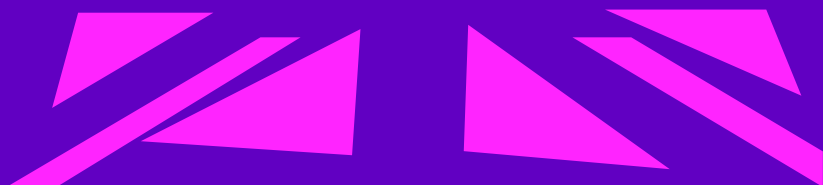


INVEST IN WOMEN



T A S K F O R C E

MANIFESTO

Driving Lasting Change
2026

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The UK has a strong and globally respected investment ecosystem, with deep pools of capital, a mature venture market and a steady pipeline of high-growth businesses. Progress has been made across entrepreneurship and investment, driven by both government and industry. But capital still does not reach the full breadth of entrepreneurial talent.

Women are founding and leading innovative, high-growth businesses across the UK, yet remain significantly underinvested. They are also underrepresented in senior investment and capital allocation roles, meaning too few women are involved in the decisions that shape where capital flows.

The Invest in Women Taskforce was established to tackle this imbalance. Since launch, IWT has helped mobilise more than £635m of capital commitments, supported the creation of the Women Backing Women Fund of Funds, and brought together the public and private sector to drive practical change.

Yet the greatest opportunity still lies ahead. To fully unlock the economic potential of female entrepreneurship, bold and coordinated action is needed across government, public institutions, investors and the wider private sector. This Manifesto sets out five pillars for action, highlighting the reforms, partnerships and commitments that can accelerate progress and help build a more productive, innovative and inclusive economy for all.

Five Pillars for Action

DRIVING LASTING CHANGE

To unlock the UK's full entrepreneurial and investment potential, action is needed across the ecosystem. The Invest in Women Taskforce has identified five pillars for action where government, institutional investors and broader industry can work together to improve how capital is allocated, strengthen participation and drive long-term economic growth.

1 Design policy with gender balance in mind from the start

Government and industry both play a critical role in shaping how capital flows through the investment ecosystem. As the UK looks to unlock greater levels of investment into venture capital, there is a significant opportunity to ensure that women entrepreneurs and investors can better access future capital allocations.

- ▶ Government should strengthen consideration of gender balance in the design and delivery of investment and entrepreneurship policy. This should include assessing how major capital mobilisation initiatives, such as the Mansion House reforms, the UK Scale-Up Fund and future pension investment initiatives, can support improved outcomes for women entrepreneurs and investors.
- ▶ As pension fund investment into venture capital and private markets increases through initiatives such as the Mansion House reforms, the UK Scale-Up Fund and wider LGPS consolidation, funds, pools, administering authorities and investment managers should consider how capital allocation strategies, manager selection processes and investment vehicles can support women-led businesses and fund managers across the UK.

2 Improve investment outcomes through better representation

Investment outcomes are shaped by who makes decisions. Investment processes and decision-making structures can reinforce familiar networks and patterns, narrowing the range of founders and businesses that receive backing and scale-up support. Increasing representation across investment decision-making roles is therefore critical to improving both access to capital and long-term market performance.

- ▶ Government via the British Business Bank should commit to developing future talent pipelines into investment committees and capital allocation roles, with an aim of reaching at least 30% participation of women in Investment Committee processes for 100% of capital deployment by [2030]
- ▶ Encourage industry to set and publicly report against ambitions for achieving 30% representation of women across senior investment teams and angel investing roles over time. Progress should be underpinned by actions to broaden entry routes, develop future investment leaders and strengthen the pipeline of women progressing into senior decision-making roles.
- ▶ Improve access to the British Business Bank's co-investment funding for women-led angel groups through the Regional Angel Programme.

3 Improve Transparency – the catalyst for change

Data and transparency drive accountability, helping identify structural imbalances and inform where further action is needed.

- ▶ Strengthen gender-based reporting across British Business Bank funds and associated public funding programmes, including greater visibility of the gender composition of investment teams, fund managers and investment portfolios.
- ▶ Expand participation in the Investing in Women Code across the wider ecosystem particularly for those with influence over capital allocation and high growth business formation. Particularly targeting LPs (including Pension funds) as well as University Funds.
- ▶ Require gender data on founders and investors to be captured through S/EIS claims and associated tax submissions to HMRC, enabling analysis of capital allocation patterns.

4 Modernise tax incentives to 'close the gap'

Tax incentives remain one of the most effective tools available to influence investment behaviour. While EIS has played a significant role in supporting early-stage business growth, it requires modernisation to reflect the needs of today's landscape.

- ▶ Remove the seven-year EIS eligibility limit to reflect longer growth trajectories and career breaks by women founders.
- ▶ Introduce a carry-forward mechanism for unused S/EIS allowances, encouraging more sustained and flexible investment over time.
- ▶ Deliver a coordinated national S/EIS awareness campaign, led jointly by government and industry to broaden participation and increase uptake among new and underrepresented investors

5 Expand education, awareness & role models to make entrepreneurship a visible, viable pathway for women

Greater exposure to entrepreneurship, visible role models, mentoring networks, and clear accessible opportunities can inspire women to see starting a business as achievable.

- ▶ Develop a national awareness campaign that showcases a diversity of women entrepreneurial role models alongside the tools and initiatives that support investment and business growth.
- ▶ Recognise & reward entrepreneurship within academic career progression with universities and research institutions treating commercialisation and venture creation as a formally recognised pathway.
- ▶ Introduce entrepreneurship education, mentoring and exposure to high-growth business pathways across schools, universities and early careers, building on the Government's curriculum review and wider efforts to improve financial literacy and readiness for the future economy.

We call on government, institutional investors and industry leaders to join us in unlocking this opportunity for founders, fund managers and the wider UK economy.

THE CASE FOR CHANGE

Detailed policy proposals,
evidence base and global precedents

1 Design policy with gender balance in mind from the start

The UK's venture capital ecosystem is a critical engine for innovation and long-term economic growth. However, UK institutional investors - particularly pension funds - remain under-allocated to private capital and venture investment compared with international peers such as the United States and Canada. This constrains the flow of long-term capital into high-growth businesses and limits the UK's ability to scale innovation at pace.

At the same time, without deliberate consideration of how capital is allocated, investment is likely to continue flowing disproportionately away from women-led and mixed founding teams. As the UK seeks to unlock greater pension fund investment into venture capital and private markets through initiatives such as the Mansion House reforms, there is a significant opportunity to ensure women entrepreneurs and investors are better represented within future capital allocation decisions from the outset.

Government and industry therefore both have an important role to play in shaping a more representative investment ecosystem. Policymakers should strengthen consideration of gender balance within the design of investment and entrepreneurship policy, ensuring policies actively assess how outcomes for women entrepreneurs and investors can be improved over time. Existing policy assessment processes already consider potential impacts across different groups. However, greater emphasis could be placed on ensuring investment and entrepreneurship policies actively support inclusive growth and improved outcomes for women over time.

The UK pension market, in particular, has the potential to play an increasingly important role in improving access to capital for women-led businesses and fund managers as private market allocations expand. This could include:

- ▶ As DC funds increase their VC investments, they should consider how to support the advancement of women-led business by working with their investment managers on meaningful targets and strategies.
- ▶ As the LGPS landscape evolves and consolidates, funds, pools and administering authorities should work with Combined Authorities and other stakeholders to ensure vehicles and routes exist to enable women founders throughout the country have access to the capital to grow.
- ▶ As Long-Term Asset Funds (LTAFs) continue to develop, institutional investors should consider how allocations into venture capital and high-growth businesses can support broader participation across the investment ecosystem, including women-led fund managers and founding teams. This could include defined allocations into women-led funds or investment strategies aligned to IWT objectives.

MOMENTUM IN ACTION

Women backing Women Fund of Funds

The Women Backing Women Fund of Funds is one of the most significant interventions delivered through the Invest in Women Taskforce, creating a pioneering, dedicated route for institutional capital to back women-led and mixed investment teams.

Managed by Bootstrap4F, the Fund of Funds is designed to invest in high-performing fund managers who can help more capital reach women-led and mixed founding teams across the UK. By focusing on who allocates capital, as well as who receives it, the fund is helping to shift long-standing patterns in the venture ecosystem.

In March 2026, the fund reached a **£130 million first close**. In just a few months, the Fund of Funds has already received applications from over 70 funds representing an investable universe of over £6.4bn (\$8.5B) AUM showing just how deep the true pipeline is.

The Fund of Funds provides the infrastructure for institutional investors to support women fund managers, back more diverse investment teams and help more high-potential businesses access the capital they need to grow.



Find out more about the **Women backing Women Fund of Funds** [here](#)

2 Improve investment outcomes through better representation

Investment outcomes are shaped by who makes decisions. Women currently hold only around 22%¹ of senior investment roles in UK venture capital, while just 14% of angel investors are women². Research shows that women back women³, and where investment decision-making is shaped by a narrow range of perspectives and networks, funding often flows towards more familiar founders and business models, narrowing the range of businesses that receive backing and scale-up support.

Improving representation across investment decision-making roles is therefore critical to broadening access to capital, strengthening investment outcomes and improving long-term market performance. We propose greater industry ambition towards achieving at least 30% representation across both senior investment roles and angel investing ecosystems over time.

Women in investment decision-making

- ▶ Venture capital firms and asset managers overseeing public funding – including funding from organisations like the British Business Bank - should establish public targets and plans for improving representation within investment teams and investment committee processes over time, with transparency supported through the Investing in Women Code. This builds on broader market progress seen through initiatives such as the FTSE Women Leaders Review, which successfully increased women's representation on UK Boards.

Women angel investors

- ▶ Women angel investment has grown significantly in recent years, with a 60% increase in the number of women angels since 2022 and more than £4 billion of deals involving women angels⁴. However, women still represent only around 14% of UK angel investors. Increasing both the number and influence of women angel investors is therefore critical to improving access to capital for women-led and mixed founding teams.

MOMENTUM IN ACTION

British Business Bank Investor Pathways Capital

The UK is already taking steps to strengthen the diversity and depth of its investment ecosystem. The British Business Bank's £400 million Investor Pathways Capital initiative supports new and emerging venture capital fund managers from a broader range of backgrounds.

Critically, it is targeting at least 50% of investment to women fund managers, helping to address longstanding disparities in who receives and deploys capital. By widening access to fund management, it is expanding the pipeline of investment talent and shaping more inclusive investment outcomes.

In June 2026, the British Business Bank announced up to **£90 million** for its first 10 microfunds, backing emerging fund managers who will invest in the next generation of UK businesses. The first cohort is a powerful sign of progress, with women making up **57% of General Partners** and **43% are from Ethnic Minority backgrounds** with all selected funds led by first-time institutional managers.



Find out more about the **Investor Pathways Capital initiative** [here](#)

Angel investment into women-led and mixed teams

- ▶ Angel investment into women-founded businesses is still not reaching its full potential, and investor composition materially affects outcomes. IWT-commissioned Beauhurst analysis found that where women angels participated in investment rounds, 49% of investment flowed to women-founded teams, compared with 19% where there was no women angel participation⁵. To improve investment flowing into women-led and mixed teams at greater scale, the ecosystem must continue improving diversity across angel networks and investment communities more broadly.
- ▶ Improve access to British Business Bank co-investment funding for women led angel syndicates and networks through initiatives such as the Regional Angel Programme. The British Business Bank has already established a Regional Angel Programme co-investment platform, managed by Haatch, which supports smaller and earlier-stage syndicates. While progression to the Regional Angel Programme is not guaranteed, it provides an important pathway for emerging and diverse angel syndicates to access co-investment opportunities and build towards future participation.

Greater support for angel syndicates

- ▶ A key lever for progress on Women angel investors is the growing visibility and impact of women-focussed angel syndicates. These collaborative communities of investors demystify the investment process for women, provide vital support, education, mentorship and the ability to pool resources. The Diverse Angel Syndicate programme, a government-funded British Business Bank programme delivered in partnership with UKBAA, plays an important role in supporting the formation and development of new, diverse-led angel groups. While programmes such as the British Business Banks' Regional Angel Programme have deployed significant capital, access to these funds remains uneven, with only a small proportion flowing to women-led angel groups. To unlock the full potential of angel investment, further action is needed to both scale successful initiatives such as the Diverse Angel Syndicate programme, and improve access to co-investment capital, including consideration of dedicated allocations to women focused angel groups.

MOMENTUM IN ACTION

British Business Bank Diverse Angel Syndicate Programme

Delivered with UKBAA as a strategic partner.

Encouraging progress is being made to broaden participation in angel investing and increase capital flowing to underrepresented founders, including women-led businesses. The British Business Bank's Diverse Angel Syndicate initiative is implementing a major new programme, up to 15 syndicates, with a primary focus on improving gender and ethnic diversity within angel investing. Participating syndicates will undertake an intense programme of training and structural support to build effective syndication models and significantly increase their community of angel investors. Results from the previous 3-year pilot, which ran up to 31st March 2026, showed promising results. The initiative:

Recruited **272** angel investors, including 261 women, resulting in 165 active angels and many progressing beyond a first investment

Supported 65 investment deals with a total value of

£54.3 million

of which 68% supported women-led founding teams and 32% supported mixed-gender founding teams

Increased participation from first-time investors, with 232 novice investors joining participating syndicates



These models demonstrate that targeted interventions can successfully bring more underrepresented investors into the market and unlock capital for a broader range of founders.



Find out more about the **Diverse Angel Syndicate initiative** [here](#)

Global precedents exist for diversity investment targets

At European Level, the **European Investment Fund** (EIF) launched the Gender Smart Equity Investment Programme InvestEU in 2024⁶, showing a bold yet practical approach to addressing gender imbalances to increase participation in equity funds. This programme embeds gender criteria into fund selection, linking access to EIF capital to women's representation in leadership and investment decision-making roles, rather than at final recipient level. Under the programme, a financial intermediary is considered to adhere to the gender criteria if it satisfies at least one of the following: i) women partners make up at least one-third of its management team, ii) women represent at least 40% of its senior investment team, or iii) women represent at least 40% of its investment committee.

In support of implementation, EIF also has made internal structural changes, including identifying diversity champions within the investment team and introducing yearly mandatory diversity training for all EIF team members. Further actions include the Empowering Equity Programme and Academy, connecting women STEM students with mentoring support and direct career pathways into VC and PE. EIF has also introduced an Enhanced Due Diligence framework, ensuring that a gender lens is applied to the assessment of all funds under the EIF InvestEU Fund of Fund allocations.

In terms of impact, the EIF has invested €13bn in funds with women in leadership positions since 2022. Evaluation of the EIF gender smart initiative under InvestEU between 2024 and 2025, has shown that 61% of EIF equity transactions met the gender smart criteria⁷. Notable women-led VCs backed by EIF include SISTA fund, France; Revaia France; Auxxo Capital, Germany; FundF. Austria; Borski Fund, Netherlands

Looking further afield, the **2x Global Challenge⁸ : Financing for Women** was launched at the G7 Summit in Canada in 2021. It sets the 2x Criteria as a global industry standard with specific targets for financing women and gender lens investment, aimed at investment institutions, development finance institutions, banks, fund managers and institutions, including the EIB. Specific criteria are set out, covering key areas and targets for women entrepreneurship and ownership, employment, supply chain; leadership (30% women in leadership; investment (portfolio 30% of investment to businesses that meet at least one of the 2xcriteria) as well as portfolio, with self-reporting against the relevant criteria and targets.

As the UK considers how best to improve access to finance, these examples provide a clear precedent for action. They demonstrate how targeted interventions can be designed in a pragmatic and commercially credible way, helping to influence investment behaviour, increase diversity within the funding ecosystem and deliver lasting impact at scale.

3 Improve Transparency – the catalyst for change

Effective markets rely on transparency to function efficiently, yet the current investment ecosystem lacks consistent and sufficiently granular data on how capital is allocated by gender. This limits the ability to assess outcomes, identify structural gaps and design targeted interventions that improve performance over time. Data and transparency are therefore critical to improving accountability across the investment ecosystem and ensuring progress can be tracked effectively over the long term.

Investing in Women Code

The Investing in Women Code is an industry-wide voluntary commitment for organisations providing finance to businesses. Data provided by Code signatories already offers one of the most comprehensive aggregated views of gendered access to finance in the UK, helping benchmark progress and identify where further action is needed.

There remains a significant opportunity to continue expanding participation across the existing investment ecosystem, including greater growth from LPs, GPs, angel groups and other investment institutions. Increasing the breadth of reporting over time would strengthen the robustness of data, improve market transparency and increase accountability across the ecosystem.

The Code could also play a wider role across the innovation and investment landscape, from pension funds allocating significant pools of institutional capital, through to universities and spinout ecosystems helping develop and commercialise the UK's next generation of high-growth businesses. Expanding participation across the full capital lifecycle would help build a more complete picture of how funding flows through the UK ecosystem over time.

This should be supported by stronger gender-based reporting across British Business Bank funds and associated public funding programmes, including greater visibility of:

- ▶ The gender composition of investment teams
- ▶ Fund manager leadership
- ▶ Investment committee representation
- ▶ Portfolio allocation outcomes

More consistent transparency across public funding programmes would help build a clearer long-term picture of how capital flows through the UK investment ecosystem and where structural imbalances persist.

Improving transparency within S/EIS

The Enterprise Investment Scheme (EIS) and Seed Enterprise Investment Scheme (SEIS) have played an important role in encouraging investment into early-stage UK businesses. However, the current claims and tax submission processes provide limited visibility into how S/EIS-supported investment is distributed across different founder and investor groups.

Introducing a basic level of gender-disaggregated data collection within S/EIS claims and associated HMRC tax submissions could significantly improve understanding of investment allocation patterns across the UK ecosystem. This could include requiring investors, as part of HMRC filing processes, to disclose:

- ▶ Whether recipient businesses are women-led, mixed or all-male founded teams
- ▶ The gender of investors participating within funding rounds

Improving the transparency of S/EIS through these existing HMRC processes would create a stronger evidence base for understanding how tax incentives influence capital allocation and where further action may be needed to improve access to investment over time.

MOMENTUM IN ACTION

Level 20

Level 20 has been a significant force for progress in improving gender balance across private equity and venture capital. Founded in 2015 to increase the representation of senior women, particularly in investment roles, **its network spans thousands of members across Europe and provides a platform for industry-wide collaboration and change.**

Through its work, Level 20 has demonstrated that improving representation requires sustained action to strengthen the pipeline of talent at every stage of the career journey. Its activities are centred around four core pillars: building professional networks and connections across the industry; supporting career development through mentoring and learning opportunities; producing research and insights that improve understanding of industry trends and barriers; and engaging firms and industry leaders to drive change.

This combination of data, convening power and practical support has helped create greater visibility of female talent, support career progression, and encourage firms to invest in the next generation of women entering investment decision-making roles. The continued success of initiatives such as Level 20 demonstrates the importance of long-term, industry-led commitment to building a stronger and more diverse investment talent pipeline.



Find out more about the **Level 20** here

4 Using Tax Policy to Shift Investment Behaviour

Tax incentives form a critical part of the UK investment ecosystem, shaping how capital is allocated towards innovation, entrepreneurship and high-growth businesses. Schemes such as the Enterprise Investment Scheme (EIS) and Seed Enterprise Investment Scheme (SEIS) have played an important role in encouraging early-stage investment and supporting risk-taking across the UK economy.

However, there remains an opportunity to ensure these incentives better reflect the realities faced by a broader range of founders and business models, including women-led businesses.

Reviewing EIS eligibility timelines

The current seven-year EIS eligibility limit may not fully reflect the longer growth trajectories often associated with sectors where women founders are more highly represented, including health, education and consumer-focused businesses. Women founders may also experience additional barriers in accessing growth capital, alongside career breaks and non-linear career pathways that can affect the speed at which businesses scale within the current eligibility window.

Government should therefore consider whether existing EIS eligibility timelines remain appropriate for the modern innovation economy and whether greater flexibility could help ensure businesses with strong long-term growth potential are not excluded from accessing capital prematurely.

Introducing a carry forward mechanism

Introducing a carry forward mechanism for unused EIS/SEIS allowances would support more consistent long-term investment behaviour across the ecosystem.

Investment opportunities do not arise evenly year-to-year, and greater flexibility could allow investors to deploy capital more strategically over time, including into underrepresented founders and emerging sectors. A carry forward mechanism could also encourage more sustained participation in early-stage investment activity, particularly amongst newer and less frequent investors.

Improving awareness and accessibility of EIS

While EIS remains a highly attractive investment incentive, awareness and accessibility across different investor and founder groups remains uneven. There is an opportunity for government, industry and ecosystem partners to strengthen understanding of the scheme and widen participation in early-stage investing.

This could include:

- ▶ Improved awareness campaigns and educational resources
- ▶ Clearer guidance for first-time and underrepresented investors
- ▶ Greater visibility of investment opportunities beyond traditional networks and regions

Strengthening engagement with EIS has the potential to encourage broader participation in early-stage investment and increase capital flowing towards a wider range of founders and businesses across the UK ecosystem.

5 Expand education, awareness & role models to make entrepreneurship a visible, viable pathway for women

Entrepreneurship is still not seen as a clear or realistic option for many women. While girls aged 11–16 report high confidence in starting a business, this confidence declines significantly by ages 17–24 — the point at which key education, career and financial decisions are made.

Research across entrepreneurship and university spinout ecosystems consistently shows that early exposure to enterprise, visible role models and clearer pathways into commercialisation influences whether ideas progress into scalable businesses, particularly within high-growth sectors. However, women remain less likely to progress through these pathways, meaning potential high-growth businesses are often lost early in the journey.

National awareness campaigns and visible role models

Greater visibility of women founders, investors and entrepreneurial role models can help shift perceptions around who entrepreneurship is “for” and improve awareness of routes into business creation and investment.

Government, industry and ecosystem partners should work together to develop coordinated national awareness campaigns that:

- ▶ Showcase a diversity of women entrepreneurial role models across sectors and regions
- ▶ Increase visibility of successful women-led businesses and investment stories
- ▶ Improve awareness of tools, funding pathways and initiatives that support business growth and investment

Improving visibility and awareness can play an important role in encouraging more women to see entrepreneurship as an accessible and achievable pathway.

Entrepreneurship education, mentoring and exposure

Introducing entrepreneurship education, mentoring and exposure to high-growth business pathways across schools, universities and early careers would help strengthen long-term founder and investor pipelines. Effective mentorship should extend beyond confidence-building to include access to networks, commercial expertise, investors and long-term ecosystem support.

This should include greater visibility of:

- ▶ Entrepreneurship and business creation pathways
- ▶ High-growth sectors, including STEM and spinout ecosystems
- ▶ Venture creation and commercialisation opportunities
- ▶ Mentoring networks and investor engagement opportunities

These efforts can build on the Government's curriculum review and wider work to improve financial literacy and readiness for the future economy.

Recognising and rewarding entrepreneurship within academic progression⁹

In 2023, fewer than 8% of UK spinouts had all-women founding teams, while more than 75% were all-male teams, highlighting how women remain significantly underrepresented across high-growth commercialisation pathways.

Universities and research institutions should treat entrepreneurship, commercialisation and venture creation as formally recognised career pathways alongside traditional academic measures such as publications and citations.

This includes:

- ▶ Embedding commercialisation and venture creation within promotion and progression criteria
- ▶ Creating clearer and better signposted routes into entrepreneurship for academics and researchers
- ▶ Reducing perceived reputational or career barriers associated with exploring venture creation

Normalising entrepreneurship as a legitimate and valued outcome of research could materially expand the pipeline of women-led high-growth businesses entering the UK investment ecosystem over time.

Conclusions

The recommendations set out in this manifesto are about ensuring that the UK's investment system is able to identify, support and back the widest possible pool of entrepreneurial talent. The evidence is clear that progress is possible. Across the UK and internationally, governments, investors and institutions are already demonstrating how targeted, proportionate interventions can improve representation, strengthen decision-making, increase transparency and unlock greater participation in entrepreneurship and investment.

The foundations have been laid through the work of the Invest in Women Taskforce and the Investing in Women Code. However, more needs to be done if we are to fully unlock the UK's entrepreneurial and investment potential. By embedding gender considerations into policy design, improving representation within investment decision-making, increasing transparency, modernising incentives and expanding entrepreneurial pathways, the UK has an opportunity to build a more inclusive and higher-performing investment ecosystem.

This is a crucial economic opportunity the UK cannot afford to miss, or for the talent, ambition and innovation to be overlooked. The recommendations in this manifesto provide a practical roadmap for government, industry and investors to work together to unlock that potential and deliver lasting change for future generations of entrepreneurs.

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- ⁸ www.2xchallenge.org
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