CAREER CO-PILOT · ANNUAL INTELLIGENCE REPORT

Career Navigator 2026

NHS & Health Tech Careers Outlook

25	1,551	1,273	5,000+
DOMAINS ANALYSED	ROLES CURATED	SKILLS TRACKED	NEWS HEADLINES

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ABOUT THIS REPORT

Purpose

Career Navigator 2026 is the flagship annual careers outlook for professionals navigating the intersection of healthcare, public-sector services and digital health. It is designed for healthcare professionals transitioning to non-clinical roles, NHS professionals in Bands 3-8C, international health workers and students seeking UK opportunities in the health tech space, and newcomers to digital health, data, AI and transformation. The report is evidence-led, practitioner-focused, career-actionable and written in clear language for wide circulation.

Scope

We intentionally focused on non-clinical, health-tech-adjacent roles. The curated job dataset excludes frontline clinical posts and concentrates on digital transformation and EPR programmes, data and analytics, business analysis, project and programme management, clinical safety (non-clinical roles), information governance and cybersecurity, and innovation and service improvement. Readers should therefore interpret findings as guidance for digital and non-clinical career pathways rather than a census of all NHS hiring.

ABOUT CAREER CO-PILOT

Career Navigator 2026 is produced by Career Co-Pilot, the career development and workforce intelligence arm of MRI Medic Consulting Limited. Career Co-Pilot focuses on non-clinical, digital, and health-tech career pathways for healthcare and public-sector professionals. Its work includes reviewing job data, tracking health-tech and public-sector innovation signals, and translating these into practical, evidence-led career guidance.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Career Navigator 2026

33% of NHS non-clinical roles are in Project & Programme Management

0.8% of roles are AI-oriented — vs 17% of health-tech headlines

51% of jobs in PPM + Digital Transformation — barely covered by media

CVI ≥14 for 5 top-viability domains including Data & Analytics

Major Growth Domains

Three domains dominate hiring: Project & Programme Management (~33% of roles), Digital Transformation & EPR (~19%), and Data & Analytics (~14%). Demand stems from national programmes to roll out electronic patient records, federated data platforms, large-scale change initiatives and, recently, AI pilots across the country. The highest volume of senior posts (Band 7+) arises in these domains, making them key entry points for professionals targeting Band 8 progression.

Under-Recognised yet Critical

Information Governance & Security and Communications & Engagement advertised modest numbers of roles but offer good progression to Band 8+ and high transferability of skills. In contrast, IT Infrastructure & Support, Estates & Facilities, Finance & Procurement, HR and some software development roles account for few postings and appear to have lower career viability, indicating that these pathways may remain niche or transactional unless linked to larger transformation programmes.

News Signals vs Hiring Reality

> *"Health-tech news headlines are dominated by AI & machine learning (~17% of headlines). However, AI-oriented jobs comprise only 0.8% of roles. Meanwhile project/programme management and digital transformation posts together make up about 51% of jobs but receive little press attention."*

Career Viability Index (CVI)

We introduce a qualitative index to compare domains across demand, progression potential, skills transferability, entry accessibility, stability and automation risk. Project & Programme Management, Digital Transformation & EPR,

Data & Analytics, Information Governance & Security and Research & Innovation score highest (CVI ≥14). Domains such as Finance & Procurement, HR & Organisational Development, Estates & Facilities and Software & AI receive low CVI scores.

Implications for 2026

Professionals seeking senior digital roles should prioritise project/programme management, digital transformation and data/analytics skill sets, while developing fluency in information governance and cybersecurity frameworks. The workforce must embrace lifelong learning and cross-functional collaboration to harness AI and digital tools.

METHODOLOGY

Data Sources

1. NHS Jobs dataset (~1,600 roles)

Curated from NHS and partner organisations between May and December 2025. This dataset includes domain, job title, employer, and location. The dataset was assembled by searching for health-tech and digital-adjacent roles using keywords such as clinical safety, project manager, programme manager, digital transformation, business intelligence, data analysis, business analysis, information governance, risk management, and cybersecurity. Purely clinical roles were excluded.

2. Health-tech news dataset (~5,000 headlines)

Headlines were aggregated from UK digital health media, public-sector innovation outlets and global health-tech platforms between August and December 2025.

Analytical Approach

Data preparation: Domains were normalised into 15 major categories. Job titles were grouped into role families. Bands were clustered into Band 3-4, Band 5-6, Band 7 and Band 8+.

Domain-level intelligence: For each category: hiring volume, band distribution, average band, maximum band (career ceiling) and month-by-month volatility were calculated.

Skills inference: Skill clusters were inferred using job titles, domain expectations, band seniority and themes from news headlines.

News clustering: Headlines were classified into themes. Theme prominence was compared with job-market demand to identify over- and under-hyped areas.

Career Viability Index: Each domain was scored qualitatively across six dimensions: hiring demand, progression potential, skill transferability, entry accessibility, stability and automation/funding risk.

Limitations

This report covers a six-month window and may miss seasonal or long-term hiring trends. Domain normalisation and keyword searches are heuristic and may misclassify niche roles. Band parsing distinguishes only the first numeric band (e.g., 8a, 8b, 8c are all recorded as 8). Use this report as directional intelligence, not absolute prediction.

THE NHS & HEALTH-TECH HIRING LANDSCAPE

Overall Hiring Patterns

Across 6 months, 1,551 roles met our inclusion criteria. Project & Programme Management dominated hiring (516 roles, 33%), followed by Digital Transformation & EPR (287 roles, 19%) and Data & Analytics (224 roles, 14%). Research & Innovation, Clinical & Diagnostics and Information Governance & Security each accounted for roughly 3-7% of jobs.

Employers & Locations

Hiring was concentrated among a few organisations. The NHS Business Services Authority (39 postings), UK Health Security Agency (35) and Digital Health & Care Wales (32) were the top employers. London hosted the highest number of roles (171), followed by Manchester (63), Cardiff (44), Cambridge (33) and Bristol (30).

Volatility & Stability

Project & Programme Management, Data & Analytics and Digital Transformation & EPR showed moderate volatility (CV ~0.48-0.50), indicating steady demand with fluctuations linked to project and programme cycles. Communications & Engagement, IT Infrastructure & Support, Education & Training and Finance & Procurement exhibited relatively low volatility (CV <0.35), suggesting stable recruitment.

DOMAIN-BY-DOMAIN CAREER ANALYSIS

Domain Summary Table

Domain						
Project & Programme Mgmt	516	330	43	Medium	8+	Moderate
Digital Transformation & EPR	287	166	35	Medium	8+	Moderate
Data & Analytics	224	93	35	Medium	8+	Moderate
Research & Innovation	113	78	26	Medium	8+	High
Clinical & Diagnostics	77	38	24	Medium	8+	High
Information Governance	55	23	13	Medium	8+	Moderate
Communications & Engagement	31	13	6	Medium	8+	Low
Estates & Facilities	43	17	3	Medium	8+	High
Strategy & Planning	29	14	5	Medium	8+	High
Software & AI	13	7	3	High	8+	High
Finance & Procurement	11	5	1	Medium	8+	Low
HR & Organisational Dev	8	4	1	High	8+	Medium
Education & Training	7	3	2	Medium	8+	Low
IT Infrastructure & Support	9	3	1	Medium	8+	Low

Commentary

Project & Programme Management

The engine of NHS digital transformation. Highest number of roles, largest proportion of Band 7+ posts and multiple routes to Band 8+. Entry difficulty is medium — most roles require professional certification (Prince2, Agile, MSP) and proven experience.

Digital Transformation & EPR

Roles support system roll-outs, user adoption and digital change. Medium entry difficulty and clear progression to Band 8. Attractive for professionals who combine clinical understanding with project skills.

Data & Analytics

Demand spans data quality officers (Band 5-6), business intelligence analysts (Band 6-7), data engineers and data architects (Band 7-8). Strong progression potential. Transferable skills include SQL, Power BI, R/Python, data governance.

Information Governance & Security

Despite modest hiring volume, progression opportunities are strong. As AI and digital tools proliferate, expertise in GDPR, ISO 27001, DPIAs and risk management will remain in high demand.

Estates & Facilities, Finance, HR, Education & Training

These domains advertised few roles and may be vulnerable to automation and consolidation. They may offer specialised opportunities within major projects, particularly in procurement.

BANDS, PROGRESSION & CAREER CEILINGS

Band 7 Roles and Pathways to Band 8+

Across all recorded domains, Project & Programme Management produced the highest number of Band 7 postings (~330), followed by Digital Transformation & EPR (166), Data & Analytics (93) and Research & Innovation (78). Clinical & Diagnostics offered 38 Band 7 roles and 24 Band 8 roles. Information Governance & Security advertised 23 Band 7 and 13 Band 8 roles, reinforcing its potential as a leadership pathway.

Glass Ceilings and Pipelines

Administration, support and estates roles rarely progressed beyond Band 7, reflecting a glass ceiling without additional upskilling. Clinical & diagnostics professionals who wish to move into Band 8 leadership must often pivot into project management, data, digital transformation or governance roles to access senior posts.

Skills That Matter for 2026

- **Programme & Change Leadership:** MSP, Agile and Prince2 methodologies, stakeholder management, benefits realisation, change management, budgeting and procurement, and risk management.
- **Data Literacy & Analytics:** SQL, Power BI/Tableau, data modelling, data storytelling, and data quality.
- **Digital Transformation & Clinical Informatics:** EPR/EHR workflows, digital clinical safety, configuration and optimisation, user-centred design, clinical engagement and training.
- **Information Governance & Cybersecurity:** GDPR and UK data protection law, ISO 27001, DPIAs, cyber-security frameworks, risk registers and incident response.
- **Research & Innovation:** Clinical trials management, grant writing, ethics and governance, product development, industry partnerships, intellectual property.
- **Communications & Engagement:** Plain-language writing, digital communications, public speaking, stakeholder engagement, workshop facilitation and change communications.

SENIOR NHS LEADERSHIP PATHWAYS

Signals from 102 Digital Health Leaders

Our digital-health leaders dataset contains 102 anonymised senior figures drawn from NHS and allied public-sector organisations. The aim of this analysis is to spot patterns, not prescribe the path to promotion.

Role Category	Approx. Share	Key Signals
Director	~33%	Programme directors, digital portfolio directors. Require broad oversight of transformation and large-scale delivery.
Officer (incl. senior clinical informatics)	~26%	Bridge clinical teams and digital programmes. Clinicians more likely found here than at Director level.
Head / Manager	~19%	Run service lines, manage analytics functions and implement programmes.
Chief officers (CIO, CDO, CCIO)	~17%	CIOs, CDOs and CCIOs. Presence of CDOs reflects the rise of digital transformation roles.

Key Findings

- Clinical background is not a prerequisite for digital leadership. Only about a third of leaders explicitly identify a clinical background, yet many hold senior digital roles.
- Non-clinical professionals dominate digital/data leadership. Digital and informatics skills provide a very viable route to senior positions.
- Digital and data qualifications are common. Roughly two-thirds of education entries reference IT, data, informatics or technology degrees/certificates.
- Gender diversity is better than expected. Gender representation is relatively balanced (~51 men, 46 women). Women are well represented among Chief Digital Officers (6 out of 10).
- No single golden path. Senior digital-health leaders come from clinical, technical and managerial backgrounds; a diversity of routes leads to senior positions.

HEALTH-TECH NEWS SIGNALS & CAREER IMPLICATIONS

Media vs Reality

News Theme	Share	Linked Domains	Observation
AI & Machine Learning	16.5%	Software & AI, Data	AI hype dominates media but yields very few advertised NHS jobs (0.8% of roles).
Health Inequalities & Patient Care	13.5%	Clinical & Diagnostics	Reflects policy commitments but seldom translates into digital-job creation.
Public Sector & Procurement	9%	PPM, Finance	Aligns with high hiring in project/programme management.
Digital Health & EPR/EHR	7.3%	Digital Transformation	Corresponds well with large volumes of EPR and digital transformation posts.
Cybersecurity & Privacy	1.1%	Info Governance	Under-represented in news relative to its importance. Demand will grow.

Artificial Intelligence and "future tech" headlines create excitement but should not distract job-seekers from robust domains such as project management, EPR optimisation and data analytics. Roles grounded in organisational change, governance and data quality offer more consistent opportunities.

GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

What UK NHS Hiring Signals May Mean Elsewhere

This section interprets UK NHS hiring trends for an international audience. Its aim is not to predict exact job numbers abroad, but to highlight the types of capabilities that large public health systems value worldwide.

Capability Signals That Travel Well Across Borders

Programme & Change Delivery

Expertise in managing large-scale health projects is universally needed. Skills in project planning, stakeholder coordination, and change management travel well internationally.

Digital Transformation & EHR/EPR Optimisation

Governments everywhere are implementing and upgrading electronic health records. The core capability is guiding end-to-end digital adoption, not just coding one application.

Data, Analytics & Informatics

The demand for data proficiency is rising everywhere. Roles focused on data governance, business intelligence, and health informatics are in demand globally.

Governance, Clinical Safety & Information Assurance

Ensuring data privacy, system security and regulatory compliance is increasingly becoming critical worldwide. The NHS signal that governance roles are "quiet growth areas" holds globally.

Country Snapshots

Nigeria

Key systems include DHIS2, donor-driven EMR projects and a national data repository. Professionals fluent in project governance, data standardisation or health informatics can find roles in government agencies, international NGOs or consulting firms.

Canada

Canada Health Infoway works with provinces on an interoperability roadmap. Skills in programme management (navigating provincial-federal collaboration), analytics and IG align well with Canadian needs.

Australia

A mature digital health strategy with My Health Record and numerous state-level digital programmes. Project/delivery skills and data analytics are in high demand.

Singapore

Sing Health's Office of Insights & Analytics and Office for Service Transformation reflect a structured approach. Singapore demands top-level technical expertise and leadership in digital health.

Gulf States (UAE, Saudi Arabia)

Aggressively expanding digital health under national visions. A premium on rapid project execution, advanced analytics and strict governance. UK-trained project directors and IG specialists are sought after.

Ireland

HSE Slaintecare plan prioritises an integrated eHealth infrastructure. Demand for project and programme managers, data analysts, and IG specialists is strong.

New Zealand

Te Whatu Ora (national entity) committed to retaining a large health IT workforce. Specialists in EHR systems, cybersecurity and analytics are in demand.

To pivot internationally, position yourself as a leader in digital health transformation rather than a narrow engineer. Highlight experience in cross-functional teams, policy or regulatory contexts, and technology-enabled change.

CAREER PERSONAS & REALISTIC PATHWAYS

Five Composite Profiles

1. Burnt-Out Clinician

Profile	A clinical professional (e.g., medical doctor, nurse, therapist, pharmacist) overwhelmed by shift work and seeking a sustainable non-clinical career.
Suitable domains	Digital Transformation & EPR, Project & Programme Management, Clinical & Diagnostics
Typical entry roles	Clinical informatics specialist (Band 6-7), digital clinical trainer, EPR implementation lead, clinical applications specialist, project support officer
Skills to prioritise	Understanding of EPR workflows, stakeholder engagement, change management, clinical safety principles, basic data literacy, Prince2 or Agile Foundation training
Common mistakes	Assuming clinical expertise alone guarantees progression, underestimating the need for formal project management credentials, ignoring information governance requirements
6-12 month outlook	Obtain a project management qualification and volunteer for digital projects within your trust. After 9-12 months, target Band 6-7 roles in EPR implementation, then progress to Band 7-8 by expanding into business change or data quality roles.

2. International Graduate

Profile	A non-UK health professional with a master's degree (e.g., health informatics, public health) seeking to enter the NHS digital workforce.
Suitable domains	Data & Analytics, Project & Programme Management, Information Governance & Security, Research & Innovation
Typical entry roles	Data analyst (Band 5-6), project support officer, information governance officer, research associate
Skills to prioritise	Proficiency in data tools (SQL, Power BI), understanding of UK data protection law, project management basics, strong communication skills, networking with professional bodies (e.g., BCS, FedIP)
Common mistakes	Focusing solely on academic credentials, underestimating the importance of NHS context and local regulations, neglecting soft skills
6-12 month outlook	Spend 3-4 months building data portfolios and completing NHS-focused MOOCs or apprenticeships. By 12 months, position yourself for Band 6-7 posts.

3. Band 5/6 Professional Targeting Band 7/8

Profile	A mid-career NHS professional (e.g., data quality officer, clinical coder, technical specialist) aiming for senior leadership within 18 months.
Suitable domains	Project & Programme Management, Digital Transformation & EPR, Data & Analytics, Information Governance & Security
Typical entry roles	Project manager or programme coordinator (Band 7), digital transformation lead, data governance manager
Skills to prioritise	Advanced project management (MSP, Agile), benefits realisation, stakeholder management across clinical and corporate teams, mentorship of junior staff
Common mistakes	Remaining in specialist silos, delaying pursuit of formal leadership training, underestimating the complexity of change management
6-12 month outlook	Complete MSP Practitioner or Agile PM certificates. Seek secondments to large transformation programmes. By month 12, apply for Band 7-8 posts.

4. Early-Career Digital/Data Entrant

Profile	A recent graduate or career-changer with basic digital skills (e.g., coding bootcamps, MSc in data science) aiming to enter the NHS digital workforce.
Suitable domains	Data & Analytics, Software & AI, Digital Transformation & EPR, Research & Innovation
Typical entry roles	Data quality officer, junior data analyst, EPR support analyst, software tester, research assistant
Skills to prioritise	Python/R and SQL, data visualisation, understanding of healthcare datasets (SNOMED CT, ICD), knowledge of clinical workflows and standards (e.g., HL7, FHIR)
Common mistakes	Applying solely for AI or research posts without building a foundation in data quality and governance, neglecting soft skills and NHS context
6-12 month outlook	Invest 3 months in hands-on data projects or hackathons with healthcare datasets. By month 12, move into Band 5-6 roles.

5. Public Sector Professional Pivoting to Health Tech

Profile	A civil servant or local-government employee with experience in policy, procurement or programme delivery, seeking to join the NHS digital agenda.
Suitable domains	Project & Programme Management, Finance & Procurement, Information Governance & Security, Strategy & Planning
Typical entry roles	Programme officer, procurement manager, commercial manager, policy advisor, risk and compliance officer
Skills to prioritise	Understanding of NHS procurement frameworks, contract management, stakeholder engagement, familiarity with digital health regulations (e.g., DSP Toolkit)
Common mistakes	Underestimating the complexity of NHS governance and clinical safety, assuming private-sector procurement practices transfer directly
6-12 month outlook	Invest time in NHS policy training and clinical safety standards. After 9-12 months, aim for Band 7-8 posts.

CAREER PLAYBOOKS & DECISION GUIDES

Career Viability Index (CVI)

Each domain is scored qualitatively across six dimensions on a scale of 1 (low) to 3 (high). Scores are summed to produce an overall CVI. Use this index to gauge the relative attractiveness of career pathways, not as a definitive ranking.

Domain	Demand	Progr.	Transfer.	Entry	Stability	Auto.	CVI	Rating
Data & Analytics	3	3	3	2	2	2	**15**	**HIGH**
Project & Programme Mgmt	3	3	3	2	2	2	**15**	**HIGH**
Digital Transformation & EPR	3	3	3	2	2	1	**14**	**HIGH**
Information Governance & Security	2	3	3	2	2	3	**14**	**HIGH**
Research & Innovation	2	3	2	2	1	3	**14**	**HIGH**
Communications & Engagement	1	3	2	2	3	2	**13**	**MEDIUM**
Clinical & Diagnostics	2	3	2	2	1	1	**11**	**MEDIUM**
Education & Training	1	3	1	2	3	1	**11**	**MEDIUM**
IT Infrastructure & Support	1	3	1	2	3	1	**11**	**MEDIUM**
Strategy & Planning	1	3	2	2	1	2	**11**	**MEDIUM**
Finance & Procurement	1	3	2	2	3	1	**10**	**LOW**
HR & Organisational Dev	1	3	2	2	2	1	**10**	**LOW**
Estates & Facilities	2	3	1	2	1	1	**9**	**LOW**
Software & AI	1	3	2	1	1	1	**9**	**LOW**

Notes: Demand reflects relative job volume; progression captures presence of Band 8+ roles; transferability assesses how well skills apply across sectors; entry accessibility is influenced by average band; stability derived from volatility; automation risk is rated high (score 1) for domains susceptible to automation and low (score 3) for roles requiring high human judgement.

90-Day Upskilling Plans

Project & Programme Management

Complete a recognised project-management certification (Prince2 Foundation/Practitioner or Agile PM). Shadow a programme manager in your trust. Learn benefits realisation and risk registers. Read the NHS Digital Service Manual and relevant procurement frameworks. Build a basic understanding of EPR systems and data governance.

Data & Analytics

Learn SQL and database fundamentals. Practise building dashboards in Power BI or Tableau using publicly available datasets (NHS waiting times, mortality rates). Familiarise yourself with NHS data standards (SNOMED CT, ICD-10). Study information governance requirements and the Data Security and Protection Toolkit.

Digital Transformation & EPR

Explore EPR vendor platforms (e.g., Epic, Cerner) through webinars and user groups. Develop change-management skills using Prosci or APMG Change Management frameworks. Attend NHS digital-innovation communities or regional digital academies. Understand digital clinical safety standards (DCB0129/DCB0160).

Information Governance & Security

Complete an Information Governance Toolkit module. Study UK GDPR and data-protection law. Learn fundamentals of cyber-security (NIST CSF, ISO 27001). Practise drafting data-sharing agreements and DPIAs. Join professional networks such as the IAPP or NHS IG Forum.

Research & Innovation

Enhance statistical literacy (R, Python, SPSS). Understand clinical trial governance (ICH GCP). Explore innovation methodologies such as design thinking and lean start-up. Identify funding calls relevant to your interests (NIHR, Innovate UK).

If-Then Decision Guides

- **If you have strong clinical expertise but no digital experience,** then prioritise EPR training and project-management certification, and target Band 6 digital-nurse specialist posts.
- **If you are a data scientist or software engineer without healthcare context,** then learn NHS standards (SNOMED CT, FHIR), patient-safety regulations and IG frameworks before applying to NHS roles.
- **If you are mid-career and aiming for Band 8+,** then identify a domain with high CVI (PPM, data/analytics, digital transformation, IG, research & innovation) and invest in both technical and leadership training.
- **If you are risk-averse,** then avoid small domains with low CVI (Estates & Facilities, HR, Finance, Software & AI) unless you have a strong personal fit or cross-sector mobility.

KEY TAKEAWAYS FOR 2026

Five Things to Act On

1

Focus on fundamentals

Despite the buzz around AI and other emerging technologies, career success in 2026 will be built on strong foundations: project delivery, data literacy, governance and change management. These domains drive the majority of hiring and offer clear progression to Band 8.

2

Build digital literacy at all levels

Evidence shows that the workforce must develop digital skills, including communication and collaboration, digital safety and problem solving. Health organisations should invest in training and create supportive environments.

3

Beware hype cycles

News coverage may overstate the immediate demand for AI and understate the importance of unglamorous roles. Job-seekers should ground their decisions in actual hiring patterns, not headlines.

4

Target high-viability domains

Project & Programme Management, Digital Transformation & EPR, Data & Analytics, Information Governance & Security and Research & Innovation offer the best combination of demand, progression and transferability.

5

Embrace lifelong learning

Digital transformation is ongoing. Professionals must commit to continuous upskilling and adapt as technologies, policies and healthcare needs evolve.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Dr Ronald Kelechi Ikpe is a physician and health-informatics practitioner who has led digital transformation initiatives across NHS trusts, curated thousands of digital-health job postings and news headlines and advises clinicians and public-sector professionals on career transitions into non-clinical roles. Dr Ikpe hosts the "Behind the Scenes in Health" podcast, sharing stories of professionals who have moved from clinical practice into digital and leadership positions. His work focuses on empowering healthcare workers to navigate the evolving digital landscape, build resilient careers and improve patient care through technology.

Learning & Next Steps

For professionals who wish to act on the insights in this report, Career Co-Pilot Academy provides structured learning pathways, workshops, and guided programmes focused on non-clinical and digital health careers. The Academy sits within Career Co-Pilot and supports skills development aligned to real-world role requirements highlighted in this report.

Visit careercopilot.academy to explore member tools, intelligence cards, and career development resources.

SOURCES & FURTHER READING

1. WHO/BeWell Policy Brief on Digital Skills for Health Professionals
2. NHS England Long Term Workforce Plan
3. Digital Skills Development: Evidence Brief
4. Health Education England AI & Digital Healthcare Technologies Capability Framework
5. NHS Workforce Statistics, June 2025

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