

NHS Lanarkshire Dress Code and Appearance at Work Policy

(Including links to the NHS Scotland National Uniform Policy, Dress Code and Laundering Policy and other Local and National Policies)

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Endorsing Body:	Area Partnership Forum
Governance or Assurance Committee	Healthcare Governance Committee
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i. CONSULTATION AND DISTRIBUTION RECORD	
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Distribution:	NHSL Intranet: FirstPort and NHS Lanarkshire Public Facing Website
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ii. CHANGE RECORD			
Date	Author	Change	Version
24.2.2015	G. Reilly	Title – from Uniform, Workwear and General Dress Code Policy	3.0
		The policy focuses on dress code and appearance for all staff, with additional requirements for those working in a clinical capacity, whether in a National uniform or not.	
30.01.25	P. McCrossan	The policy has been updated to include additional guidance to ensure compliance with observations regarding hygiene, nails, false eyelashes, and hair. To enhance safety, infection prevention, and control, a statement has been included stating that lanyards should not be worn in clinical areas. "Bare Below the Elbows" Policy: Clear rules regarding the "Bare below the elbows" approach have been articulated to promote infection control practices.	3.1

1. INTRODUCTION

This policy sets out the uniform and dress code principles for NHS Lanarkshire (NHSL). It has been introduced to protect the safety of patients/service users and employees by ensuring that employees' uniforms and appearance comply with infection prevention and control requirements, health and safety and NHS Scotland National Uniform Policy, Dress Code and Laundering Policy, DL (2018) 4.

All employees must present a clean, smart, professional image. They are expected to portray this image to patients/service users and members of the public.

NHSL recognises the diversity of cultures and religious beliefs and takes a sensitive approach to ensuring appropriate consultation with staff. Staff who adapt their uniforms to reflect their beliefs must remain within Health and Safety Legislation and Infection Prevention and Control requirements.

Employees are advised that any proposed deviation from this policy because of cultural, ethnic, religious, or physical considerations must be agreed upon in consultation with the employee's line manager and, where considered appropriate, with a senior lead from Infection Prevention and Control, Human Resources, and/or Health and Safety.

This policy requires all staff to wear uniforms and clothing that are compatible with maintaining the safety of patients and staff and appropriate to the area and sphere of work undertaken. Adherence to the policy will minimise the risk of cross-infection and enhance patients, carers/relatives, visitors, and fellow staff members' trust and confidence.

Agency and contract workers will receive uniforms from their employers but must be aware of this policy and comply with the Board's health, safety, and infection prevention and control requirements.

Staff required to wear a clinical uniform should also refer to the Scottish Government's National uniform policy, outlined within [DL \(2018\) 4, National Uniform Policy, Dress Code and Laundering Policy](#).

2. AIM, PURPOSE AND RESPONSIBILITIES

This policy has been developed to ensure that:

- The policy applies to all staff whether or not they are required to wear a uniform.
- Priority is given to infection prevention and control, security and health and safety considerations, including safeguarding measures related to moving and handling, violence, and aggression.
- Staff are aware of the uniform and dress standards that apply to them.
- Staff dress for work in a way that does not offend patients, members of the public or colleagues.

Dress Code and Appearance at work (including National Uniform Policy)

The uniform and dress code requirements for staff groups are clarified.

The policy includes:

- A link to the requirements of the national uniform policy for those staff required to wear a uniform.
- NHS Lanarkshire's changing arrangements for staff required to wear a uniform.
- Guidance on personal protective equipment
- Guidance on washing uniforms and workwear.

The following policy objectives are crucial to our collective efforts to maintain a safe and professional clinical environment:

- Contribute towards Board Infection Prevention and Control measures by minimising the risk of cross-infection from clothing/accessories.
- Promote the Board's Health and Safety measures by minimising the risk of injury from inappropriate clothing and accessories and ensuring the use of appropriate protective clothing.
- Ensure that all persons working within NHSL maintain a smart, professional image, underscoring their crucial role within the Board.
- The purpose is to promote the wearer's mobility, comfort, and safety and to allow for easy identification for security and communication purposes.

The Board considers that employees' dress and appearance are significant in portraying a professional image to all service users, whether patients, visitors, clients, or colleagues. It is also important that staff should feel at ease in their uniforms, subject to the overriding requirements for patient safety and public confidence.

The impact of Hospital-Care-Associated Infections (HCAI) on patients in terms of morbidity and mortality cannot be overstated, and the health, well-being and safety of patients are a priority for the Board. Compliance with the Dress Code, uniforms, and hygiene requirements in the clinical setting is integral to managing and preventing HCAI.

All staff are responsible for minimising the spread of infection by complying with the requirements of this policy and associated procedures. This policy must be read and applied in conjunction with the [NHS National Services Scotland National Infection Prevention and Control Manual and NHSL Hand Hygiene Policy](#).

A breach of this policy may be considered a disciplinary offence under NHS Scotland's Conduct policy.

3. SCOPE

3.1 Who is the Policy Intended to Benefit or Affect?

The policy applies to all NHS Lanarkshire employees, locum, permanent, bank staff members, and fixed-term contract employees (including apprentices) who hold a contract of employment or engagement with the Board, as well as secondees (including students), volunteers, work experience, trainees, and pet therapy handlers.

It also applies to external contractors, agency workers, and others assigned to NHS Lanarkshire.

In October 2023, the Scottish Government released the Interim National Menopause and Menstrual Health Policy for NHS Scotland, published as DL (2023) 28. The policy states that lightweight alternatives or additional uniforms may be made available with approval from your line manager. The full guidance on reasonable adjustments is available via this [link](#)

3.2 Equality and Diversity

Who is the Policy Intended to Benefit or Affect?

- The policy applies to all NHS Lanarkshire employees, locum, permanent, bank staff members, and fixed-term contract employees (including apprentices) who hold a contract of employment or engagement with the Board, as well as secondees (including students), volunteers, work experience, trainees, and pet therapy handlers.
- It also applies to external contractors, agency workers, and others assigned to NHS Lanarkshire.
- The policy applies to the individuals identified irrespective of age, sex, disability, ethnicity/race, marital or civil partnership status, sexual orientation, religion or belief, pregnancy or maternity, or gender reassignment.
- NHS Lanarkshire recognises the diversity of its workforce in terms of culture, religion, faith, health inequalities and physical impairments. Specialist uniform items required to meet religious or medical / health needs can be requested through the National Uniform contract. These may include reasonable adjustment(s) or adaptation to standard uniform items, and the line manager should contact the uniform supplier or procurement to discuss individual staff member's request(s).
- The staff member's line manager must agree and authorise a specialist item when required. The line manager is responsible for ensuring any garment purchased adheres to the Scottish Government issued DL (2018) 4, National Uniform Policy, Dress Code and Laundering Policy.

- Where a specialist item is required for medical or health reasons, Occupational Health advice can be sought. Where available, such items may be procured or manufactured on a bespoke basis.
- NHSL line managers are asked to treat such requests sympathetically and balance them against service needs, requirements and considerations. When considering requests, priority will be given to health and safety, infection control and quality of care considerations.
- NHSL respects and upholds the right of individuals to the lawful expression of these differences and will take, as far as reasonably practicable, a sensitive approach when this affects dress and uniform requirements.
- Wearing items from religious/cultural norms (e.g., Sari, Turban, Hijab, Kippah, and Clerical collar) is part of this welcome diversity.
- However, there may be circumstances where there are safeguarding and infection control reasons why wearing specific articles and/or clothing is not permissible; the health and safety of staff and service users and infection prevention and control procedures will take precedence when considering reasonable adjustments for religious wear observance. The line manager can conduct risk assessments where appropriate.
- Where personal, cultural or religious requirements make it difficult for a staff member to comply with NHS Scotland and/or the NHS Lanarkshire uniform policy guidance, they should seek advice from their line and/or departmental manager and the relevant professional lead to obtain further advice.
- Line Managers cannot agree on any adjustments that may compromise patient or staff safety, especially regarding Healthcare-Associated Infections. Further assistance is available from the Board's Equality and Diversity Manager, Head of Health and Safety, nominated Infection Prevention and Control lead(s), and/or designated Human Resource Service lead(s). NHSL leads will endeavour to treat such requests sympathetically and balance them against the needs of each service.
- Headscarves must be plain, shoulder-length, adornment-free, tucked in, and not drape freely when providing direct clinical care. Likewise, ties, if worn, should also be tucked into a shirt just below the neckline.
- Staff who wear face coverings as part of their religious or cultural observance, such as a niqab, a full-face veil, or a burka, are expected to remove them while on duty. This ensures that staff members are identifiable, which enhances engagement and communication with patients, visitors, and work colleagues.

4. PRINCIPAL CONTENT

4.01 Personal Hygiene

- A high standard of personal hygiene is mandatory. All employees should maintain their hygiene and be well-presented.

4.02 Identification Badges

- For security and identity purposes, all employees, including those in the community, must wear their Board identification badges in all areas of the organisation.
- Clinical staff with direct patient contact must attach their ID badges to their pockets with a belt clip and wear name badges for easily visible identification.
- Staff not involved in direct patient care activities may continue wearing a lanyard for their ID badge

4.03 Body Art/Tattoos

- New body art or tattoos must be covered with a waterproof dressing until healed.
- Body art or tattoos must not be visible if they have the potential to offend; they should not contain explicit, discriminatory, or political images or slogans. All staff are expected to comply with this requirement.
- A departmental manager and the relevant professional lead can judge what is acceptable and, if necessary, seek advice from the relevant HR Business partner.

4.04 Footwear

- Footwear must be clean and in good repair, suitable for the work task, and of a style that is not hazardous to either patient or staff member. For staff working in clinical areas, shoes should be soft-soled, closed-toe, and made of a wipe-clean material.
- Clogs are only permitted for use by staff in theatres and interventional departments, such as invasive cardiology, endoscopy, and interventional radiology.
- Clog-like shoes with holes in the front, such as Crocs or similar, must not be worn in clinical practice in hospital or community settings, including outpatient clinics and patients' homes.

- Flip-flops, thong-style/open-toe sandals or shoes, canvas-style pumps, high heels of a heel height greater than 3 inches, and beach shoes are not considered suitable work footwear.
- If alternative footwear is required for medical purposes, the line manager must discuss and agree upon the available options. Where appropriate, a risk assessment can be completed. The individual may be asked to provide medical evidence and attend an Occupational Health Assessment.

4.05 All Clinical Staff Who Wear Uniforms

- All employees required to wear a uniform must wear the uniform provided and agreed upon by NHS Scotland. Uniforms are provided as protective clothing and should be clean and changed daily, odour- and crease-free, and presentable at the commencement of each shift. This includes any item worn for religious or cultural reasons.
- Employees should have access to a spare uniform in case of accidental contamination by blood, body fluids or any other unhealthy/toxic substance.
- If the uniform is grossly contaminated with body fluids, the uniform should be disposed of as contaminated clinical waste.

4.06 Bare Below the Elbow

“Bare below the elbow” applies to all staff present in clinical areas, including direct community visits, whether providing direct patient care or not. Any sleeve must be able to be rolled or pulled back and kept securely in place during hand-washing and direct patient care activity. **THERE ARE NO EXCEPTIONS TO THIS RULE.**

4.07 Facial Hair

- Facial hair must be well groomed, short, and neatly trimmed unless it reflects the individual’s religion. In this case, it should be secured where patient contact is involved. Beards must be covered when undertaking aseptic procedures.
- Where a staff member must be fit tested and/or use an FFP3/respirator mask for respiratory protection, they must be clean-shaven. An FFP3 mask/respirator must seal tightly to the face, or air will enter from the sides.
- For staff who cannot be clean-shaven due to religious or cultural beliefs, their line manager, supported by the appropriate Health and Safety service lead, will decide on alternative suitable respiratory protective device(s) for indicated clinical procedures.

4.08 False Eyelashes

False eyelashes or extensions are prohibited for clinical staff or staff members entering a clinical area. This also applies to clinical and catering staff who manage, prepare or serve food and drinks.

4.09 Fingernails

Fingernails should be short and clean. When looking at the hand from the palm, the nails should not be visible beyond the fingertips. Long nails or nails with sharp edges can puncture protective gloves and pierce fragile skin.

Nail polish, false fingernails such as press-on nails, glue-on or acrylic artificial nails, or nail products, such as jewellery and art, are prohibited in a clinical setting. These items have been found to harbour gram-negative bacteria, which could compromise the effectiveness of hand hygiene.

4.10 Hair

When wearing a clinical uniform or clinical setting, staff must not wear long ponytails or hair below collar length. Hair must be tied up and above the collar line, and any hair fastenings should be minimal and clean.

Headscarves worn for religious purposes are permitted in most areas. However, they are excluded in areas such as theatres, where they could present a health, safety, and cross-infection hazard.

Hair should not present a risk to staff members or patients from a health, safety, security or infection control perspective. This will be assessed case by case, particularly where the staff member cites religious or cultural beliefs. The line manager or service/clinical lead will decide in these circumstances.

Further advice and support on such decisions are available from professional leads in infection, prevention and control, health and safety, human resources and equality and diversity.

4.11 Jewellery

Staff in uniform must comply with the following guidelines: Jewellery such as earrings, bracelets, bangles, wrist watches, necklaces, wrist-worn fitness trackers, woven threads such as Kabbalahs, and rings containing stones must not be worn. Stud earrings are permitted immediately following piercing for up to 6 weeks but must be covered whilst on duty.

These items can hinder proper hand washing and pose a risk of injury during patient moving and handling procedures. Only one plain band finger ring is permitted.

Staff will be asked to remove any jewellery item that breaches these standards. The security of the items removed is the responsibility of the staff member concerned.

4.12 Watches/Wearable Devices etc.

Staff members must not wear watches or wearable devices on their forearms, such as fitness trackers, when in uniform. These devices impede proper hand washing and may cause injury to patients during patient moving and handling procedures.

4.13 Surgical Scrubs

Scrubs should only be worn by designated staff in specific areas. Staff wearing scrubs should change before travelling to and from work.

If suitable changing facilities are unavailable on-site at an acute or community site, and there are no alternatives, staff may travel to and from work in their uniform.

However, the uniform must be completely covered during travel, and the employee must travel directly to their destination without stopping.

4.14 Travelling to and from work in uniform

If suitable changing facilities are unavailable on-site at an acute or community site, and there are no alternatives, staff may travel to and from work in their uniform. However, the uniform must be completely covered during travel, and the employee must travel directly to their destination without stopping.

- When wearing a uniform at work, all policy requirements and dress code policy elements apply, not just when staff give direct patient care. This would include staff wearing a uniform to attend a meeting.
- Staff who review patients in the community and need to visit patients wearing their uniforms must cover the uniform while travelling between the patient's home and workplace.
- It is reasonable for staff to purchase fuel for their vehicle or charge their vehicle during working hours if their uniform is adequately covered. However, they should not conduct personal business while in uniform.
- Surgical scrubs are considered uniforms for this policy. All staff wearing scrubs must be bare below the elbows, display an ID badge, and have hair tied up off the collar as per section 4 above.

4.15 Changing Arrangements

Where changing facilities exist, staff must come to and leave work in their own clothes and change into their uniform for the duration of their shift. A clean uniform or set of scrubs must be worn for every shift.

Staff must not leave worn uniforms or scrubs in the workplace but must take them home immediately after wear for laundering. Staff must not travel to and from work in uniforms or scrubs where changing facilities are available.

Staff must only wear uniforms/scrubs outside the workplace when on escort duties or undertaking a community or cross-site role. In these situations, they must ensure that their uniform is completely covered by an outdoor coat when travelling to and from the workplace. At the commencement and completion of their shift, they will be required to change, as above.

4.16 Uniform Compliance

Any non-compliance with the policy will be addressed initially using a peer-to-peer approach. Initially, a gentle reminder will be given. If non-compliance persists, the matter should be escalated to the next-in-line manager and the service professional lead. Consistent non-compliance with the policy will be treated as a disciplinary matter under NHS Scotland's Conduct policy.

4.17 Clinical & Non-Clinical Non-Uniform-Wearing Staff.

Non-uniform-wearing staff must dress presentably and smartly to inspire confidence in patients and the public.

Employees who wear their personal clothes must ensure they are suitable for work purposes, are always clean and in a good state of repair and can be laundered appropriately. The following must not be worn:

- Clothing that is revealing may cause embarrassment or offence, such as skirts or dresses above mid-thigh length, low-cut or backless tops, those that expose the midriff or underwear, and transparent fabrics.
- Clothes portraying large advertisements; sports clothing, etc. (unless participating in sport-related therapeutic activities with patients)
- Clothing that could be interpreted as intimidating or threatening (for example, combat fatigues)
- Ripped or torn clothing
- Denim clothing with rips and patches should be avoided.

Appropriate footwear should be worn for the environment. Depending on the service or corporate area, line managers can exercise discretion regarding the above points, ensuring staff are treated fairly and consistently.

Employees appearance should align with this policy's standards when working remotely, i.e. home-based contract working, blended working, use of Microsoft Teams, etc., especially when attending formal meetings.

4.18 Non-Clinical Staff Who Are Required to Wear a Uniform

Non-clinical staff required to wear a uniform must comply with the requirements outlined in section 4.17 above. Uniforms and Personal Protective Equipment must always be worn while at work and will comply with local departmental instructions.

4.19 Travelling to and from Work

Where changing facilities are in place, wearing a uniform while travelling off-site from NHS Lanarkshire premises is prohibited. However, uniform travel is permitted if staff are undertaking specific duties, i.e., community staff, such as Community Midwives, District Nurses, and other community Allied Health Professionals.

Staff must only wear their uniform outside the workplace if they must travel to and from work, where changing facilities are not provided, or if they perform escort duties. In these situations, an outdoor coat must completely cover the uniform.

This is for the safety and security of all staff. The public perception is the risk of cross-infection is heightened when staff travel to and from work in uniform. Therefore, staff must refrain from wearing their uniforms in public.

Requests to wear uniforms outside the organisation for formal occasions or to promote the organisation must be authorised in advance by the appropriate Head of Department.

It is acknowledged that community staff may be required to visit pharmacies or petrol stations when working, which is acceptable. However, staff should not routinely be seen shopping while in uniform.

4.20 Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

Certain clinical and non-clinical staff groups must wear protective clothing as part of their duties. The principles are based on the need for personal safety, patient safety, statutory regulatory requirements, the work environment, health and safety requirements, and infection control requirements.

Where staff are required to wear protective clothing with long sleeves, e.g., lab coats, overalls, etc., for safety purposes, they are exempt from bare below the elbows.

Short sleeves must be worn under the protective clothing/lab coat to properly wash hands before entering and after leaving the lab/kitchen/workplace and at appropriate points during the working day.

4.21 Disagreement

Managers are responsible for ensuring this policy is followed consistently and appropriately. It is not meant to be an exhaustive list of rules but rather to give a general indication of the required standards.

Where the staff member and line manager disagree on how to apply this policy, the matter should be referred to the next-in-line manager.

Consistent non-compliance with the policy will be treated as a disciplinary matter under NHS Scotland's Conduct policy.

4.22 Return and Disposal of Uniforms

All uniforms supplied to staff remain the property of the Board and must be returned for security reasons when the staff member leaves Board employment.

If a uniform needs to be replaced due to wear and tear, the old uniform should be returned to the consumables team on each acute site, who will arrange suitable disposal of the garment.

Highlander, the Board's shredding waste contractor, will dispose of any branded uniforms. The company will shred the material and send it for RDF (refuse-derived fuel).

Highlander can provide collection bags for £20 each if needed. However, if there is a large uniform volume to be cleared, we can request the contractor to conduct a site visit and provide a quote based on a bulk clearance instead of charging per bag.

4.23 Used Uniforms – Not Visibly Contaminated

- When staff can change out of their uniforms, they should take them home in a disposable bag. The bag must only be used once.
- If changing facilities are unavailable, staff must follow the guidance in this policy when wearing their uniform to and from work.
- According to the care label, uniforms and workwear should be laundered at the highest temperature suitable for the fabric.
- Uniforms/and workwear must be washed separately from other items of clothing

Dress Code and Appearance at work (including National Uniform Policy) using your usual washing detergent.

- Hands must be washed after the uniforms are placed in the washing machine.
- Dry uniform as normal, preferably in a tumble dryer.
- Iron with a hot steam iron.

4.24 Advice on Washing Uniforms and Workwear

Where uniforms have been worn (in conjunction with PPE as appropriate) and are not visibly contaminated with blood or other body fluids, they may be home laundered.

The process for home laundering is detailed in section 3 of the Scottish Government's National uniform policy, outlined within [DL \(2018\) 4, National Uniform Policy, Dress Code and Laundering Policy](#).

4.25 Contaminated Uniforms

The following procedure will apply when the uniform is visibly contaminated with blood or other body fluids, for example, following a PPE failure or other incident.

Home laundering is not appropriate for contaminated uniforms.

The duty manager will assess if the uniform is condemned, following local procedures for safe disposal.

Home laundering is not appropriate for contaminated uniforms.

Following the local procedure, the staff member should change out of the uniform as soon as possible. If the front of the garment has been contaminated, it may be advisable to turn the garment round so that the back is to the front before removing it over the head. This will reduce the risk of contamination to the face.

5. Roles and Responsibilities

5.1 Employees will:

- Ensure they are familiar with the policy and procedures.
- Comply with the policy
- Attend training as necessary.

5.2 Managers will:

- Ensure they communicate with staff about the policy.

- Consistently implement the policy at the local level
- Keep accurate records.
- Provide training as appropriate.

5.3 Trade Union Representatives will:

- Support the requirements of the policy.
- Undertake training as appropriate.

5.4 Human Resources Staff will:

- Provide advice and guidance where staff have repeatedly failed to comply with the policy.

5.5 Infection Control Service will

- Provide where appropriate awareness training.
- Assist in auditing compliance with the policy during hospital-acquired infections and handwashing audits.

5.6 Salus Health and Safety

- Provide where appropriate advice and assistance to managers and staff.

6. SUCCESS CRITERIA / MONITORING EFFECTIVENESS

The requirements of this policy will be subject to regular audits.

Line managers and team leaders will monitor this policy and conduct uniform audits using the InPhase portal. Audit findings and any necessary action plans for improvement may be shared with the Infection Control Committee and other governance groups.

If staff members violate the policy, they will be asked to comply. If they refuse, they will be asked to remove the non-compliant items or go home and change.

If a staff member persistently breaches the guidelines in this policy, they may face action under the NHS Scotland Conduct Policy.

7. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

The replacement costs of uniforms and scrubs represent an ongoing financial cost.

8. COMMUNICATION PLAN

- This policy will be launched using the weekly staff briefing and available on FirstPort.
- A digital PC splash screen will be developed to highlight important policy issues.
- Pop-up posters with staff-group colours will provide easy identification for the public.
- Pop-up screens will be developed with right and wrong compliance with the dress code.
- Create a pop-up poster to compare staff compliance or non-compliance with the dress code.
- This policy will also be discussed at the appropriate management team meetings, local partnership forums, and Board advisory committees.

9. EQUALITY IMPROVEMENT – MONITORING AND QUALITY

This policy will be reviewed every three years via the Joint Policy Forum. QUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT



This policy meets NHS Lanarkshire's EQIA.

(tick box)

10. SUMMARY OR FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQS)

This policy reflects the requirements of the National Uniform Policy DL (2018) National Uniform Policy, Dress Code and Laundering Policy

11. REFERENCES

In developing this policy, cognisance has been taken of the following National and Board policies:

- The NHS Scotland National Uniform Policy, Dress Code and Laundering Policy
www.publications.scot.nhs.uk/files/dl-2018-04.pdf
- NHS Scotland Workforce Policies
<https://workforce.nhs.scot/>
- National Infection Prevention and Control Manual
www.nipcm.hps.scot.nhs.uk/
- ACAS Guidance on Discrimination and the Equality Act 2010
<https://www.acas.org.uk/discrimination-and-the-law>
- NHSL Hand Hygiene Policy
www.nhslanarkshire.scot.nhs.uk/download/hand-hygiene-policy/
- Interim-National-Menopause-Menstrual-Health-Policy
<https://www.gov.scot/publications/interim-national-menopause-menstrual-health-policy-nhsscotland-equality-impact-assessment/>
- NHS Lanarkshire Equality, Diversity & Human Rights Policy
<https://www.nhslanarkshire.scot.nhs.uk/corporate-policies/human-resources-nhsl/>