



# DANCE FOR ALL

**Extending Our Ambition  
for Dance in the UK**



“  
**To express oneself through movement  
 takes us into new worlds, brings us  
 together, and keeps us active and healthy,  
 both physically and mentally**  
 ”

Dance does so much for us all – it builds confidence, inspires creativity and friendships and makes us feel good about ourselves.

Dance never loses its power to do great things and attract great people but I know from my travels up and down the country just how the world of dance has changed, with fewer opportunities for new dancers and fewer people like the amazing teachers I had around to inspire and support new generations of budding young dancers.

I could not agree more with the conclusions and recommendations in this report because they confront these and other challenges head on and suggest great ideas for delivering high quality dance experiences and unlocking the full potential of dance to play its part in the life of our country.

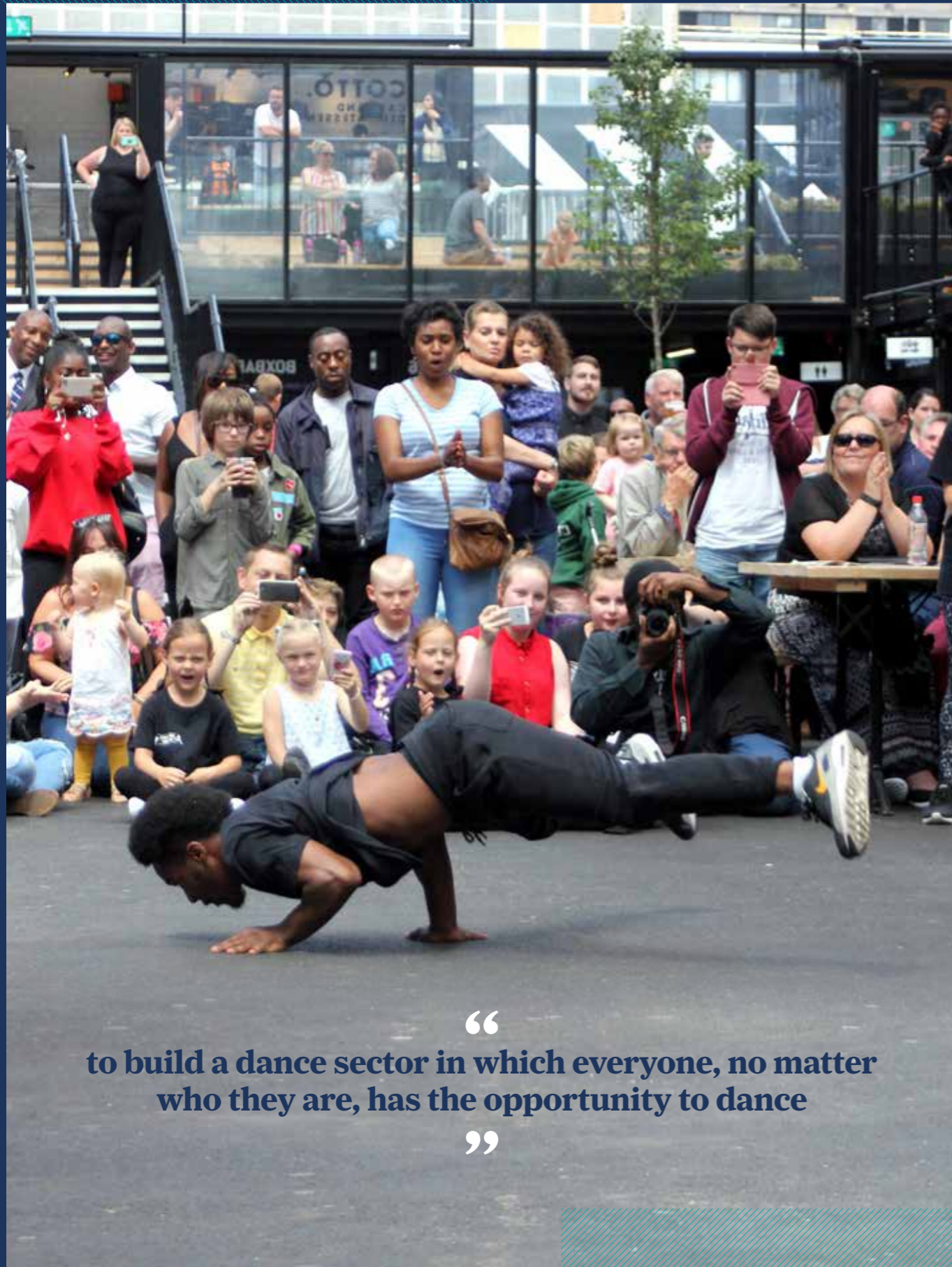
More than anything, I welcome the report’s overwhelming call for everyone working within the sector to recognise their part in the solutions and for us all to come together to make them happen.

As the report following this foreword says: “Dance is good for everyone, everywhere, no matter who you are. To express oneself through movement takes us into new worlds, brings us together, and keeps us active and healthy, both physically and mentally.”

We should remember these words, be inspired by them, and, together, get Britain on the dance floor.

*Shirley Ballas*

Shirley Ballas



Samuel Morais break dancing in London  
© The Whitgift Foundation

“  
to build a dance sector in which everyone, no matter  
who they are, has the opportunity to dance  
”

# Extending Our Ambition for Dance

The ISTD is one of the world's leading dance examination boards with the widest range of dance genres available. A registered educational charity, ISTD supports and trains its six thousand teacher members in fifty-nine countries through a range of courses, teaching syllabi and techniques and conducts approximately 90,000 examinations each year. ISTD is especially focused on training the future workforce in dance and certifies over 500 initial teaching qualifications annually. In doing so, we strive to advance excellence in dance teaching and dance education.

Above all, we believe that everyone should have the opportunity to learn, make progress and excel in dancing. We are committed to helping young people follow a rich and rewarding dance education and, in so doing, build a broad pipeline of talent to sustain the widest possible access to dance. For us, therefore, whilst teachers are at the heart of our mission, we also know that we are part of an ecosystem. Teachers, artists, studios, administrators, dance companies, and arts organisations, both large and small, depend on each other to ensure that dance in all its forms is in good shape, now and in the future. It is for this reason that we are committed to working collaboratively, especially to build strong and consistent progression pathways for learners across the dance sector.

To secure a brighter future for dance across the UK, this year our 120<sup>th</sup>, we are publishing [Extending Our Ambition for Dance](#), encouraging and committing to collaboration and action across the dance sector for its future growth and development. Like many, we believe in the power of dance to change lives, promote health and wellbeing, and contribute to our rich and dynamic culture. But we also know the sector faces many challenges.

Through [Extending Our Ambition for Dance](#) and the work that follows, we hope the sector comes together to both promote and speak with one voice – to extend our ambition for dance. We know we don't have all the answers, which is why we are making a commitment to collaborate, learn from what works, and innovate to develop compelling proposals for funders, decision makers and the public to build a dance sector in which everyone, no matter who they are, has the opportunity to dance. [Extending Our Ambition for Dance](#) is therefore both a rallying call and a set of ambitions on which we hope to build.

*Michael Elliott*  
**Michael Elliott, ISTD Chair**

# Securing the Future for Dance

Dance is good for everyone, everywhere, no matter who you are. To express oneself through movement takes us into new worlds, brings us together, and keeps us active and healthy, both physically and mentally.

Dance is also an incredibly important and valuable part of our popular culture and cultural economy, thrilling millions of people every week, whether on our television screens<sup>i</sup>, at home and in the street, or in performance spaces.

For learners at any age, taking their first steps on their journey through dance has benefits that can last a lifetime. Learning to dance boosts confidence and academic attainment<sup>iii</sup>, keeps us fitter for longer, reduces obesity, improves our mental wellbeing, and prevents a range of health problems in later life<sup>iv</sup>.



**22% of young people aged between 11 and 18, 31% of 7- to 11-year-olds and 47% of children between 5 and 7 participated in dance at least once in the last week<sup>ii</sup>**



**The annual social value of movement and dance is £3.49 billion, representing around 5% of the total social value generated by community sport and physical activity<sup>v</sup>**

For learners who have the application and discipline to make progress, excellence in dance develops a wide range of transferrable skills that have broader career potential, in the arts and other sectors, benefitting us all and boosting our economy. For those at the very top of the profession, dance enhances our cultural reputation around the world and touches the lives of millions of people.

Today, access to dance in our communities, in general, is in relatively good shape. For those who wish to connect with others and learn different skills in dance, there are clubs and groups in most communities, and schools, studios and companies in many towns and cities, where different forms of dance are practised and available. However, this infrastructure relies not only on experienced and trained dance teachers but for young people to have the wherewithal to access this provision, both financial and the necessary adult support and transport.





Fallen Angels - Doorways  
© Jazamin Sinclair

But, hidden from view, the health of the sector, the local provision of dance, the numbers of talented people who support the sector, and those who might reach the pinnacle of the profession, is in a critical state. The pipeline of talent – which connects access to dance and progression routes, in schools, out-of-school clubs and private dance schools, though pre-vocational and vocational training, including in higher education<sup>vii</sup> – is narrowing at an alarming rate<sup>vii</sup>.

The decline of arts subjects in schools is well known<sup>ix</sup>, with many people citing a devaluing of arts and creativity in education, an increasing emphasis on STEM subjects and narrowing of the school curriculum as well as pressures on school budgets as responsible. Whilst dance is on the national curriculum, as part of Physical Education at key stages 1,2 and 3, it is a poorly covered subject, often offered as an after-school activity or not at all. For those who do want to learn to dance, this cost is transferred to families, raising the bar to entry, with dance becoming a preserve of an ever-diminishing demographic. These pressures continue through school years with a contraction in GCSE and A level entries<sup>x</sup>, with a knock-on effect in higher education<sup>xi</sup>, which in turn reduces demand and therefore supply of both dance teachers and the courses available to learners.

Whilst the current status of dance is a mixed picture, with the demise of dance in statutory education and Higher Education, there remains a strong appetite and interest in dance in the private sector evidenced by consistently high graded examination numbers<sup>xii</sup> and vocational college intake.

Yet our dance ecosystem, the interdependent infrastructure that connects communities to dance,



**3.66 million**  
adults in England participate  
in a dance class at least twice  
over a 28-day period<sup>vi</sup>



**1.85 million**  
graded examinations in performing arts  
are taken annually around the globe,  
39% of which are in dance, supported  
in the UK by 15,000 dance teachers<sup>xiii</sup>

nurturing talent, developing audiences, and increasing participation is very much under threat. Support for this essential framework, through regional and sub regional dance agencies has diminished significantly. Where dance has always been concentrated in London and the Southeast, regional dance agencies have played an essential role in maintaining the health of dance across the UK. Schemes to develop dance administrators and managers, who support embryonic companies to establish, build relationships with venues, festivals, and artists and without whom we would not have many of the companies we have today, have also ceased<sup>xiv</sup>.

Despite the visibility of dance, the result of all of this is not just a narrowing of access to local opportunity, with the huge benefits in health and wellbeing this brings. The lack of access to dance, to progress and excel, represents wasted human potential and a less diverse sector.

But, despite the challenges, there is evidence that we can succeed. Across the country, the valuable work of dance agencies, producers, teachers, studios, clubs, and artists is making a huge difference. In some areas, we see studios becoming dance hubs, teachers working together, building relationships with other practitioners, making connections with schools and community groups.

It is clear that a healthy dance sector requires cooperation and partnership, where all organisations both large and small, independent professionals, practitioners, teachers, and leaders work together to extend access and opportunity for people who want to practise and learn to dance.

At ISTD, we believe we can all contribute to a better future for dance. We believe that everyone, whatever their background, location, or circumstances, should be able to realise their potential. That is why we believe collaboration based on a shared vision for dance should be a goal for all of us.

# Creating a Diverse and Inclusive Dance Sector

Participating, learning, and making progress in dance should be available to all regardless of who you are or where you live. Dance will only be truly accessible when it fully represents the communities in which it takes place. Evidence for a lack of access to dance makes it essential that we have a shared understanding of the barriers to dance, for learners taking their first steps as well as those who wish to progress and succeed in the dance sector, as teachers, practitioners, advocates, and leaders. Many barriers are intersectional and unconscious, arising from factors including geography, disability, cost, class, ethnicity, and sexual identity.

We also need to identify what works, to learn, share and scale up the models that deliver diversity in the dance sector, and commit to plan, implement, and monitor a sector-wide pathway to a diverse, inclusive, wholly representative dance sector. And this means amplifying the importance of diversity, celebrating the different talents, cultures and influences that contribute to our dance ecosystem, and promoting the benefits of dance for everyone.

## We will support and campaign for:

- A programme of sector-wide research to map the journey in dance, identify barriers and strategies for overcoming these. We will use this mapping to incrementally remove barriers to access and progression and broaden sector understanding of how to become more inclusive and diverse.
- Raising public awareness of the value of participating in dance, promoting diversity and inclusion at every level of the dance sector, through high profile national campaigns and celebratory events.
- Encouraging the appropriate leadership to develop EDI programmes, to agree and set improvement targets and share best practice in ensuring the sector is more representative of the population and diverse.
- Developing new qualifications to meet the evolving needs of dance learners and providing a new offer to appeal to more people starting their dance education.



Roswitha Weischka teaching an all-abilities class © Rachel Cherry



# Connecting Dance Communities

The dance ecosystem has become more fragmented in recent years. Yet the sector's success, and the success of the dancers and dancing its supports, depends on all of us. The future must therefore be about connecting local provision, using existing and new structures, around the learner's journey through dance. This is something in which we all have a stake, and supporting greater collaboration among providers will ultimately benefit the sector in meeting the needs of those learning to dance.

Building our cultural infrastructure and connecting dance communities therefore means making entry points and progression routes more visible and available. It means better signposting of local opportunities to participate, learn and support dance. And it means equipping practitioners with the tools to connect with each other and their communities. This may not require new funding, rather a recalibration of existing resources, some of which may be in the wider arts and cultural education sectors.

## We will support and campaign for:

- A comprehensive programme to map and understand the existing dance infrastructure in the UK, making this information freely available, so that new and existing learners can access the best opportunities available to them.
- Supporting health and wellbeing professionals to make referrals to dance activity by providing a comprehensive register of local dance opportunities. This would build upon the work already undertaken by some agencies in making the case to health professionals, providing guidance, and signposting locally available provision.
- Gathering research and publishing evidence to clearly articulate the many benefits of dancing, thereby building a growing knowledge base to advance the case for extending dance education and the use of dance in a range of settings.
- The development of a national online hub for dance excellence in the UK with easy-to-access expert advice, latest research, evidence, and professional development opportunities.



## Promoting Excellence in Schools

For many learners, their first experience is in a school or pre-school setting. It is here where equality of provision is at its greatest, cost barriers are often at their lowest and where the pipeline of talent is therefore at its widest. For this reason, the sector must work on effective solutions to engage, equip, and support the provision of dance in schools. Just as we seek to connect dance communities, we must ensure schools are also connected to these networks as they can signpost young learners who show promise to opportunities outside school.

Our ambition for promoting excellence in schools must involve pupils being exposed to dance and performance, both as audience and participants. It needs to show pupils, parents, and school leaders the value of dance, for health, mental wellbeing, and academic attainment. It needs to provide the tools, guidance and curriculum support that teachers and teacher trainees need to deliver dance lessons that reach minimum standards. And it needs to recognise, and incentivise good practice and achievement between schools, in the community and nationally.

### We will support and campaign for:

- A broad and balanced school curriculum which acknowledges and values the creative and physical benefits of dance.
- The development of curriculum guides and resources to support the delivery of a high-quality dance offer in schools.
- Every child provided with the opportunity to experience a high-quality dance performance before they reach the end of Key Stage 3 to inspire both the dancers and audiences of the future.
- Providing schools with the best opportunities to provide a high-quality dance through programmes to connect them with local dance education experts and institutions.

## Inspiring and Developing Teaching and Learning

At ISTD dance teachers are central to our purpose and the future of dance education. We know the importance of maintaining high standards in teaching and this requires shared definitions and common principles of what excellence in dance looks like. We must aim to create a vibrant and engaged community of dance teachers, connected by passion and quality, so that we support dance teachers to thrive throughout their careers.

To do this, we need to support, nurture, recognise and connect current and future generations of dance teachers. This is about sharing teaching techniques, resources, and pedagogies, as well as a range of other skills including business development, presentation skills, and advocacy. This could see the sector developing broad based dance teacher networks, promoting role models, applying industry wide safeguarding mechanisms, developing resources and, in the future, establishing a central hub to promote standards and excellence in dance teaching.

### We will support and campaign for:

- Continuing professional development for dance educators, supported by a new range of qualifications and bespoke online resources, promoting strong dance education leadership and skills development.
- Innovation and development of the use of immersive technologies in dance education to enhance the understanding of technique, increase participation and bring performance experiences closer to learners.
- A centre for Dance Teaching Excellence and Innovation, which supports prominent dance educator forums, encourages national and international dialogue and the sharing of best practice in dance teaching.
- A kite mark accreditation scheme so that the learners and parents can easily identify a high quality, safe and effective dance teacher to support them on their progression pathway.



# Meeting Our Ambition

For ISTD, **Extending Our Ambition for Dance** is a starting point from which to initiate a conversation, or rather, many conversations. We hope that the result will be a greater sense of a shared mission and future for dance in the UK as well as the best ideas and solutions possible to create that future. It is important to say at this stage that many of the most effective answers are already out there, delivered through the commitment and passion, the excellence and experiences of dance practitioners working in communities across the country.

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**we want to shine a light on the best of what the sector already does**  
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So, where we can, we want to shine a light on the best of what the sector already does.

Alongside this dialogue, we also want to make a commitment of our own. We aim to put energy and resources into sector strengthening. We are all components of a system; the dance sector, and the way those components interact is critical to its future health. So, we plan to convene and connect, to shape a vision for dance in the UK. We will put our energies into supporting research, producing briefings, and into policy dialogue. The nature and focus of these outputs will emerge from our conversations.

We very much hope **Extending Our Ambition for Dance** is a catalyst for something positive and ambitious that delivers practical benefits for everyone who dances and might wish to dance, now and in the future. If these ambitions resonate with you, please contact [ceo@istd.org](mailto:ceo@istd.org) to join the conversation.



**Join us to make dance accessible for everyone.**

To find out how you can get involved visit  
[www.istd.org/dance-for-all](http://www.istd.org/dance-for-all)

<sup>1</sup> Strictly Come Dancing (BBC) viewed by 10,057,000, 16/12/23. <https://www.barb.co.uk/viewing-data/most-viewed-programmes/>  
<sup>2</sup> Sport England. Active Lives Children and Young People Survey, p19 (2022 – 2023, academic year)  
<sup>3</sup> Bowen, D. and Kisida, B., 2019. Investigating Causal Effects of Arts Education Experiences: Experimental Evidence from Houston's Arts Access Initiative. RICE-Houston Education Research  
<sup>4</sup> Sport England. Active Lives Children and Young People Survey, p37 (2022 – 2023, academic year)  
<sup>5</sup> Sport and Recreation Alliance. Social Value of Movement and Dance research report (2023)  
<sup>6</sup> Sports and Recreation Alliance. Social Value of Movement and Dance to the UK, (2023)  
<sup>7</sup> One Dance UK research. <https://www.artspromotional.co.uk/news/educators-warn-decline-dance-education>  
<sup>8</sup> *ibid*  
<sup>9</sup> <https://lordslibrary.parliament.uk/arts-education-in-secondary-schools/>  
<sup>10</sup> Cultural Learning Alliance: <https://www.culturallearningalliance.org.uk/arts-gcse-and-a-level-entries-2022/>  
<sup>11</sup> <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/scores-jobs-set-go-uk-universities-axe-courses>  
<sup>12</sup> Number of certificated graded examinations in dance for 2021 – 2022, just under 190,000 (CDMT, Graded Examinations Data Report)  
<sup>13</sup> <https://www.artspromotional.co.uk/news/educators-warn-decline-dance-education>  
<sup>14</sup> What Do We Do Now: The Deconstruction of Four Decades of Dance Development in England. Burns, Gallagher and Gamble. 2022.



Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing (ISTD) exists to advance excellence in dance teaching and education, representing dance teachers and their communities.

For 120 years the Society has provided quality dance training across a diverse range of genres – enabling its members to inspire their students with a passion for dance. With nearly 6000 members in 59 countries we conduct 90,000 examinations worldwide each year.

Membership of the Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing is a passport to artistic and professional progression.

Discover more [istd.org](https://www.istd.org)



**Imperial Society of  
Teachers of Dancing**

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Registered charity number 250397  
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