Strategies for Embedding Community Engaged Learning within Universities and Communities

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STRATEGIES FOR EMBEDDING COMMUNITY ENGAGED LEARNING WITHIN UNIVERSITIES AND COMMUNITIES

Introduction
Academic community-engaged learning can be described as a course-based, credit-bearing educational experience that allows students to participate in an organized community based activity that meets identified community needs and reflect on the activity in such a way as to gain further understanding of course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of civic responsibility. As such, community engagement pedagogies are ones that combine student learning goals and community objectives in ways that can enhance both student growth and the common good. While Community engaged learning is well recognised as an important agent for change that meets the needs of learners as well as the wider society we live in, there is a paucity of studies that have evaluated the actual process of building capacity for sustainable community engagement by universities which have embarked on that journey.

A review of the literature suggests that Community engagement is transitioning from its first generation of development into its second generation. This is marked by an evolution of campus-based centres with responsibility for managing a range of community engagement activities. This range of supports include faculty development, community partner leadership development initiatives, developing resources to support community engaged learning and creating and delivering credit bearing community engaged learning courses. In this new phase, educators are also seeking to better understand community engagement as one of many measures to demonstrate potential and actual impact of engagement.

This framework is intended to serve as a resource for faculty, staff, academic leaders and educational developers involved in community engaged learning programme development, facilitation and/or evaluation. Drawing on the literature and institutional case studies, strategies for embedding community engaged learning and research within Universities and Communities will be addressed under five key domains:

1) Alignment with Institutional Philosophy, Mission and Values,
2) Organisational Infrastructure, Strong Leadership and Resourcing,
3) Faculty and Student Involvement and Support,
4) Supporting community participants and
5) Reporting and Communication. Under each domain, the multilevel organisational actions (top down initiatives and bottom up actions) related to the institutionalisation of community engaged learning can be explored.

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STRATEGIES FOR EMBEDDING COMMUNITY ENGAGED LEARNING WITHIN UNIVERSITIES

Alignment with Institutional Philosophy, Mission and Values

Organisational Infrastructure, Strong Leadership and Resourcing

Faculty and Student Involvement and Support

Supporting Community Participants

Reporting and Communication
1. Alignment with Institutional Philosophy, Mission and Values

- Study your country’s national policies (general policies related to education/higher education, socio-economic development, etc.)
- Explore scope for cross institutional collaboration
- Clarify criteria for engagement in the policy document of your university (what is included and what is not, in the context of your institutions mission and goals)
- Develop your understanding of stakeholder engagement and communication, by learning from other sectors and draw on a wealth of information that is available regarding well-established “best practices”
- Build a clear understanding of the terms and knowledge base around community engaged learning/research and develop a shared understanding appropriate to your context
- Develop a clear internal communication strategy around community engaged learning
- Hold consultations regarding aligning plans for community engaged learning/research with educational reform efforts

At the launch of the ‘Engaged Research: Society and Higher Education’ national report: Prof Maura Adshead, UL; Sarah Bowman Director of Public Engagement Trinity College Dublin; Kate Morris Campus Engage National Co-Ordinator

1.2.2 Champion civic engagement

In June 2014, the University of Limerick became one of the founding signatories to the Campus Engage Charter for Civic and Community Engagement. The signing of the charter was indicative of our desire to strengthen the link between the University and communities. To underpin this goal, we an institution-wide strategy that will enable us to engage in research and teaching.

We will establish the UL Engage Office as a focal point for civic engagement while capturing and the entire breadth of civic engagement in a coordinated manner.

Profile - Bernie Quilliman

Bernie Quilliman is a senior lecturer in the Department of Nursing and Midwifery at UL. Since February, Bernie has also taken on the additional responsibility of UL’s Civic Engagement (CE) Champion, which will keep her busy until December 2015.

During 2015, plans include establishing the CE network, connecting with external partners, and securing funding. This includes connectivity with the ERG. Plans include evaluating the impact of the CE network, and development of the CE network’s strategic plan.

Development of the CE Engagement website is already underway and will be completed by the end of the year. The website will profile key CE activities in addition to providing general information and resources which will be tailored to meet the needs of staff, students and the general public.

Biographies: There are always stories to tell about engagement events, both within UL and Limerick City. This will provide the opportunity to make engagement visible.
In May 2012, University of Limerick established a TASK FORCE ON CIVIC ENGAGEMENT which made 23 recommendations on the development of a coherent community engagement strategy for the University of Limerick. This report was presented to Governing Authority for consideration and action from University management.

https://goo.gl/t165K9

⇒ Approach the university’s executive/leadership forum with a draft proposal and the planned set of activities to incorporate community engaged learning into the core missions of teaching and research

⇒ Establish a framework of recognition and reward for staff and students involved in community engaged learning/research. financial incentives; recognition through publicity, awards or special titles; support for dissemination activities; community engagement appropriately represented in staff polices and processes

⇒ Incorporate Community Engagement into faculty and departmental workloads, and create a network of champions at all levels in the organisation

⇒ Ensure the timescales for the engagement process are realistic.

⇒ Host a civic engagement forum.

UL Engage hosted a World Café event with local Limerick city organisations to explore opportunities to engage with the University of Limerick, November 2015.
2. Organisational Infrastructure, Strong Leadership and Resourcing

- Engagement can be a low, high or no-cost initiative
- **Structure/Infrastructure** can take many forms and assume many duties, according to the institution’s characteristics
- **Support from senior personnel** within the institution
- **Identification and support of Community engagement professional** (consider suitability to the post, personality) to take on institutional roles and responsibilities relevant to building capacity in community engaged learning.
- Consult/brainstorm with different departments on the potential of establishing a “civic engagement structure” which would serve as a central entity that develops resources and provides leadership in Community engaged learning
- **Create a central team** dedicated to enhanced CE enabling support for academic staff across the university in engaging the public with their teaching and research. Responsibilities would include **Co-ordinating /Policy-making**
- **Identify resources needed in terms of personnel, finance, and organizational support.**
- Develop a **strategic plan (short/long term)**, to implement community engaged learning
- **Systematically assess impact of community engagement in consultation with community partners.** Agree what the outcomes of the engagement process should be, what indicators will be used to measure success, and what evidence will be gathered.
- Develop and support a **faculty development plan to support the implementation of community engaged learning/research.**

In February 2013, the University of Limerick appointed a Civic Engagement Champion (0.5, part-time position) to work with students and staff who engage in the wide array of CE activities. A key role was to lead the development and implementation of the UL Practicum, to enable students to engage in curriculum credited learning projects in collaboration with external community partners. This would enable students to engage in activities that address human and community needs together with structured opportunities intentionally designed to promote student learning and development. Role responsibilities also focused on providing a clear and coherent contact point for civic/community engagement with UL, promotion of UL’s CE profile to internal and external stakeholders.
Seek small internal funding (competitive mini-grants) to incorporate engaged research/learning projects into academic courses.

Undertake an inventory of current service experiences to provide baseline data.

Coordinate among faculty, staff, already involved in Community Engaged Learning (CEL)/Research activities, gathering more assessment data and using feedback to improve the programs that exist.

Develop networks and contacts: Access to networks and contacts is viewed as being of central importance to civic engagement. The significance of building and maintaining these networks was highlighted as being particularly important.
3. Faculty and Student Involvement and Support

⇒ Build Faculty/student knowledge and awareness

⇒ Implement campus wide intergroup dialogue opportunities e.g., lunch series/coffee mornings, Host engagement day/week e.g. “Engage Thursdays” To keep engagement from becoming a string of unintentional and disconnected projects.

⇒ Educate through units and departments to provide faculty training broadly

⇒ Identify opportunities within curricula to incorporate community engaged learning experiences

⇒ Scope opportunities for cross-discipline collaboration

⇒ Clarification of roles and responsibilities of everyone involved (e.g. Communities, students, faculty, Community engagement centres).

⇒ Celebrate Successes and communicate benefits across the organisation and to the external community.

⇒ Seek to show case/share information on Community engaged learning through institutional events e.g. teaching and learning symposia, department newsletter.

UL Engage supports professional, public and project-based engagement with bespoke training for individual staff, students and communities. It offers workshops providing practical and academic advice on developing community engaged research and learning.
4. Supporting Community Participants

- **Build community partner awareness** of the mission and objectives of the university in relation to community engagement and community engaged learning.
- **Hold conversations with community groups** to scope potential projects for community engaged learning.
- **Build and maintain effective partnerships** built on mutual understandings.
- Acknowledge and support the community participation and leadership in relation to community engaged learning/research.
- **Develop tools and resources for community partners** to support engaged learning/research.
- Seek community partner input to evaluation and product development.
- Developing a faculty culture which respects the knowledge assets of the community, as well as one that supports the sharing of power and control within research projects.
- **Capacity building with community partners** to support community engaged learning/research.
- **Develop guidelines and Resources** and seek input on product development.

Tools and resources to support community partners working on engaged learning/research projects have been developed by the UL Engage team in collaboration with our community partners, such as:

- Building Capacity with Community Partners to Support Student Engaged Learning: Training Workshop Series
- UL Practicum Module Outline and Resources
- Facilitating Community Engaged Learning
- Graduate Attribute Development: Student Self Assessment
- Supporting Graduate Attribute Development—Community Partner Role
- Reflection in Community Engaged Learning
⇒ **Identify and support** faculty members who wish to incorporate community engaged learning into their courses. **Self-Selection** — Not all faculty need to, are interested in community engaged learning. Work initially with the willing.

⇒ **Develop guidelines and Resources** to support community engaged learning

⇒ **Learn from and share resources** with colleagues from other universities

⇒ **Seek feedback from staff, students and public,** developing and sharing good practice.

⇒ **Provide evidence of experience** in community engaged learning activities by describing the significance of contributions to the community and their effect on student/staff personal civic identity, and by soliciting feedback from others involved in the activity

⇒ **Building competence and confidence** in community engaged learning pedagogies and approaches/ investment in faculty development.

⇒ **Involve students as co-creators, co-producers of knowledge**

⇒ **Introduce peer support/ mentoring opportunities** where faculty partnered to learn from each other
5. Reporting and Communication

- Communicate the institution’s “brand of engagement” internally to the organisation and externally
- Ensure cohesiveness between University identity and public image in relation to community engaged learning/research
- Make engagement visible through recognition events and presentations of projects and research findings both within the University and beyond its institutional walls.
- Improve our understanding of stakeholder communication and reporting of community engaged learning, by learning from other sectors.
- Consider a clear message via a centralised structure
- Establish a clear process for reporting community engaged learning/research
- Establish a clear process for reporting community engaged learning/research
- Develop tools and resources for community partners to support engaged learning/research
- Seek community partner input to evaluation and product development

Since Autumn 2016, 24 UL Engaged modules are now profiled on the UL Engage website representing engaged learning in all faculties. The ‘UL Engaged Modules’ listing provides an index of all UL modules that contain an element of engagement in the syllabus, with a brief summary of the module content and contact details for the responsible academic.
A UL-wide data base for all staff and community groups involved in community university partnerships and projects, the UL Engage directory provides an administered data base for:

- **Communities** looking to partner with UL
- **UL staff** looking to work with communities
- **Engaged Researchers** looking for project partners
- **Further details on exemplars, evaluations and impact studies for UL Engaged work**

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**NCBI—WORKING FOR PEOPLE WITH SIGHT LOSS**

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**WHAT WILL YOU DO ON THIS PRACTICUM?**

Activities will include, assessing service users’ needs in their ability to use iDevices, in conjunction with NCBI staff. Provide an individual/group educational intervention for service users based on their needs assessment and produce a report, including an evaluation of the intervention. 11 potential participants have been identified to participate in the educational workshops. All participants will have iDevices (Pad, iPod Touch, iPhone) and will have different levels of familiarity and knowledge of use of same i.e. beginner/ intermediate.

**WHY WILL YOU DO THIS WORK?**

This practical experience enables students to learn how to evaluate the needs of service users with vision impairment and develop an education intervention on the use of accessibility features for people with vision loss. As such, you will engage in both independent as well as collaborative learning. You will learn from one another to reach creative solutions to practical problems. The module is designed to enable students to develop the capacity to apply curriculum-based knowledge in a real-world setting and self-assess and develop graduate attributes to work effectively as a member of a multidisciplinary team in collaboration with external community stakeholders. Submission of reflective journals will allow you to reflect on your learning and to identify any difficulties encountered in conducting your project. Presentations will allow you to practice and refine your communication skills.

**WHO WILL YOU BE WORKING WITH?**

Practicum students undertaking this project will work NCBI – Working for People with Sight Loss and service users.

**HOW WILL YOUR WORK BE EVALUATED?**

Both formative and summative assessment methods will be used. Assessments will be designed to complement the interactive teaching and learning approaches. In particular, methods conducive to workplace assessment will be employed. These will include weekly reflection diaries, a group presentation, a reflective assignment and self-assessment activity.
Students work and learn with community partners on projects identified by local community groups. Some of the projects implemented in the Limerick region are briefly described below with accompanying testimonials from community partners, students and staff.

I am so appreciative for the opportunity to have been part of the UL Practicum. The module really made me feel like I was a part of the Limerick community, not just a study abroad student here for a brief time. It was so valuable to feel that I had left my mark, even a small one, on the area. I was able to meet fantastic, caring, visionary, supportive people who helped me to grow throughout the semester, and I wouldn’t trade that for anything. I can’t recommend the practicum enough to any international student! It opened my eyes to the impact a small group of determined people can have, and I’m both proud and thankful that I was able to be involved in it.

Abbey Benning
UL International Practicum student
University of Minnesota

The students were very enthusiastic and I was very surprised at how fast they took on, you know took the information in and were able to compile something very clear cut which is what we wanted. They gave their all, they took it very personal which I love. I know you if somebody wants to feed into that and that I will get the best out of them and that is exactly what we got.

Suzanne Roche
Community Practicum Co-ordinator
CEO, Limerick’s Gateway to Education

It was great to have the students alternative vision because you’re focused inside in the project, you’re working on it every day so you don’t see the whole picture. It’s great to have students come in from outside and say ‘do you know what I think would be a really good idea’, but because you’re so focused on sales or timesheets or whatever you don’t see it. It was brilliant to have that…. just bright, talented students just to say ‘I think this will work’.

Karen Keane
Community Practicum Co-ordinator
Limerick’s Gateway to Education

In terms of what this experience has meant to me personally, it has been something that I find hard to summarize, not because of the lack of depth in it, but the exact opposite. Unlike a regular classroom setting, being involved in hands-on work with my community partner has enhanced my skills and served as an opportunity that cannot be replicated in any other setting. The overall aspect of this module more than met my expectations, and I was honestly amazed by how much I felt I grew both in my study abroad experience and as a student. In light of the benefits of this module, I feel that I am both a better student, but also a more well-rounded person.

Bailey Perry
UL International Practicum student
University of Minnesota
My experience with the Practicum really mattered because I could tangibly make a difference in peoples’ lives while in college. University pushes people to think about themselves: their career, future relationships, money planning, classroom learning, etc. but little is done to expand thinking beyond academic walls and outside oneself. This experience enabled me to do that in a way that made learning a joy!

Aimee Allcock
UL International Practicum student
South Dakota School of Mines and Technology

Adare Tidy Towns was very pleased to be involved in UL Practicum I feel that both projects have benefited from the involvement of the students. Students working with us on the Tourist Ambassador Program identified the need to extend our focus to younger people and their recommendation to partner our volunteers with international students is welcomed. Students also worked with the local conservation officer and produced a simple pamphlet for owners of the cottages which we hope will encourage owners to comply with existing regulations. The students were delightful to work with and I feel that they enjoyed their time in Adare. The project work enabled them to become involved in the community from the outset. I would like to thank UL for the opportunity to take part in this Practicum and look forward to future engagement.

Eleanor Purcell
Community Practicum Co-ordinator
Adare Tidy Towns

My experience was interesting and something completely different to what I’m used to. Being able to go out, meet, and work alongside people with other cultures and getting credit for it has been one of the best experiences that I’ve had in Ireland. Most students get to see Ireland in a tourist perspective, but you don’t get to see the reality of Ireland until you’ve done the Practicum.

Nicholas Himann
UL International Practicum Student
Wilfrid Laurier University
“Fresh young minds, outside eyes and new ideas—needed in every community!”

Biddy Hayes
Community Practicum Co-ordinator
BGM Community Council

The UL Engage project was a real shot in the arm to get our projects going again, for people to come in with fresh eyes and ears and look at our challenges and potential from a different light.

Our community has benefitted from students coming in from a whole new country with a new international way of looking at things. This opened doors that maybe local people might not have been able to open and in that regard our project might not have progressed unless the students were involved.

Mark Nagle
Community Practicum Co-ordinator
BGM Community Council Chairperson

This practicum proved to be an invaluable educational experience because it taught me lessons about and skills for working with different people, stressed the importance of giving back, and built me as a person overall.

Kelsey Kuiper
UL International Practicum student
Davenport University

Biddy Hayes
Community Practicum Co-ordinator
BGM Community Council
The students made an invaluable contribution towards our aim of presenting and promoting the rich heritage of Mungret to visitors from at home or abroad. In particular, they furnished badly needed technological skills with the enthusiasm and creativity of youth. Coming from outside Ireland enabled them to format the material in a manner that would be interesting to overseas visitors. The students’ obvious interest in our project was a welcome affirmation of our own efforts. It gave our confidence a badly needed boost and renewed our enthusiasm.

Nessan O’Donoghue
Community Practicum Co-ordinator
Mungret Heritage Society

I have never worked on a community project quite like the UL Practicum and this entire process has been different, exciting, but more importantly, enjoyable. This experience has not only been engaging and creative, but one of learning and growth. By working with complete strangers in a country I have never been to before, I do believe that I have learned how to better adapt to situations and communicate with others while in the moment. Overall, I am grateful to have had this experience. This course has made my time studying abroad in Ireland that much more meaningful and it was an experience that I would not have gotten in a normal classroom on campus.

Ryan Cafaro
UL International Practicum student
Southern Connecticut State University
While it is simple to learn and memorize facts and processes given enough time, the world outside the bounds of a college campus demand a greater variety of skills and more adaptability. This is where a practicum course can serve to provide a place to build such skillsets through real world experience in a controlled environment. Throughout the UL Engage Spring 2017 Practicum, I learned a variety of lessons, but they were all centred upon people. In practice there is no job or industry that is entirely void of interaction with people, and, while all people are different, and every individual brings along with them a variety of challenges, I was able to take away some new strategies for how to approach human centred interactions in the future.

Overall, this educational experience was just that: an experience. While classes offer tried and true definitions and methodologies, this practicum offered an opportunity to not hear about an experience, but go through the experience. Just as I recognized the necessity of collaboration and attention to individuals in collaboration, learning is something that must be customized. By engaging in a practical experience, it is possible to have personalized learning that provides the student with the opportunity to develop their own methodologies and intuition for dealing with real-world situations.

Gabriella Haire
UL International Practicum student
University of Minnesota

The University of Limerick Practicum module was a class unlike any I have taken before. It has been far more rewarding to learn these skills through experiential learning, rather than studying directly from a textbook for hours on end. It was much more enjoyable as well and often times did not feel like I was working. It was not until I reflected on this experience did I realize how much I have changed from the beginning of the semester to now due to my practicum experience. In the future, I will seek out more experiential learning opportunities like this because I have developed many skills that I cannot get from a traditional classroom.

Jaxon Sommers
UL International Practicum student
University of Minnesota

Samaritans were delighted to become partners with UL Practicum as it offered the chance to put into practice projects that Samaritans would love to do, but because of the logistics involved and voluntary nature of the organisation can be difficult or too time consuming to achieve. It has also granted us the opportunity to work with a highly educated, diverse and motivated group of students.

John Downey,
Community Practicum Co-Ordinator
Director, Limerick & Tipperary Samaritans

I really enjoyed this experience, there is nothing like it back at my home university so it was an entirely new opportunity for me. Not only did the project allow me to go into the community ad meet new people from the Limerick area, I got to spend time with a group of incredible students who were also involved in the various projects. The practicum pushed me to be social, when studying abroad could have a solitary experience.

Matthew Moran
UL International Practicum student
Southern Connecticut State University
This practicum played a huge part in me enjoying my time in Ireland and it came at a complete surprise when it was offered upon arriving here. Not only did I learn so much about myself and the community I was involved in but I learned about the culture and history of Ireland. I also got to know faculty and community partners who I formed lasting connections with. People thought I was crazy to go abroad in my last term of my undergraduate degree, but I have learned life skills and knowledge here that will continue to serve a purpose in my upcoming future. In light of this, I would highly recommend this practicum to all incoming students who are in search of that community setting and obtaining life skills. The quality of my learning has been improved due to this module.

Colleen Condry
UL International Practicum student
Syracuse University

It is challenging coming to a foreign place and then working alongside new faces in a different workplace with its own special quirks; however, the experience is well worth it after overcoming those trial and tribulations. It is a great way to witness a different side of Ireland by interacting and working alongside an older Irish community than just being surrounded by students on campus.

Conor O’Riordan
UL International Practicum student
State University of New York

The Practicum Experience was the hands on project I was looking for. If I were to compare my involvement between my first four months of my undergrad, and my last four months here at UL, I got so much more experience out of my months here at UL. I was able to meet an amazing group of individuals who were going through the same experience abroad as I was, which helped tremendously in finding my own community here in Ireland. I also got to know faculty and community partners who I formed lasting connections with. People thought I was crazy to go abroad in my last term of my undergraduate degree, but I have learned life skills and knowledge here that will continue to serve a purpose in my upcoming future. In light of this, I would highly recommend this practicum to all incoming students who are in search of that community setting and obtaining life skills. The quality of my learning has been improved due to this module.

Jessica Kern
UL International Practicum Student
Wilfrid Laurier University

It’s the most amazing opportunity for growth that you could never find in a classroom.

Jonathan Tormoen
UL International Practicum student
University of Minnesota

This practicum played a huge part in me enjoying my time in Ireland and it came at a complete surprise when it was offered upon arriving here. Not only did I learn so much about myself and the community I was involved in but I learned about the culture and history of Ireland. I learned things that most students don’t take the time to learn while they are abroad. The best part about this class is that I learned it by leaving the classroom and getting involved. I had a great amount of support from the module instructors and the community partners that made it very easy to enjoy what I was doing.

Colleen Condry
UL International Practicum student
Syracuse University
This practicum was a very positive experience for me. For course credit, we were able to get involved in the community and become part of something greater than just four classroom walls. Coming from a different country and culture, engaging in the Limerick community from the start was very comforting and a welcoming experience. Being part of a community organization that I was interested in and passionate about, while also knowing I was helping them move forward and making a difference, was extremely rewarding.

Emma Lambert
UL International Practicum student
University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point

Working with the UL Practicum students was overall a very positive experience. The students who engaged with the St. Gabriel’s project were on a study abroad programme from the USA. They were committed and enthusiastic in their approach to the work. They devised a plan around the project and developed a framework that can be brought to another stage. We were very pleased with the outcome.

Kate Sheahan
Community Practicum Co-ordinator

The practicum program gave me a chance to immerse myself in the Irish culture and learn things that I would have otherwise completely missed. It gave me a chance to initially reflect on my skills and see how I was able to improve as a student and as a professional. This was a chance to partner with like-minded students, who value making a difference using their own set of personal skills and talents. I was challenged, pushed, and was outside of my comfort zone as times, but to reflect and see the accomplishments that my partner and I were able to achieve was well worth it!

Kathleen Larson
UL International Practicum student
Drury University

The Practicum experience also taught me the positive effects that challenging you can bring. Choosing to do this module was something that was out of my comfort zone but provided me with the courage to put myself out there more because of the positive impact it had had on me. The way of which I was able to learn all of this was in an interactive environment. This was very different from a normal school setting but was done in a way that proved to be much more enjoyable and interesting to me. I learned by doing and not just studying and writing papers. To me this actually proved to be more effective for my personal style of learning. I was truly able to grow in areas of myself that I did not even know I had in me. This showed to be important not only in my work but also in my own personal self. The lessons that I learned will help me in my future careers. It taught me how to work in a professional environment and be professional. This experience has given me new skills, new confidence and a new way of looking at things that I will forever cherish.

Meghan Dion
UL International Practicum student
Bridgewater State University
For examples of collaborative work between lecturers, students and community partners please visit: www.ul.ie/engage

The following tools and resources are available at: www.ul.ie/engage/node/3131
Resources for Practicum Students are available at: www.ul.ie/engage/node/3271

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