ABOARD
RoAdmap to EmBedding Open ReseArch Practices in IReland

ABOARD Self-Assessment Survey for Researchers - Summary Report

Executive Summary

This report summarizes the first step of the stakeholder engagement process of the ABOARD project: a self-assessment survey of Irish researchers regarding their openness to and appetite for change in relation to Open Research and Responsible Research Assessment practices. The overall objective of ABOARD is a roadmap for system-level incentivisation of Open Research and Responsible Research Assessment practices in Ireland with a focus on including the voice of researchers themselves - aiming for effective and coherent alignment of incentives that researchers encounter in all their major fields of activity (including recruitment, promotion, institutional research initiatives and engagement with external funders).

The survey attracted responses from 193 researchers from a total of 18 institutions across Ireland, with relatively even participation from all academic fields and across different career stages, resulting in a data set which can be viewed as representative of the Irish research ecosystem. The results show that awareness levels of Open Research practices among researchers are generally high, but that the implementation of those practices is perceived as low and fragmented: it varies significantly across, and even within institutions and is generally not well aligned with institutional incentivization practices.

The survey showed that current awareness levels, openness to and appetite for Open Research and Responsible Research Assessment practices - while slightly higher in STEM fields and at advanced career stages - are generally at quite similar levels across disciplines and career stages, with only minor differences within these categories. The results highlight an awareness of the benefits of Open Research and responsible assessment practices, an appetite for more alignment in policy, for support and resources to obtain the skills required for more engagement in these practices and, in the short-term, for addressing difficulties arising from the high cost of Open Access publication.

This survey for researchers was one component of ABOARD's self assessment work package and has been complemented with a similar self assessment survey for funding institutions and consultation engagement with other key stakeholders. Together, these formed the basis of the next step in the engagement process: a series of collective intelligence workshops. Combined, these outcomes will feed into government recommendations and a position paper and will ultimately inform national policy in relation to the incentivization of Open Research practices.

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1. Introduction

The ABOARD project is funded by the National Open Research Forum, and it is co-led by University College Cork and Trinity College Dublin.

The project's objective is the production of a roadmap to develop both system-level incentivisation of Open Research and responsible research assessment practices in Ireland; this will mean that the incentives that researchers encounter in all their major fields of activity (including recruitment, promotion, institutional research initiatives and engagement with funders) are aligned effectively.

The ABOARD project brings together a consortium of research performing organisations, funders and researchers and also undertakes dialogue with key policymakers.

This Self-Assessment Survey was conducted as part of ABOARD's work package #3 and had the objective of assessing the current state of Open Research incentives and responsible research assessment practices in the Irish research ecosystem and the openness to and appetite for change in relation to these.

The survey ran from November 2024 to January 2025. It was hosted on Qualtrics and disseminated through the ABOARD project partners within their institutions and disciplinary networks and promoted via email, LinkedIn and the ABOARD website. It obtained ethical approval from the Social Research Ethics Committee of University College Cork.

2. Institution, Career Stage and Discipline of Respondents

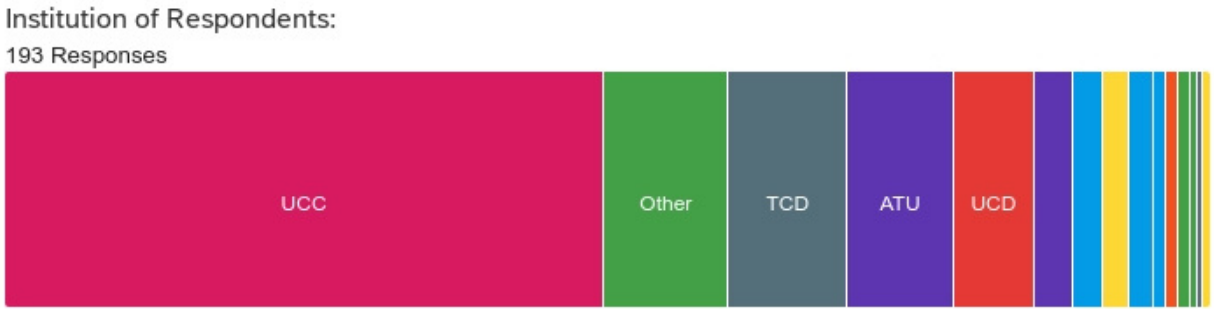

Fig 1: Institutions of Survey Participants

The survey received 193 valid responses from 18 institutions across Ireland. 61% of participants came from STEM disciplines (Medicine & Health Sciences, Life Sciences, Engineering and Physical Sciences), and 39% from Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences. The highest number of responses came from senior lecturers/associate professors (23%), followed by professors (20%), lecturers/assistant professors (18%), post-doctoral researchers (14%) and research fellows (10%). 14% were in other research-related careers.

Institution	Count
University College Cork	96
Other (includes 17 responses from **Teagasc**)	20
Trinity College Dublin	19
Atlantic Technological University	17
University College Dublin	13
University of Galway	6
University of Limerick	5
Dublin City University	4
Technological University Dublin	4
Dun Laoghaire Institute of Art and Design & Technology	2
Mary Immaculate College	2
Royal Irish Academy	2
Dundalk Institute of Technology	1
Maynooth University	1
South East Technological University	1
Total	**193**

Table 1: Institutions of Survey Participants

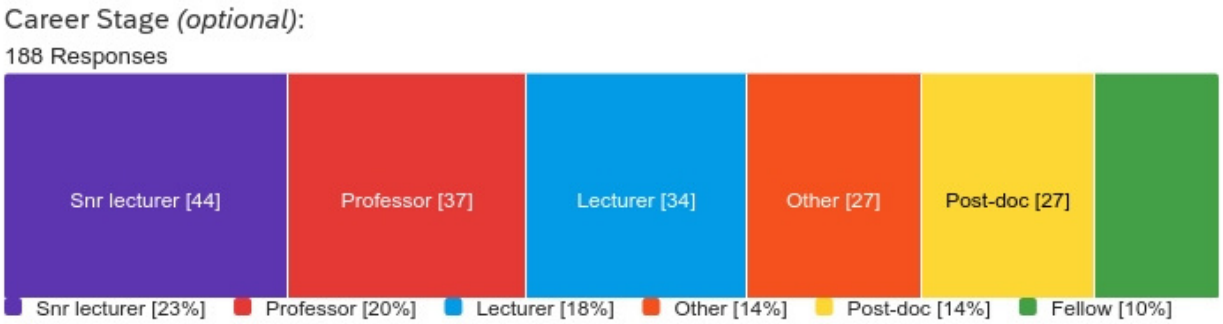

Fig 2: Career stage / academic role of survey participants

Throughout this report, the term early-career researchers refers to post-doctoral researchers and PhD students (these were categorized under “other”). The term mid-career researchers refers to those who selected ‘research fellow’, ‘lecturer/assistant professor’ or ‘senior lecturer/associate professor’.

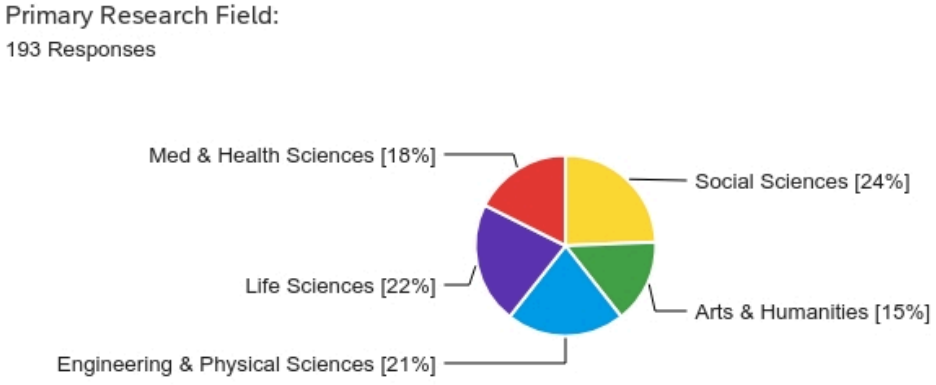

Fig 3: Primary Research field of survey participants

3. Awareness Levels (0-10) of Open Research Practices, Responsible Research Assessment and the Responsible Use of Research Metrics

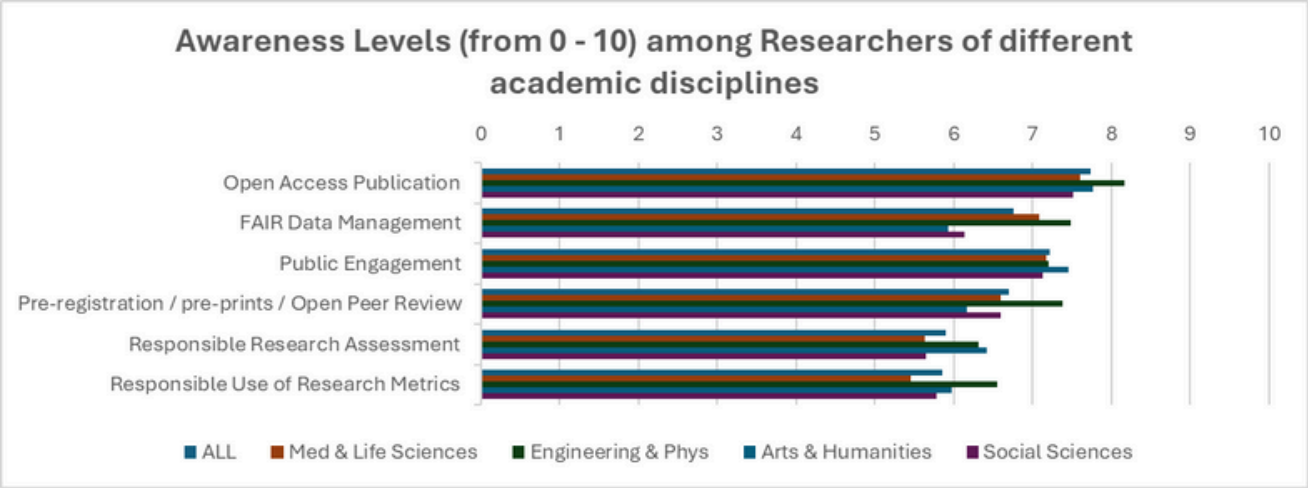

Fig. 4: Awareness Levels of Open Research Practices, Responsible Research Assessment and the Responsible Use of Research Metrics

Key Findings

Open Access (OA) Publication, Open peer review, pre-prints and pre-registrations as well as FAIR Data Management and Public Engagement are commonly understood as Open Research practices. Engagement in Open Research practices is closely linked to their incentivisation (incentivisation meaning here that such practices are both *possible* and that they *matter* with respect to research funding applications, recruitment, promotion and other research assessment processes). Responsible Research Assessment (RRA) means recognising, in research assessment, a broad range of research practices, activities and outputs and basing assessment principally on qualitative evaluation and avoiding the inappropriate use of metrics.

Of these concepts and practices, researchers reported the highest awareness levels for Open Access Publication (mean: 7.73), followed by Public Engagement (mean: 7.21), while awareness of Responsible Research Assessment and the Responsible Use of Research Metrics (RURM) is lowest (mean 5.9 and 5.85 respectively).

Differences by career stage

Awareness levels are highest among professors: with a mean level of 8.41 for OA Publication, 7.58 for FAIR Data principles, 7.76 for Public Engagement, 7.54 for Pre-registration, Pre-prints and Open peer review, and 6.94 and 6.83 for the concepts of RRA and RURM.

Awareness levels of Early and Mid Career Researchers were at a slightly lower level, quite similar to each other (with mean values ranging from 5.53 to 7.61 for early career and from 5.55 to 7.68 for mid-career researchers) showing the same trend as professors: highest awareness levels for OA Publication and lowest for the responsible use of metrics and responsible assessment practices.

Awareness levels by discipline

Awareness levels across all concepts and practices (bar Public Engagement) are highest among Researchers in Engineering and Physical Science disciplines (mean value between 6.31 for responsible research assessment and 8.17 for OA publication), and at slightly lower levels which are very similar across the other categories (ranging from 5.46 for RURM to 7.76 for OA).

Awareness levels for FAIR Data management are significantly higher in STEM fields (7.21) than in Arts, Humanities (5.93) and Social Sciences (6.13), whereas awareness levels for Public Engagement are highest in Arts and Humanities (7.45) compared to mean values between 7.1 and 7.2 in the other fields.

4. Perceived Alignment of Institutional Incentivization with Open Research and Responsible Assessment Practices

a) On a scale from 0 – 10, to what extent do you agree with the following statement:

"Current incentivization within my institution is well aligned with the Responsible Use of Research Metrics (RURM) and Responsible Research Assessment (RRA)."

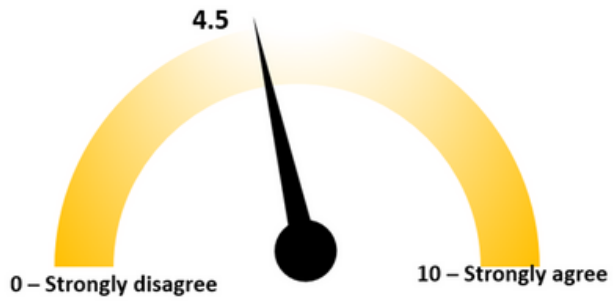

Fig 5: Perceived alignment of current institutional incentivisation with RURM and RRA

Key Findings:

Overall agreement lies at a mean of 4.5 which is below the neutral line, leading to the conclusion that current incentivization within researchers' institutions is not well aligned with the Responsible Use of Research Metrics and Responsible Research Assessment practices. Agreement was strongest among Early Career Researchers with a mean agreement value of 4.9 and lowest among Professors (3.6). There were minor differences between disciplines: agreement was strongest within Engineering and Physical Sciences (5.03) - the only one beyond the neutral line - and lowest among researchers in Social Sciences (4.22).

Themes of researchers' views:

The following themes emerged from comments when researchers were asked how their institution aligns with, and incentivizes, Open Research practices, Responsible Use of Research Metrics and Responsible Research Assessment:

Uneven Adoption: Open research practices vary widely—some groups follow them rigorously, others not at all. Institutional policies are often vague or inconsistently enforced.

Cultural and Structural Challenges: Traditional metrics still dominate. While open research is discussed in strategy documents, practical support and incentives are lacking.

Limited Incentives and Support: Few institutions offer funding or recognition for open access publication. Researchers often bear costs themselves, especially for unfunded work.

External Compliance Over Internal Drive: Funder mandates are currently a key driver of open practices, not institutional encouragement or policy.

Mixed Attitudes: Some researchers are skeptical or resistant, citing concerns about fairness, cost, and the value of open access publishing.

Selected comments:

"I believe that we are on a way to prioritising responsible research assessment practices, while there is still a culture shift needed, many initiatives are on the way and many researchers are now aware that metrics do not tell the full story."

"Not very well aligned, in my view. Open access publication costs are quite high, but no financial support is available for it, so if research is unfunded (which most of mine is), then it is very difficult to publish open access."

"This should be a personal choice, I complete disagree with forcing people to do this under the cloak of 'incentivizstion'. Open access practises are driving a race to the bottom. This ideology has created a huge vanity publishing system. Stop meddling!"

4b) Perceived alignment between institutional incentivization and Open Research practices:

"To your knowledge, does your institution currently have incentives, rewards or recognition practices to encourage Open Research practices in relation to …"

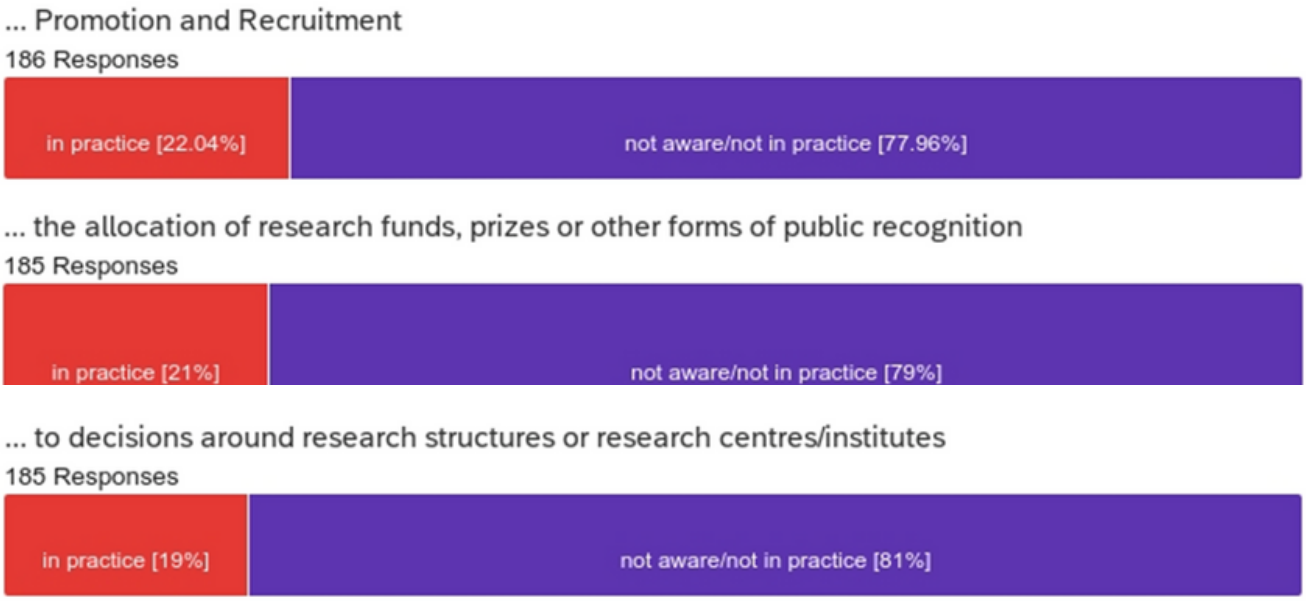

Fig 6: Perceived alignment between institutional incentivization and Open Research practices

On average, just over 20% or researchers agreed that their institutions currently have incentives, rewards or recognition practices to encourage Open Research practices. These are observed strongest in relation to Promotion and Recruitment (22.04%), followed by practices related to the allocation of research funds prizes or other forms of public recognition (21%) and in relation to decisions around research structures, research centres and institutes (19%).

As the highest, 32% of researchers in the Arts and Humanities observed Open Research incentivization practices reflected in the internal allocation of research funds (and 29% in relation to decisions around research structures or research centres / institutes, prizes or other form of public recognition).

Only 15% of researchers in Medical and Life Sciences observed these practices in relation to internal allocation of research funds.

Early Career Researchers were the group that observed these practices in relation to internal allocation of research funds the most (30%), while only 17% of mid-career researchers observed these.

It is important to note that the responses to this question reflected **researchers' observations and awareness** of incentivization practices in relation to Open Research.

5. Alignment with researchers' own priorities (rated on a scale from 0-10):

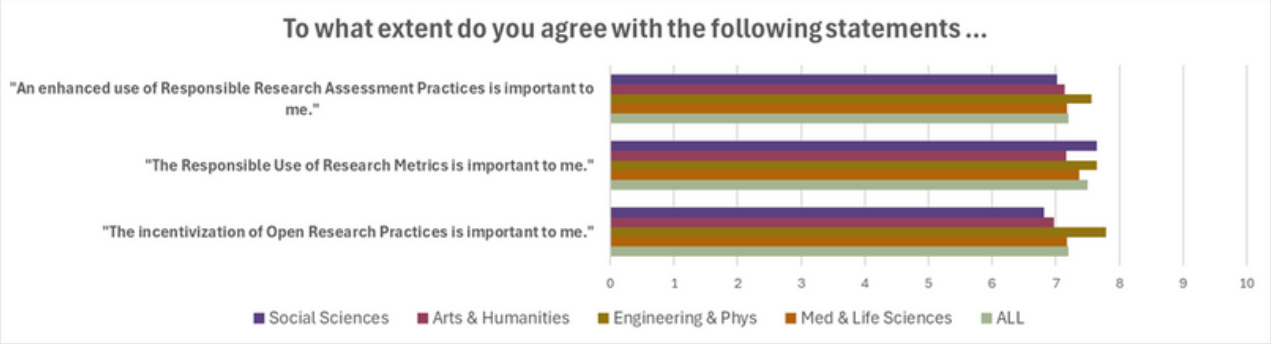

Fig 7: Researchers' level of priority of Open Research practices, Responsible Use of Research Metrics and Responsible Reseach Assessment practices

Researchers across all disciplines and career stages agreed that the incentivization of Open Research practices, the Responsible Use of Research Metrics and an enhanced use of Responsible Research Assessment practices are important to them (with overall agreement ranging from mean values of 7.2 to 7.5 on a level from 0 - 10), with strongest agreement from researchers in Engineering and Physical Sciences (between 7.6 and 7.8).

Agreement with the importance of Open Research practices was rated 7.2 – highest by Professors (7.8) and by researchers in Engineering and Physical Sciences (7.8) - and 7.5 for the importance of Responsible Use of Research Metrics and 7.2 for an enhanced use of Responsible Research Assessment practices. The differences between disciplines and career stages overall are very small.

Fig 8: Researchers' appetite for stronger / enhanced Open Research practices, Responsible Use of Research Metrics and Responsible Reseach Assessment practices

Researchers across all disciplines and career stages would like to see stronger incentivization of Open Research practices (7.5), and an enhanced Use of Responsible Research Metrics (7.4) and Research Assessment practices (7.3). Again, there were small differences between researchers of different disciplines:

this sentiment was strongest among researchers in Engineering and Physical Sciences (between 7.7 and 7.9) and lowest among researchers in Arts and Humanities (between 7.0 and 7.2)

6. Researchers' comments on current research incentivization, Open Research and Responsible Assessment practices:

There was no notable difference in sentiment or view from researchers in different disciplines; these are the **common themes** derived from researchers' comments across disciplines and career stages:

Support for transparency and the promotion of diverse outputs: Open research practices are appreciated for their transparency and accessibility, and there is encouragement for diverse and creative research outputs. However, there are **practical difficulties:** the time required for learning skills, ethics reviews, and data protection assessments is not adequately recognized, leading to frustration among researchers.

Researchers recognize the potential benefits of Open Research practices, such as increased citations, efficiency, cost savings, and showcasing good practices.

Early stages and lack of incentives: Open research practices are still in early stages with no specific incentives for open research within institutions, making it difficult to prioritize.

There is **increasing awareness that traditional metrics do not fully capture research quality, leading to a movement towards responsible research assessment practices.** Responsible research assessment should ideally be reflected by a fair and ethical allocation of funds and promotions.

A main concern is the **high cost** combined with a **lack of financial support for Open Access publication**.

There are also **ideological concerns**: Some view open research practices as ideologically driven and problematic, particularly regarding funding and the impact on traditional publishing systems.

Disciplinary differences and lack of formal policies and support: Open research practices often cater more to STEM disciplines, creating challenges for arts and humanities researchers. Institutions often lack formal policies and active encouragement for responsible research practices, leaving researchers to rely on their own initiatives.

Early Career Researchers

Comments from Early Career Researcher reflected similar concerns but also highlighted how precarity of employment can affect the uptake of Open Research practices:

Newly graduated individuals have **lower awareness** of institutional communication and practices, and they are looking for fair and ethical allocation of funds and promotions.

The time required for learning necessary skills and engaging in Open Research practices is **not adequately allocated or recognized**, especially for Early Career Researchers.

Concerns about job security take priority over considerations on open research and assessment practices.

7. Conclusions and Next Steps

The survey findings indicate that there is a generally high awareness of Open research practices among the Irish research base, particularly with respect to Open Access and FAIR data principles. There is less awareness of responsible research assessment and the responsible use of research metrics. Current research incentivisation practices vary widely across the Irish research landscape and are not perceived as being well aligned with the above principles. **There is, very importantly, appetite for additional incentivisation and alignment of these practices.** The levels of awareness and appetite for additional incentivisation is particularly high among researchers in STEM disciplines, most notably in Engineering and Physical Sciences. (This may be due to features such as a focus on reproducibility of research results, existing funder mandates regarding Open Access publications and FAIR data management, and frequent involvement in consortia which require openness and collaboration).

Next Steps

Note that, in addition to this self-assessment survey for researchers, ABOARD work package #3 also comprised a (similar) self assessment survey for funding organizations, and the project team will prepare and publish a similar report on these findings in due course. The results of the self assessment exercises formed the basis for a series of collective intelligence workshops with different stakeholder groups (work package #4), which took place between March and May 2025. The insights from both work packages will be used to form Declarative Statements, recommendations and a position paper in relation to the incentivisation of Open Research practices, the responsible use of research metrics and responsible research assessment practices. These will be debated at a capstone event which is expected to be held in early 2026 where policy recommendations and the final position paper will be presented.

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