense of control, direction and stability, and have access to networks and support; participants tend to report more positive experiences. This indicates that these elements are a valuable part of young people's transition; however, it does not follow that any intervention for young people which provides these elements will be successful. The iterative nature of young people's transition means that these themes can take on different roles according to an individual's current context and needs. We have seen throughout participants' transitions that what helps, or is important to them, in a certain context does not necessarily confer the same benefits or importance in a different context. The development of themes since the initial interviews has coincided with changes in participants' contexts, and longitudinal data has provided greater insight into how these themes can change according to individual circumstance.

Table 2. on page 13 provides a summary of the key ideas and connections between the main themes in section 1.2. The lower left half of the table displays the intersections between themes, and the upper right provides examples from participants. The table is designed to be read as an A3 sized document.

Final Comments

This report provides an update of the main themes which have emerged from qualitative interviews with young people during and after their Youth Guarantee programme. It can be read alongside the Interim Report which includes analysis of quantitative data, initial findings and themes from the first rounds of two interviews with participants. Overall the themes discussed in this report align with findings from the quantitative data and build on the findings discussed in the Interim Report. Both qualitative and quantitative data emphasise the importance of support, development and having a future direction, and highlight the diversity of participants' experiences.

As we begin to understand participants' experiences over time, it is becoming clear that there is tension between the view of transitions on which the Youth Guarantee policy is based, and the narratives of our participants. The policy is informed by a linear view of transition in which the educational intervention sets young people on the 'right' path for the future. This report has shown that our participants' transitions experiences are not linear, and in many cases involve young people trying out multiple pathways as they search for a route which matches their current needs and ideas about who and/or what they want to be. This finding, combined with the complexity of the challenges faced by participants, indicates that it may be unrealistic to expect a one-off intervention such as Youth Guarantee Fees Free to produce a sustained positive outcome. The young people in this project experience Youth Guarantee as part of their own process of self-development rather than as a one-off event which determines their future direction. This does not change the overall findings in relation to what helps and hinders young people in their transitions and the impact of Youth Guarantee on these. However, it does indicate a disconnect between policy and the experiences of our participants.

Table 2: Summary of main themes and relationships between themes

Main Themes	1. Self-development	2. Control	3. Fit	4. Networks and Support	5. Stability and Direction
1. Self-development	**1. Self-development** **Growing** **Different and new contexts** **Active self and skill development** **Identity development** **Reconcile current and future selves**	"Because in the previous semester I saw my strongest subjects and which ones I struggled with, so I like scheduled my time within different assignments like, do one of them and do the next one like, get it over and done with so I can work on the others before, instead of cramming it all at the same time, so that was a good time management skill that I used."	"And like seeing other wool handlers that are real experienced and like, go to the shows and stuff, it just makes you like, wanna do it too." "[YG provider], they kind of showed me all these different ways, how to study properly. Um I think that's one of the big reasons why, you know, I went to another course, is just coz I knew I'd be able to do it. Or I knew I'd be able to think of other ways how to do it, if I couldn't do it."	"(Employer's) putting me through like, all my site safe courses and like, trainers and all that sort of stuff. I just learn and ask questions and I'm with a good bunch of guys though, good knowledge and stuff." "My older sister she will just advise me to like, go over Biology, oh Human Anatomy notes with her and watching the lectures together and explaining it to each other, so that's been a great support."	"I can just see how big technology is gonna get in the future and I think it's gonna be good if there's like, if I have heaps of knowledge about that and it'll be easier to find a job" "Yeah it's just more um, me, just sort of finding a routine and you know like um, a medium point for my life so I can sort of, keep going on instead of being all over the place with a few things, yeah."
2. Control	• Self and skill development can be a way for participants to take control over themselves, and their pathways or their direction • When participants are struggling to gain control in some areas of their lives, self-development can provide purpose which helps them retain a sense of control in other areas of their lives.	**2. Control** **Search for suitable pathways** **Independence and self-responsibility** **Regain direction** **Access opportunities** **Agency and stability**	"Um, I changed my pathways, I want to be a Midwife now, Midwifery. And so right now I'm studying Health. I didn't really wanna do Psychology. I just thought about what options I had, thinking about um, what's like best for me and what I'll possibly be good at, I think Midwifery will match me pretty good. I think I'll enjoy it."	"Um, my old neighbour, he's pretty qualified, like, he's got his own business and that, so I'll just talk to him, and see if I can get anything through him." "Yeah, yeah my sister, she taught me how to like, apply online and all that, because she did it before. She just said it's good to like, apply for different stuff and then see which one you get"	"I wanna work for the rest of this year so I can save up and put a bit of money behind me before I go into studying. Just so I'm a bit stable" "When I um first signed up for the Airforce I got a message back the day after and I, it said well, you need eighteen credits so I was like "oh right, I'll do Correspondence""
3. Fit	• Self-development helps participants maintain fit and solidify their identities • Fit is a secure base which motivates participants to develop themselves and guides this development • Fit and self-development inform each other in the iterative process of transitions as participants seek to align their future vision with current self	• When participants experience fit they are more likely to report feeling in control • Participants use control to search for fit • When participants identify fit, they use control to access the networks and self-development required to attain this.	**3. Fit** **Matching** **Belonging** **Alignment between identity and activity**	"Um, like friends, when they like, tell me if something's um cool like to come and try it out and then, yeah. I'd like go check it out and stuff." "I was talking to my brother, he was doing Level 5, and then he was telling me what Level 4 was about, and that's when I decided not to do it."	"Um, I'm just working, and just trying to look good, get more hours. Yeah. I'm comfortable where I'm at, at the moment" "Uh yeah, I'm trying to get a Painter's apprenticeship. Yeah, there's always work for it, because everything's got paint. I can always go further with it, and I can go to other industries with it"
4. Networks and Support	• Provide opportunities for self and skill development • As part of their self-development, participants create new networks and maintain current networks • Support and networks shape ideas and values through their influence on participants' perspectives and the access and information they provide	• Support and networks provide participants with security and motivation • Some participants seek to use or create networks as a way to increase control • Support and networks help participants make informed decisions; this increases their sense of control	• Networks and support shape participants' ideas about fit • Networks and support can help participants access contexts where they experience fit • Networks and support provide participants with a stable base as they search for fit	**4. Networks and Support** **A base for fit, confidence, motivation** **Sources of info** **Access to opportunities** **Value is clearer to participants**	"Oh my old man. When he was young, he was quite successful so I wanna be like that when I'm older." "My mum's like always the person that helps me try and figure out things. She just, she helps me try to plan it, coz I had no idea anything about Student Loans and everything"
5. Direction and Stability	• Having direction can provide a reason for participants to engage in self-development • Direction and stability act as base from which participants can develop themselves and skills. • Self-development can influence participants' direction through strengthening their identities or exposing participants to new pathways. • For some participants, self-development is a way of gaining control over the direction of their lives	• Having direction can give participants a sense of control over their futures • Stability and direction provide a base for participants to gain or expand their control • Having control over their future direction can increase participants' self-efficacy • Participants' desire for control influences their choice of direction	• Fit provides direction and stability • Direction and/ or stability can guide participants' search for fit and provide a base to search from • Experiences of fit inform the direction chosen by participants.	• Participants explore and search for direction from their secure base of networks and support • Networks and support shape participants ideas about which direction they want to take • Networks and support give participants access to opportunities	**5. Direction and Stability** **A driver** **A framework – guide, inform search** **Purpose** **Stability to search for direction**

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Further Reading

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