



University of Essex

# OUR APPROACH TO SUPPORTING STAFF WITH HEALTH CONDITIONS OR IMPAIRMENTS

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PEOPLE AND CULTURE



# OUR APPROACH TO SUPPORTING STAFF WITH HEALTH CONDITIONS OR IMPAIRMENTS

## AIM

This document sets out how the University supports prospective, new and existing staff with health conditions or impairments, both physical and mental. It is a resource for prospective, new and existing staff with health conditions or impairments, for those with management responsibilities for staff with health conditions or impairments and for colleagues of staff with health conditions or impairments.

Our Approach to Supporting Staff with Health Conditions or Impairments is one of a suite of documents that sets out how we aim to create an inclusive environment in which all staff feel safe and supported. Other related documents include our [Athena SWAN Bronze Institution Action Plan](#), which focuses on our commitment to gender equality, our [Supporting Trans and Non-Binary Staff](#) document, our [Zero Tolerance Approach to Harassment and Bullying](#), our [Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy](#) and our strategic approach to supporting all staff; 'How we Work at Essex'.

## POLICY STATEMENT ON EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

The University of Essex celebrates diversity, challenges inequality and is committed to nurturing an inclusive and diverse community that is open to all who have the potential to benefit from membership of it, and which ensures equality of opportunity for all its members.

We expect all members of our campus communities online and offline, employees, workers, contractors, students and visitors to be treated, and to treat others, with dignity and respect. We do not tolerate discrimination against any individual or groups of people because of their age, gender identity, marriage and civil partnership status, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, because they have a disability, or because they are pregnant, breastfeeding or have recently given birth.

To support our value-commitment to inclusivity, we extend protection from discrimination beyond our legal obligations to cover other forms of difference such as socio-economic background, political beliefs and affiliations, family circumstances, appearance, personal interests.



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## EQUALITIES LEGISLATION

Under the Equality Act 2010, it is unlawful to discriminate against or treat someone unfairly because they have a disability<sup>1</sup>. Examples of discrimination include refusing a disabled person goods or services that are available to others, not making 'reasonable adjustments' during the recruitment process e.g. not offering a range of ways for potential candidates to access information and apply for roles, or excluding a disabled person from a development activity.

Also see: [Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy 2019-25](#)

## INTRODUCTION

The University is committed to establishing an inclusive environment in which all staff with health conditions or impairments are valued and respected. We are a [Disability Confident Employer](#) and have signed the [Mindful Employer Charter](#) for employers who are positive about mental health.

As a Disability Confident Employer, we are committed to hiring more people with a disability and providing the right support and development throughout employment to help us transform our culture, customer relations and performance.

The Disability Confident Scheme aims to:

- challenge attitudes towards disability
- increase understanding of disability
- remove barriers for people with a disability and those with long-term health conditions in employment
- ensure that people with a disability have the opportunities to fulfil their potential and realise their aspirations

We recognise however that laws, policies and processes alone do not create inclusive environments and this is why we take a holistic approach, which places as much emphasis on how people behave as it does on policy and process.

<sup>1</sup> You are disabled under the Equality Act 2010 if you have a physical or mental impairment that has a 'substantial' and 'long-term' negative effect on your ability to do normal daily activities. 'Substantial' is more than minor or trivial e.g. it takes much longer than it usually would to complete a daily task like getting dressed. 'Long-term' means 12 months or more.

This document sets out our approach to supporting staff with health conditions or impairments in the context of our broader commitment to celebrating the diversity of our students and staff, nurturing communities of belonging in which all are accepted without exception, and promoting inclusion, well-being, resilience and empowerment to enable everyone to reach their full potential.

People and Culture developed this document in collaboration with members of the Essex Access Forum, staff with health conditions or impairments themselves and staff who have caring responsibilities for someone with a health condition or impairment.



## PRINCIPLES

The way in which the University supports staff with health conditions or impairments is based on five key principles:

**1. Creating inclusive environments:** we will create environments that normalise health conditions or impairments and reduce the need for staff with a health condition or impairment to ask for specific adjustments

**2. Going beyond legislative requirements:** where workplace adjustments are required, we will consider the needs of all staff with health conditions or impairments regardless of whether they come under the Equality Act 2010 definition of disability or have a diagnosis

**3. Respecting confidentiality:** An individual's health condition or impairment, and the implications if it impacts on the way in which they engage with work, will be shared on a need-to-know basis and in line with the person's wishes

**4. Knowledge building:** we will build knowledge amongst our community of how to realise the potential of people with a health condition or impairment and avoid making assumptions through training and awareness-raising activities

**5. Offering maximum flexibility:** we will be as flexible as possible in facilitating continued engagement with work for staff with health conditions or impairments, including those that are progressive and/or can fluctuate



## SECTION 1: SUPPORT FOR INDIVIDUALS

We want all staff with health conditions or impairments to feel welcome and confident that the University understands what it means to have a health condition or impairment and that our people and processes recognise that every individual's experience is unique.

### PROSPECTIVE STAFF

We strive to ensure all prospective staff have the opportunity to demonstrate their skills, expertise, potential, values and behaviours throughout the recruitment process and that no negative assumptions are made about a candidate's suitability for a role because they have a health condition or impairment (perceived or actual).

All staff are required to complete Unconscious Bias training and our Resourcing Guidance, which all staff must adhere to, sets out the principles for recruitment and selection at the University of Essex: inclusivity, values-based, rigour, fairness and consistency. Additionally, all staff involved in recruitment, from shortlisting through to interview panels, are required to complete Recruitment and Selection training.

#### Preparing to apply for a job

We conduct all our recruitment online and we aim to provide you with all the information you need so that you can engage in the recruitment process independently, however if you need advice or help in making an application, or need information in a different format, you can contact our Resourcing Team ([resourcing@essex.ac.uk](mailto:resourcing@essex.ac.uk), 01206 876559).

We work in partnership with AccessAble who provide detailed online access guides to many of our campus buildings and facilities. If it would be helpful to familiarise yourself with our campuses before applying to work here you can find relevant information on the [AccessAble website](#).

#### Disclosure

As part of the application process, we ask people to provide information about themselves in order to collect data that will help us to understand the impact of our recruitment processes on different groups of people. This includes asking whether you consider yourself to have a disability.

The amount of information you provide us with is entirely up to you; please only disclose information with which you are comfortable, but the more you provide, the more useful it will be for us. The information you do provide will be stored safely and responsibly and only used anonymously to help improve our recruitment processes.

#### Disability Confident

If you consider yourself to have a disability, disclose this when you apply for a job, and select to be considered under the Disability Confident scheme, we will shortlist you if you meet all the essential criteria<sup>2</sup> for the role.

You may choose to disclose a disability but select not to be considered under the Disability Confident scheme. In this case, there is no guarantee you will be shortlisted even if you meet all the essential criteria for the role.

<sup>2</sup> We consider essential criteria to be only those that are essential from day one and we take care to ensure that only those that are essential to the effective performance of the job are listed as essential.

#### The interview

If you are invited for interview, we will outline what the interview process will look like, and will ask if you require any reasonable adjustments or special arrangements. Please let us know how we can support you during the interview, and we will aim to put these arrangements in place, so that you have the opportunity to demonstrate your potential, skills, expertise, knowledge, behaviour and values. This could include having extra time for interview tasks, or having any relevant information provided in an accessible format.

#### Facilities

We aspire to offer all interview candidates a quiet space before the interview, so that you have a chance to collect your thoughts and prepare for the upcoming tasks. If you would like more information on quiet spaces, you can contact our Resourcing team ([resourcing@essex.ac.uk](mailto:resourcing@essex.ac.uk), 01206 876559).

You can find out about our campus buildings and facilities using the [AccessAble website](#).



## NEW STAFF

### Disclosure

You are under no obligation to disclose a health condition or impairment at any point during the recruitment process or at any point after being offered and accepting a contract of employment. However, doing so enables us to put in place reasonable adjustments and signpost you to relevant support services and facilities at the University.

All new staff are asked to complete a health questionnaire, which asks if you have any condition for which you need support and/or reasonable adjustments. You are also encouraged to let your line manager know if you have a health condition or impairment and disclose it on the university's self-service system for staff, [HR Organiser](#). Information you disclose about a health condition or impairment will be shared on a need-to-know basis only.

### Reasonable adjustments

You might require reasonable adjustments in order to work in your role. These might be adjustments to the physical features of premises and/or the arrangements for your employment. It is important for you to talk to your line manager openly and honestly and explain your views about what you need.

Your line manager will seek advice on your behalf from, or refer you to, [Occupational Health](#) for assessment in order to establish what reasonable adjustments will best support you in your role. Your line manager will talk to you about what information you are happy they share, in confidence, with Occupational Health and will not share information without your permission.

Examples of reasonable adjustments might include the following:

- Having a flexible working pattern, for example a later starting time to avoid traffic or busy public transport
- Training or mentoring
- Alterations to premises
- Information provided in accessible formats
- Modifying or acquiring equipment e.g. you may need a specialist Display Screen Equipment (DSE) assessment which can be requested through Workplace Health and Wellbeing [ohquery@essex.ac.uk](mailto:ohquery@essex.ac.uk)

Depending on the adjustments required and the costs, you might need to contact [Access to Work](#), who can help towards the costs of making reasonable adjustments.

If you are a member of a Trade Union, you can also speak to your Trade Union representative who may be able to offer further support and guidance.



## EXISTING STAFF

### Disclosure

We understand that health is not linear, and that people's health can fluctuate, whether they have a diagnosed health condition or impairment or not. You may also be diagnosed with a health condition or impairment during your employment. You are under no obligation to disclose your health condition or impairment or current health status, however if you choose to disclose this information, we can then provide the best support for you.

If you would like support, you can talk to your manager about your health condition or impairment, and they can refer you to [Occupational Health](#).

### Initial conversations

It might be daunting to talk about a recent diagnosis or a change to your health, but there are a variety of people you can approach. This includes your line manager, Occupational Health, or your trade union.

Whomever you talk to, you can expect their full support.

### Reasonable adjustments

If you experience any changes in your health during your employment, you might require reasonable adjustments in order to work in your role. These might be to the physical features of premises and/or the arrangements for your employment. It is important for you to talk to your line manager openly and honestly, and explain your views about what you need.

Your line manager will seek advice on your behalf from, or refer you to, Occupational Health for assessment in order to establish what reasonable adjustments will best support you in your role. Your line manager will talk to you about what information you are happy they share, in confidence, with Occupational Health and will not share information without your permission.

Also see: [Flexible working policy](#)

Examples of reasonable adjustments might include the following:

- Having a flexible working pattern, for example a later starting time to avoid traffic or busy public transport
- Training or mentoring
- Alterations to premises
- Information provided in accessible formats
- Modifying or acquiring equipment e.g. you may need a specialist Display Screen Equipment (DSE) assessment which can be requested through Workplace Wellbeing [ohquery@essex.ac.uk](mailto:ohquery@essex.ac.uk)

Depending on the adjustments required and the costs, you might need to contact [Access to Work](#), who can help towards the costs of making reasonable adjustments.

If you are a member of a Trade Union, you can also speak to your Trade Union representative who may be able to offer further support and guidance.

### Disability-related absence

The University expects managers to support people to manage their own time and create a healthy work life balance in order to support a wellbeing culture. The University also recognises that staff with a disability may need more time off work, because of their disability, than their non-disabled colleagues and wants to be as flexible as possible in order to accommodate each individual's needs.

If you have a period of sickness absence that is related to having a disability, you are encouraged to make your line manager aware of this.



## SECTION 2: SUPPORT AND GUIDANCE FOR MANAGERS

### Your responsibilities

As a manager, you will play a vital role in supporting a member of staff with a health condition or impairment. You are not expected to be a specialist or expert, but there are legal requirements you must adhere to as a manager, and you are expected to support the member of staff, communicating openly and often with them, and demonstrating a flexible, positive and open-minded problem-solving approach to making adjustments.

You are responsible for:

- Actively attracting and recruiting people with health conditions or impairments to help fill opportunities
  - Ensuring that the information disclosed to you is used in accordance with the wishes of your member of staff and the law
  - Providing a fully inclusive and accessible recruitment process
  - Offering an interview to applicants with a disability who select to be considered under Disability Confident and meet the minimum criteria for the job
  - Being flexible in selection processes so that applicants have the best opportunity to demonstrate that they can do the job
  - Communicating with the member of staff about what reasonable adjustments they think they need to fulfil the role
  - Sharing information with others in accordance with the wishes of your member of staff
- Referring the member of staff to Occupational Health in line with their consent
  - Implementing any reasonable adjustments
  - Supporting your members of staff to manage their disabilities or health conditions in the workplace by referring them to Occupational Health
  - Managing any changes within a team sensitively and effectively
  - Ensuring there are no barriers to the development and progression of staff with a disability
  - Supporting others to adjust to the changes and understand the needs of their colleague
  - Challenging inappropriate language, jokes, behaviour, assumptions and culture within your team/department/section, regardless of whether this is from employees or service users
  - Ensuring that all your direct reports have completed their essential equality and diversity training, which includes content around disability, health conditions and impairments

Your staff might not always disclose their disability, health condition or impairment to you, or they might not know about it themselves. It is also important to remember that not all disabilities, health conditions or impairments are visible.

You are therefore encouraged to consider what adjustments you can make to ensure all of your team are working in an inclusive environment, and have the support they need to do their job to the best of their ability.



### Reasonable adjustments

Reasonable adjustments are changes to the work environment that allow people with a disability, health condition or impairment to work safely and productively. Most adjustments cost very little or nothing, and are often a matter of flexibility or changing an approach to a working practice.

It is always best to consider how you can make working practices inclusive for all your team, including from the point of recruitment.

A simple way to ensure that all candidates feel supported at the interview stage would be to provide a quiet room, which will be of great benefit to not only candidates with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) or a mental health condition such as anxiety, but to all candidates. This is a small adjustment that creates an inclusive environment for all prospective employees.

You should consider the following when making reasonable adjustments:

- The views of the member of staff about what they need
- How effective the adjustment would be in overcoming the disadvantage
- How practicable it is to make the adjustment
- The extent of any disruption to activities that making the adjustment would cause
- Effects on other staff
- The sustainability of the proposed adjustment
- The likely financial and other costs incurred as a result of making the adjustment
- The University's legal obligations to make reasonable adjustments for disabled staff
- Advice from Occupational Health

In cases where you might need to consider changes to working hours, speak to your People and Culture link, as it might have an impact on the staff member's employment contract. You should also seek advice from your People and Culture link if the cost of the adjustment is high; if this is the case, funding might be available through Access to Work.

### Access to work

Where adjustments are expensive, funding may be available through [Access to Work](#).

Access to Work is a scheme run by the Department for Work and Pensions, which provides funding to facilitate reasonable adjustments in the workplace.

***As a line manager, you may contact Access to Work for advice, but the member of staff must contact them directly to arrange an assessment.***

An assessor may visit the employee and manager in the workplace and carry an assessment of their needs. They will also advise of the funding that can be provided.

Access to Work can apply to any job whether full time, part time, permanent or temporary.

### Initial disclosure

You may be told that a member of your staff has a health condition or impairment directly by the individual themselves or by a third party e.g. a member of People and Culture staff. As a supportive manager, you should refrain from making any assumptions or generalisations. Your role is to contribute to ensuring the experience is positive for both the individual and the working environment.

### Formulating a plan

In order to both support the individual and minimise disruption in the workplace, you will need to work with your member of staff to identify what reasonable adjustments, if any, are required and to implement them. Most adjustments are reasonable and straightforward, and can be put into place with minimal costs and interruption; however you may wish to refer the member of staff to [Occupational Health](#) if you have specific questions, and if the member of staff provides their consent to do so.

Once adjustments have been agreed, either as a result of a conversation with your member of staff, an Access to Work assessment and/or an Occupational Health report, you will need to implement these in the workplace as soon as possible.

Any agreed adjustments should be reviewed on an ongoing basis with your member of staff, and you should encourage them to communicate openly about how effective the adjustments are at removing any disadvantage. It is good to be flexible in your approach, and to try out new adjustments if the current ones are not effective.

Make sure you keep a written record of any agreed adjustments, as this will help you and your member of staff to review them, as well as being useful to share in future if the member of staff changes their role.

### Managing progression and development

All of your team should be given equal access to any training and development opportunities.

It is important that you have consistent and regular conversations with your member of staff about their development and goals, and speak openly and honestly to them about their health condition or impairment.

If they are experiencing any barriers in their role, you might want to review the reasonable adjustments that have been made, and consider whether any other supportive measures need to be put in place to help the member of staff reach their potential.

### Managing absence effectively

As a line manager, it is important that you create an open and inclusive culture, in which your team feel supported to discuss any health or wellbeing issues. If a member of staff is absent owing to having a disability, health condition or impairment, you will need to think about how to best support them, and how these absences are managed.

Keep in regular contact with your member of staff, to ask how they are and maintain good lines of communication. If the member of staff has been absent for a long time, you can talk to them about what would make their transition back to work easier. This could include a phased return, such as shorter days or working certain days a week, with adjusted duties during that time.

Disabled staff may need more time off work, because of their disability, than their non-disabled colleagues may. When conducting a return to work interview with a disabled member of staff returning from a period of sickness absence, you are encouraged to identify whether their absence is disability-related and record this information in your notes.

Managing absence effectively helps to support the needs of your members of staff, as well as minimising any interruption to the workplace. You might notice that a member of your team is taking a lot of time off sick, and you are not aware of any disability or health condition; if this is the case, talk to them about the cause of the problems they are experiencing and whether workplace adjustments can be made to help them.

It can be difficult to have open and frank discussions about health issues, for both line managers and staff members. A supportive, friendly and informal approach can be a good way to encourage an open, two-way dialogue about any barriers your team member is facing, and how they might be overcome.

Also see: [Sickness leave policy](#)





### Additional and ongoing support

In addition to this guidance, support is available from the following sources:

- Your link Senior Employee Relations Adviser in People and Culture
- The Head of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion
- Peer support from other managers who have supported a disabled member of staff

Disabled staff, like other staff, need your continued support. You can do this by:

- Keeping an open channel of communication with your disabled member(s) of staff in order to ensure you can respond to any changes to their needs
- Supporting them to be part of University forums and networks that provide them with safe spaces to discuss their experiences (see Section 4 of this document)
- Equipping and empowering all your staff to combat disability discrimination if they see or hear it e.g. by encouraging them to attend Bystander Intervention training

Disability Confident have produced a guide for line managers, [Recruiting, managing and developing people with a disability or health condition](#), and we encourage you to familiarise yourself with this guidance.

## SECTION 3: GUIDANCE FOR COLLEAGUES

Colleagues of disabled staff have a vital role to play in ensuring their experiences at work are positive.

Knowing what good support looks like can be a challenge and you are not expected to become an instant expert on disability issues. These tips should help:

- **Keep your reactions to a minimum and listen.** Tell your colleague you will support them in every way you can but do not ask intrusive questions, read the situation and consider what it might be appropriate to ask them. Your colleague will appreciate a positive response but will not want you to make a big deal of it
- **Be their ally and address any inappropriate remarks or behaviours.** This is not just the responsibility of your disabled colleague or their manager – it's everyone's responsibility
- **Do your own research.** Take some time to read about health conditions, impairments and disability issues in order to be better informed and a better ally. [Scope](#), [BBC Disability News](#) and [Disability Rights UK](#) are all good sources of information.
- **Treat your colleague as an individual.** All disabled people have different experiences and varying degrees of comfort talking about it. Respect their right to tell you only what they want you to know and follow their lead. Your colleague is not necessarily an expert in disability issues, so avoid making this assumption.
- **Keep what your colleague tells you to yourself.** Just because your colleague has told you some specific things about their disability, health condition or impairment does not necessarily mean they are happy for you to tell others. Leave it up to your colleague to share information with others.

Also see: [Our zero tolerance approach to harassment and bullying](#)

## SECTION 4: SUPPORT AND NETWORKS

- **[Essex Access Forum \(EAF\)](#):** The EAF was founded in 2007 as a discussion forum and consultation body working to support excellence in all aspects of physical and intellectual access at Essex (student education, staff employment and visitor experience).

Members of the EAF have diverse roles, but all share a common interest in access, disability and inclusion issues. Membership is completely open with both staff and students - disabled and non-disabled - members welcome.

- **[Connect Well Essex](#)** is a website that can put you in touch with local help and support. You can find voluntary and community groups and other non-clinical services, where you can meet new people and get involved in your community.





## SECTION 5: AN OVERVIEW OF DISABILITY

The Equality Act 2010 defines a disability as a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect of a person's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities. The term disability covers a wide range of people and health conditions and impairments, both visible and hidden.

People with health conditions or impairments can work in all sorts of roles, and their health condition or impairment may or may not affect how they carry out their roles.

The legal definition of disability is broad, and not always easy to apply. It covers a range of conditions, including diabetes, asthma, back problems, anxiety, depression and obsessive-compulsive disorder. It also covers illnesses such as cancer, HIV and multiple sclerosis (MS) from the point of diagnosis. These are just some of the health conditions and impairments that come under this umbrella, and is by no means exhaustive.

There are, however, conditions which are excluded under the Equality Act 2010. These include:

- Addiction to, or dependency on, drugs or alcohol unless it is a result of the substance being medically prescribed.
- Seasonal allergic rhinitis (i.e. hay fever) except where it aggravates the effect of another impairment.
- Tendencies to set fires, steal, physically abuse other people, exhibitionism or voyeurism.
- Tattoos (which have not been removed) or non-medical body piercing.



## SECTION 6: FURTHER INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

The following are sources of information and advice on recruiting, retaining and developing disabled people.

### **Disability Confident**

The Disability Confident webpage provides guidance and resources about employing disabled people and how the Disability Confident employer scheme can help your business. There is also a range of [case studies](#) available on the webpage.

### **GOV.UK**

Gov.uk includes guidance for employers on [employing disabled people](#), information about [Access to Work](#) and the services provided by [Jobcentre Plus](#).

### **British Association for Supported Employment (BASE)**

BASE is the national trade association involved in securing employment for disabled people. Their website offers [guidance for employers](#) on disability and work. BASE members work closely with disabled jobseekers and employers to help find sustainable work for the disabled person.

### **Remploy**

Remploy is the UK's leading disability specialist, with more than 70 years of experience delivering employment and skills support. They provide a bespoke range of resources for [employers](#) including:

- Attracting, developing and retaining an inclusive workforce
- Mental health and wellbeing
- Training
- A disability guide
- Disability awareness factsheets
- Workplace adjustments advice and guidance
- Skills and apprenticeship programmes

### **Disability organisations**

The following are organisations, which represent disabled people and therefore have specialist knowledge on a range of disabilities and health conditions and offer advice and guidance for employers:

- [Scope](#) provides information on a range of disabilities and health conditions
- [Leonard Cheshire Disability](#) can help businesses make their workplaces as inclusive as possible
- [Disability Rights UK](#) provides a number of services for employers

The following are organisations, which can provide support and information on particular disabilities and health conditions:

- Arthritis – [Versus Arthritis](#)
- Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) – [AADD-UK](#)
- Autism - [Autism Alliance UK](#), [Autism Plus](#) and [The National Autistic Society](#).
- Back-related pain – [BackCare](#)
- Cancer – [Working with cancer](#) and [Macmillan cancer support](#)
- Diabetes – [Diabetes UK](#)
- Dyslexia - [Dyslexia Action](#) and [British Dyslexia Association](#)
- Dyspraxia – [Dyspraxia Foundation](#)
- Epilepsy - [Epilepsy Action](#)
- Hearing impairment - [Action on Hearing Loss](#), [British Deaf Association](#) & [UK Council on Deafness](#)
- Heart disease – [British Heart Foundation](#)
- Learning disabilities - [British Institute of Learning Disabilities](#), [Mencap](#)
- Mental health - [Mind](#), [Rethink Mental Illness](#), [SANE](#) and [Time to Change](#)
- Motor Neurone Disease - [Motor Neurone Disease Association](#)
- Multiple Sclerosis - [Multiple Sclerosis Society](#)
- Muscular Dystrophy - [Muscular Dystrophy UK](#)
- Speech impairment - [The British Stammering Association](#)
- Spinal injuries – [Spinal Injuries Association](#)
- Strokes - [Stroke Association](#)
- Visual impairment - [RNIB](#)

**POLICY CREATOR: PEOPLE AND CULTURE**  
University of Essex  
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