



Education & Skills

The Icelandic School System - Overview

- Kindergarten from 1 or 2 years old to 6 years old.
- Primary school from 6-16 years **Compulsory Education**.
- Secondary school from 16-19 years old (and older). Teenagers aged 16-18 have a right to attend secondary school.
- In secondary school, people study for their matriculation examination or vocational studies.
- University or specialised schools.
- Continued education for adults.

Kindergarten



- Kindergarten is the first educational level. Most children in Iceland start attending kindergarten at the age of 1-2 years old, but it's not compulsory.
- Kindergartens are either private or run by the municipalities.
- It is necessary to apply for a place at a kindergarten and sometimes there's a waiting list.
- Children who speak Icelandic as a second language have priority.
- Most children attend their local kindergarten.
- Kindergarten is not free of charge. Parents share the cost with the municipalities. There is a discount if parents have more than one child at the same kindergarten.

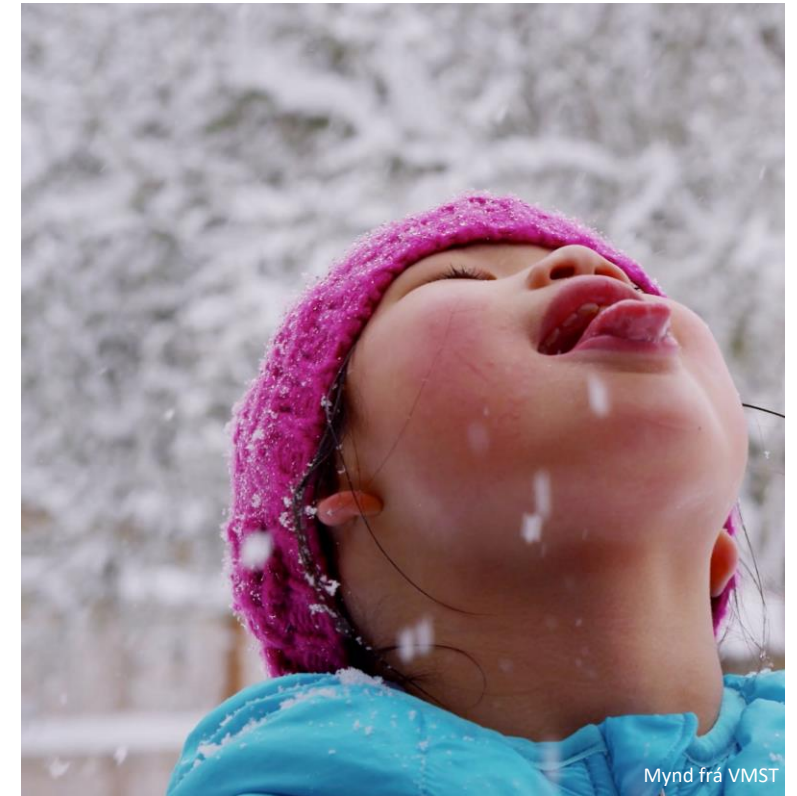
Kindergarden - Continued



- Children get a hot meal at lunchtime. They also get fruit, bread and toppings throughout the day.
- Children aged 1-3 nap during the day and get mattresses, pillows and blankets.
- The children play outdoors every day. Even if it's raining or snowing. They should own rain gear, rain boots, a snowsuit, snow boots, a hat and mittens.
- The children are supervised carefully, both indoors and outdoors.
- Being outdoors is fun and refreshing and if the children are properly dressed, they won't get cold.

What Do Children Do at Kindergarten?

- There is a daily schedule at kindergartens, and certain constants in the work.
- Among activities at all kindergartens are:
 - Working with language skill stimulation with the children and laying the foundation of literacy skills and all education.
 - Singing with the children and teaching them many songs.
 - Reading to the children and letting them look at books.
 - The children do arts and crafts and take part in diverse creative projects.
 - The children play, both indoors and outdoors (in a special outdoors area with safe playground equipment).
 - The children occasionally go on field trips with their teachers. They always wear highly visible safety vests on those occasions.



Kindergarten - Continued

- Parents are invited to parent-teacher meetings with a kindergarten teacher. There they go over the child's development and how the child is faring at the kindergarten.
- Children at kindergarten undergo developmental assessments and phonological awareness assessments.
- Children with disabilities receive training and support from a developmental therapist or special needs teacher.
- Kindergarten work is based on the Icelandic National Curriculum Guide for Kindergartens based on legislation for that educational level. Each kindergarten also publishes a plan of operation. www.stjornarradid.is/verkefni/menntamal/namskrar/

Kindergarten - Continued

- The work done with children in kindergartens is professional and diverse.
- Children of foreign origin receive a foundation and training in Icelandic that is necessary for a good start to their schooling.
- Children practice a lot of things at kindergarten:
 - There is systematic work done with language skill stimulation and their language development.
 - They practice teamwork and consideration towards each other.
 - They become more independent.
 - They are better prepared to begin their schooling.



Primary School - General information

- There is 10-year compulsory schooling in Iceland.
- Children start school the year they turn 6 years old. They start in first grade.
- Children finish compulsory schooling the year they turn 16 years old, when they're in tenth grade.
- School from 1st-10th grade is called primary school.
- All children have a right to attend school and parents have an obligation, according to law, to have their children attend school.
- Parents have to apply for holidays for their children and report illness.
- The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture publishes the Icelandic National Curriculum Guide for Compulsory Schools on the basis of legislation for that educational level. www.stjornarradid.is/verkefni/menntamal/namskrar/

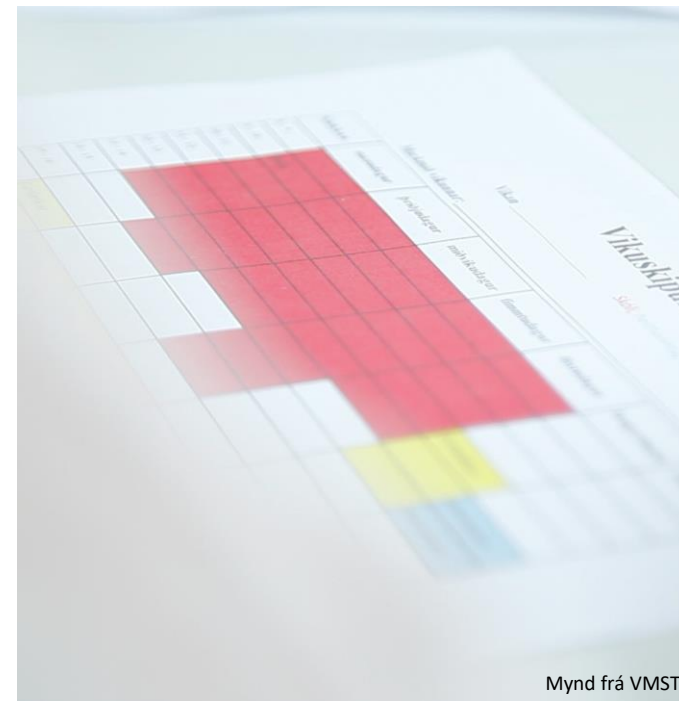
Primary school



- All children have the right to individualised education and special needs education if they need it.
- Children participate in all subjects, for example both girls and boys participate in wood shop, home economics, swimming and physical education.
- Physical education is taught every year of primary school. Children take a swim test in 9th grade.
- Parents are not allowed to keep their children at home even if they (the parents) object to some of the subjects.
- All children automatically move up a grade after the summer holidays in the fall. In that context, academic performance is **not** important.

Subjects

- In a democratic society, the residents of the country must have both general knowledge and be able to think independently.
- Schools are responsible for providing children with general education and train independent work methods and critical thinking.
- Individuals are assessed on their need for specialised classes in Icelandic as a second language or support in their general studies, and adapted study plans are made for academic subjects if necessary.
- Assistance with homework can also be applied for at the school.
- There are multiple subjects taught at schools, for example:
 - Icelandic, reading, writing, foreign languages, math, natural sciences, social studies, sex education, life skills, computer science, physical education, crafts, art, wood shop, home economics, music and swimming.



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Study Assessment

- Assessment of academic achievement is entered into the Mentor system www.infommentor.is - Assessment scale:
 - Outstanding
 - Proficient
 - On the right track
 - Needs practice
 - Not proficient
- Parents are encouraged to get detailed explanations of the criteria for assessment for different subjects from teachers.
- Progress is assessed on an individual basis and it's good to keep that in mind for parent-teacher meetings.
- Occasionally, teenagers must take preparatory classes in some subjects when they start secondary school, even if they have completed primary school in Iceland.

The Mentor System

- The digital platform Mentor is used in primary schools to manage attendance and absences, assignment delivery and student performance.
- Parents have access to the Mentor system. There they can report illness and monitor their children's progress at school.
- In Mentor it's also possible to see the names of everyone in the class and the phone number and/or email of their parents.
- Mentor is also available as a smartphone app.
- A digital certificate is the best way to sign into the system.
- www.mentor.is

Communication at School

- No teacher or school staff member can subject students to corporal punishment under any circumstances.
- Discipline in school-related activities is based on the protocol and rules of conduct at each school. Teachers and children should show each other respect in communication.
- If behavioural or disciplinary problems are severe, remedial action is sought with school administrators, parents and professionals, if necessary.
- Bullying at school is seen as a very serious issue and primary schools have a response plan to address it.



Children With Icelandic as a Second Language: Active Bilingualism

- The mother tongue of each child is important and the key to communication with the child's closest caretakers.
- A good foundation in a mother tongue has various effects on children's development.
- The Association on Bilingualism offers language classes for children in many languages. www.modurmál.com



Children With Icelandic as a Second Language: Icelandic

- Proficiency in Icelandic is important for schooling to be successful at all levels.
 - Parents need to be wholeheartedly involved in their children's school and homework and make time for it. Routine, realistic goals, positive encouragement and praise are important.
 - Home reading 5x a week where children read aloud to a parent/older sibling is very important.
 - <https://mml.reykjavik.is/>
- It is also necessary to use the time outside school to promote and stimulate Icelandic by:
 - Having children watch TV and digital content in Icelandic and with Icelandic subtitles.
 - Using apps and games that train Icelandic, reading comprehension and other subjects, for example on www.menntamalastofnun.is and www.fraedslugatt.is
 - Encouraging children to read books in Icelandic and go to the library.
 - Taking part in games and leisure and sports activities with schoolmates and friends.
- You have to work hard in new situations in order to be successful - this also applies to children. Interest and support from the parents is an important factor.

Services and Costs

- The primary schools have school nurses. They educate children on health-related issues and children can go to them if they get injured.
- Psychologists, educational counsellors and student counsellors also work at and for primary schools.
- Primary school is free of charge. Children borrow all textbooks, as well as workbooks and stationery. The state and municipalities pay all costs of operating the schools.
- Parents pay a meal fee for the hot lunch the children receive at school. Children are allowed to bring their own packed lunch instead.
- Parent-teacher meetings are held twice a year, with an interpreter if necessary.

Equality in Education

The Act on Compulsory Schools states that all children, regardless of ability or learning difficulties, have the right to appropriate education at their local school.

The Act states that children with a native language other than Icelandic have the right to appropriate Icelandic language education.

Special education schools are also operated for children with delayed development, and in some cases, they can be more suitable than a general school.

Primary schools must follow the Ministry's curriculum guide. That means that children should receive education of equal standard wherever they live. Schools may have different focus areas, however.

Good to know

- The school year is from the end of August until mid-June.
- **Remember each school's calendar - don't send children to school on holidays!**
- There is a 2-3 day winter break in schools both in the fall and spring semesters. There's also a Christmas holiday and an Easter holiday.
- There are several teacher preparation days in each school year, when there is no school but the teachers are organising the school activities.
- It is possible to pay for childcare in leisure centers when there are teacher preparation days and Christmas and Easter holidays outside the public holidays.
- Attendance is **mandatory** in primary school. Holidays outside of public holidays must be applied for.
- It is also obligatory to report a child's illness through Mentor or at the school's office.



Co-operation With the Home

- The co-operation of home and school is important. <https://reykjavik.is/foreldravefurinn>
- Children, parents and teachers need to talk to each other and communicate about how things are going at school. It is always possible to call or email a teacher and get information on studies, behaviour or the well-being of a child.
- It is important that parents pay close attention to their children's homework and help them with it.
- Literacy is the foundation of all education. All children must read at home, aloud to a parent, at least five times a week.
- www.mms.is and www.fraedslugatt.is have lots of free content for primary school students to practice various subjects.



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Co-operation of Home and School - Continued

- Parents choose a class representative in the class or year, who organises events for the class and parents to attend together.
- Parent associations are active in schools. They organise educational meetings for parents and neighborhood walks on weekends, among other things.
- Facebook groups of parents are common for school-related activities, e.g., invitations to classmates' birthday parties or advertisements for lost clothes or other items.
- Parents must pay close attention to emails from the school and teachers, the school's website and information on Mentor.

Leisure Centers

- All municipalities offer children in grades 1-4 a place at a leisure center after school from 13:30 (2:30pm) - 17:00 (5pm) Monday to Friday.
- An extended attendance after school is available for disabled children and adolescents from 5th grade to 18 years old. <https://www.stjornarradid.is/verkefni/felags-og-fjolskyldumal/fatlad-folk/leidbeinandi-reglur-fyrir-sveitarfelag/>
- It is necessary to sign your children up for the leisure center and select the time they'll be picked up or whether they should walk home.
- Sign-up is usually online on the municipality's website.
- Leisure centers are not free of charge. The fee depends on each municipality.
- Leisure centers are not mandatory, but many parents use leisure centers after school because they are at work.

What Happens in Leisure Centers?

- Leisure centers are very important for children's social development and language stimulation.
- The work in leisure centers is professional and diverse, for example, the children:
 - Play cards, do crafts and seasonal projects.
 - Play together, outdoors and indoors.
 - Participate in group work, like yoga club, drama club, or computer club.
- The children get light meals (for example, yoghurt and muesli or bread and toppings) as well as fruits and vegetables throughout the day.
- The children go outside every day, both at school and the leisure center, and should be dressed appropriately for the weather. The children are always supervised



Leisure Centers - Continued

- In larger municipalities, there is often a leisure bus that drives children from the leisure center to sports practice or other organised leisure activities within the district. (Parents pick up their children afterwards or they go home on their own).
- There are a few staff preparation days at the leisure centers every school year. They are not open for the children on those days.
- When school is closed during summer, the leisure centers offer summer courses for children where they often go swimming and on field and adventure trips. Children must be enrolled in the summer courses and the fees paid.
- Many sports associations and other associations offer summer courses for children.

The Importance of Leisure Activities for Children

- Studies show that children who speak Icelandic as a second language rarely participate in sports or leisure activities for children.
- Participating in leisure activities outside of school is very important for all children.
- They train skills and abilities in new areas, they practice social connections, make friends and learn and **use Icelandic in a more diverse way** than only at school.
- Children of foreign origin who attend leisure activities are participants in a common world of experience with their classmates, which is an important factor in integrating into a new society.
- Organised sports and leisure activities in Iceland are professional and an emphasis is placed on good communication, co-operation and healthy living.

Leisure Activities - Continued

- All districts of Reykjavík and all towns have active sports clubs. They offer sports activities for children. Football and handball are popular with both boys and girls.
- Music schools, gymnastics clubs, swim clubs, dance schools, karate clubs and scout associations are examples of associations that offer courses for children.
- Parents often take an active part in children's leisure activities and accompany them to sporting events, concerts and exhibitions.
- Diverse parent activities are often a part of children's leisure activities - and it is a good way to get to know other parents and to practice Icelandic.
- Remember the **leisure activities grant**!



Children's Social Life

- Birthdays are important to most children.
- Most classes have rules on birthdays and the best way to get information on them is through the parents Facebook group for the class, for example.
- Children in Iceland start visiting their friends and classmates and having friends over at an early age. Some schools have organised friend groups within classes.
- It is natural to accompany children at first on such visits and to obtain the telephone numbers of the friends' parents.

Teenagers' Social Life

- A social life with their peers is important to teenagers.
- Leisure centers are operated in districts and municipalities and are places where teenagers can meet. Employees are present when the centers are open.
- In primary school, teenagers often participate in various activities related to their interests, in addition to which entertainment events are held throughout the school year.
- The school camp in Reykjaskóli in Hrútafjörður is for children in 7th grade of primary school. Children stay there for a week, learning, playing, and working. <https://www.umfi.is/verkefni/skolabudir-a-reykjum/>



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Secondary schools



- Children who finish primary school (10th grade) have the right to attend secondary school.
- Secondary schools and colleges offer 3–4-year studies.
- In secondary schools and colleges, matriculation examination can be completed. That is the prerequisite for studying at University.
- In secondary schools it is also possible to finish vocational or trade studies.
- The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture publishes the Icelandic National Curriculum Guide for Secondary Schools on the basis of legislation for that educational level. www.stjornarradid.is/verkefni/menntamal/namskrar/

Secondary Schools - Continued

- The state pays all costs related to the operation of state-run secondary schools.
- Tuition fees must be paid in private secondary schools.
- Students must buy their own books and pay a confirmation fee.
- Several schools have specific schools/courses for young people of foreign origin.
 - Tækniskólinn (www.tskoli.is)
 - FÁ (Fjölbraut in Ármúli) (www.fa.is)
 - FB (Fjölbraut in Breiðholt) (www.fb.is)
 - Kópavogur College (MK) (www.mk.is)

Secondary Schools - Continued

- Most people who finish primary school choose to attend secondary school to learn more.
- Most jobs in a modern society require education at a secondary or university level.
- The high educational level of nations improves the quality of life of individuals, increases economic growth and creates new jobs. The government encourages young people to obtain an education, both boys and girls.
- Secondary school dropout rates among people of foreign origin are significant in Iceland. It is important for young people to finish their secondary education and to make use of all possible support in their studies.

Support and Social Life

- It is natural to ask for and make use of the support that is available.
- There are student counsellors in every secondary school. They can assist people in finding a suitable area of study and provide support for students that are having difficulties with their studies.
- Some schools or associations offer volunteer homework assistance.
- A friend system is sometimes in place in the schools, where older students assist new students.
- The social life in secondary schools is lively. Several clubs are operated, choirs, drama clubs and entertainment events are held. No alcohol is permitted at any events held by the secondary schools' student associations.



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Higher Education



- People who have finished their matriculation examination from secondary school or college can attend university.
- Official universities in Iceland are the University of Iceland, University of Akureyri, Hólar University College, and Agricultural University of Iceland.
- Private universities are Reykjavík University, Bifröst University, and Iceland University of the Arts.
- All universities receive state funding in line with the number of students and the composition of courses available, but only private universities may charge tuition fees.

Higher Education - Continued

- Some university courses have an entrance exam or only a certain number of students that can continue to the second year.
- In most fields however, the number of students is not restricted and a minimum grade of 5 is required to continue studies.
- Many people complete their university degree in Iceland. Most of them are women.
- All universities have a registration fee, and private universities also have tuition fees. Students pay for all educational materials themselves.

Financing University Education

- The Icelandic Student Loan Fund provides students with student loans for the duration of their studies. The loan is dependent on income and academic progress. www.menntasjodur.is
- Student loans allow people to attend university irrespective of their financial situation or background.
- Many students also work part-time with their studies.
- Student Housing has apartments available for rent to students. The rent there is cheap. There is a waiting list to get a Student Housing apartment. www.studentagardar.is

Foreign Students

- The University of Iceland offers a diploma in Icelandic as a Second Language as well as a BA Icelandic program for foreign students. www.hi.is
- To enter the diploma program, you must pass the TOEFL exam in English.
- To enter the BA Icelandic program you need a matriculation examination and a good foundation in Icelandic.
- It varies in other schools within the universities whether requirements are made for status assessments in Icelandic or English for foreign students.
- It is best to get an appointment with a student counsellor at the school in question to look at the possibility of studies and/or to have your previous university studies assessed.



Assessing Studies and Certificates From Other Countries

- If you have completed your studies or studied at a foreign school, you can apply to have your studies assessed with the ENIC/NARIC office. www.enicnaric.is
- If you have a professional title, you will need an operating licence from the relevant Ministry.
- The Europass website has a summary of professional titles in Iceland. See www.erasmusplus.is/menntun
- When a formal assessment is made the applicant must hand in an application form, as well as a certified copy of the diploma to ENIC/NARIC who will then respond to the application with a formal letter.
- Authorised vocational education from abroad is assessed at IÐAN education center (except for electronics). www.idan.is

Continuous Education/Adult Education

- Lifelong education is an increasingly important part of an adult's life.
- Some people graduate from secondary school, vocational education or university later on in life. Others change their occupation and learn something new or add to their secondary education. Many attend both leisure courses and work-related courses every year.
- Technological advancement, new jobs and job automation affect the lives and work of adults. The need to keep up with innovations and adding to their education is great.

Continuous Education - Continued

- Lifelong learning centers are operated all over the country and offer Icelandic courses, language courses, leisure courses, secondary school level education for adults, etc.
- Lifelong learning centers also offer free educational and vocational guidance for adults.
- Special language schools offering Icelandic courses are also operated.
- Specialised schools like computer schools, massage schools, commercial driver's license courses, accounting courses and more are operated.

(The Education and Training Service Centre (ETSC)) Study Programs

- Schools with quality certification from the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture can offer special study programs that are subsidised by the Education Fund and are relatively inexpensive.
- An example of such a program is Menntastoðir where adults learn math, Icelandic and other subjects as preparation for the Keilir Preliminary University Studies or preparatory studies at Reykjavík University. After which, people can apply to university.

www.keilir.net, www.ru.is

- The study programs are divided into work-related studies and general studies and the curricula can be found on the Education and Training Service Center's website, www.frae.is

Study Programs for Immigrants



- ETSC study programs specially designed for immigrants are:
 - *Reading and writing in Icelandic*, designed for those who need to learn and practice reading and writing, as well as computer training and foundations in Icelandic.
 - *Icelandic Culture and Society*, designed for people with some foundation in Icelandic (level 3-4) with an emphasis on Icelandic studies, social studies and computer training.
- Other study programs have sometimes been adapted by the lifelong learning centers for people with Icelandic as a second language. A short vocational training has also been linked to the study programs.
- Job seekers are offered various courses to strengthen themselves in the labour market. The Directorate of Labor oversees those services and is in collaboration with several educators.

Skills Assessments

(Validation of non-formal and informal learning)

- Real competence is the combined skills that an individual has acquired in various ways, such as work experience, internships, leisure-time studies, school studies, social work, living abroad and family life.
- A skills assessment is a confirmation and assessment of an individual's real competence and makes skills and knowledge visible by evaluating them against formal education or the needs of the industries.
- A skills assessment is performed in certain predefined professions. It is conducted by lifelong learning centers around the country.
- Requirements are to be 23 years of age or older, and to have at least three years' work experience in the field to be assessed. www.frae.is www.naestaskref.is

Educational and vocational guidance

- Study and career counsellors meet the individual on their terms and help them find a direction in their studies or work based on interest, skills and strengths.
- It can be good to talk to a study and career counsellor in order to increase self-awareness, analyse areas of interest, set goals, get information on study programs and receive assistance with job seeking.
- Study and career counsellors often teach study techniques in schools and support students. They also provide services regarding skills assessments.
- Study and career counsellors work on all educational levels. In lifelong learning centers, interviews are free of charge for individuals.

Websites

www.bifrost.is

www.enicnaric.is

www.erasmusplus.is/menntun

www.fa.is

www.fb.is

www.frae.is

www.fraedslugatt.is

www.fraedslumidstodvar.is

www.vala.is

www.hi.is

www.holar.is

www.icelandiconline.com

www.idan.is

www.infomentor.is

www.island.is/simennt

www.keilir.net

www.klettaskoli.is

www.lbhi.is

www.lhi.is

www.mcc.is

www.menntasjodur.is

www.mentor.is

www.mimir.is

www.mk.is

www.mms.is

www.mms.is/listi-yfir-skola

www.modurmál.com

www.multimal.org

www.naestaskref.is

www.retor.is

www.reykjavik.is/foreldravefurinn

www.ru.is

<https://www.umfi.is/ungmenna-og-skolabudir/skolabudir-a-reykjum/>

<https://www.umfi.is/verkefni/skolabudir-a-reykjum/>

www.stjornarradid.is/verkefni/menntamal/namskrar/

www.studentagardar.is

www.thetincanfactory.eu

www.tskoli.is

www.unak.is



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