towards implementation
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In 2003 the Victorian Qualifications Authority (VQA) consulted on the idea of a common way of describing and recording achievement that would work across the range of post compulsory qualifications. We explained why we thought the concept - named ‘the credit matrix’ - was worth pursuing, and how it would help, amongst other things, to ensure that learning already successfully achieved need not be repeated. The responses we received pointed to a very high level of support for the idea.

This paper summarises the outcomes of the work we have undertaken since that consultation and outlines the work we plan to do between now and 2005.

In previous papers we indicated that 2005 would be the earliest date for implementation of the credit matrix. Looking at the progress made, and the work that lies ahead, we are on track to reach this target date.

We now have a draft, detailed model for the credit matrix and an initial set of definitions and guidelines for applying it.

Feedback to date indicates that the draft model and guidelines are practicable, will support achievement of the credit matrix aims, and work to enhance the operation of the nationally agreed Australian Qualifications Framework.

We now plan to finalise the model and guidelines and work on an implementation plan. Towards the end of 2004 we will conduct a further round of formal consultation and seek your views on the model, the guidelines and the implementation plan.

We have been fortunate thus far in the amount of time and expertise that a large number of people from the education, training, industry and general community have been generous enough to give us. Members of the VQA steering and advisory groups are listed at the end of this paper, but there are many others, including those who took part in the survey on the draft descriptors, whom I would like to take the opportunity, on behalf of the VQA Board, to thank.

Stakeholder views are critical to the success of the project and we look forward to your feedback and advice in this next phase.

Dr Dennis Gunning
Director, Victorian Qualifications Authority
Introduction

**THIS PAPER**

This paper is the fourth in a series of papers* developed by the Victorian Qualifications Authority (VQA) on the credit matrix.

The first paper, *The Credit Matrix: A Consultation Paper from the VQA*, was published in June 2003. The paper outlined what the credit matrix is, how it would work, and what it would do, and sought your views on the concept. It was accompanied by a second paper, *The Credit Matrix in Brief*, which summarised the main features and aims of the credit matrix.

The third paper, *The Credit Matrix: Next Steps*, was published in December 2003. It outlined the outcomes of the consultation, and the findings of some initial design work which was undertaken during the consultation. It also outlined the work underway and planned for the period October 2003 to June 2004.

This paper reports on the outcomes of that work. It also explains how, by building on these outcomes, we plan to take the credit matrix forward into 2005 - the year we indicated in the above papers as the earliest likely date for implementation of the credit matrix.

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**FOOTNOTE**

* For more details about these publications refer to page 12.
THE VICTORIAN QUALIFICATIONS AUTHORITY

The Victorian Qualifications Authority (VQA) is responsible for all post compulsory qualifications except higher education qualifications.

The VQA has an important role to play in making sure that the Government’s goals and targets for improving participation and achievement in education and training in Victoria are met.

This role is captured in the three objectives that were legislated for the VQA in 2000. They are:

• to develop and monitor standards in education and training normally undertaken in, or in the years after, Year 10
• to ensure and support appropriate linkages between qualifications
• to make it easier for people to re-enter education and training and acquire qualifications throughout their lives.

The Credit Matrix is closely linked to the second and third of these objectives. It is in essence about a common way of describing and comparing learning successfully achieved.

Applied across the range of units and modules that make up the different post compulsory qualifications available in Victoria, the credit matrix will:

• make the qualifications system easier to understand
• allow for the design of more flexible qualifications that could include new and different kinds and combinations of learning
• provide a single and uniform way of describing qualification requirements and of recording achievement in them
• make it easier to keep track of learning achieved and to plan ahead – for individuals, providers and employers, as well as the system as a whole
• help ensure that learning already successfully achieved need not be repeated.

The idea of a system like the credit matrix first arose in 2002 as part of the work being undertaken by the VQA on ways in which the connections or pathways between qualifications could be improved.

In looking, for example, at ways of ensuring that when people move from one qualification to another they do not have to repeat learning already successfully achieved, it was clear that, in order to work out if and how much learning achieved in one qualification should contribute to another, you need a common basis for comparing the two.

A common basis for comparison is also needed to underpin the design of qualifications - like the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) - which allow learning options to be drawn from a range of different kinds of qualifications.

A system that would provide this common basis, and that would work across the range of post compulsory qualifications, would enhance the operation of the nationally agreed Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF).*

Taking the above into account, the VQA Board agreed in December 2002 that work should proceed on developing an outline of such a system. The outline would make it clear that the system was in essence about a common way of describing and comparing learning achieved in qualification units, and was enabling rather than regulatory in purpose.

Views would be sought from all key stakeholders, to ensure that broad-based support was in place before any detailed development work was undertaken.

CONSULTATION ON THE CONCEPT AND INITIAL DEVELOPMENT WORK: JUNE 2003–SEPTEMBER 2003

The Credit Matrix: A Consultation Paper from the Victorian Qualifications Authority, outlined a way of describing and comparing learning based on levels (to indicate the level of complexity of learning achieved) and points (to indicate the amount or volume of learning successfully achieved). The paper also explained briefly how the system would work and what it would do, and sought views on the concept in principle.

Between June and September 2003 over 1200 responses to the paper were received, with approximately 81% indicating strong support for the concept.

Although the focus of the consultation was on the concept, many responses pointed to the challenges ahead in taking it further. These comments, as well as the issues raised in the small number of responses indicating little or no support, pointed to:

- the importance of the credit matrix and the AQF being mutually compatible
- the importance of the credit matrix being supported by all key stakeholders, and in particular, industry and higher education
- the importance of pre-empting any confusion between credit matrix levels and AQF ‘levels’, and between the calculation of volume of learning and student contact hours
- the importance (and challenge) of developing levels, level descriptors, and a definition of volume of learning that will, on the one hand, be clear and easy to understand and use, and on the other hand, work effectively across the full range of kinds and contexts of learning.

FOOTNOTE
*The AQF provides guidelines for each of the recognised qualification titles in Australia, and is central to ensuring nationally consistent outcomes for each title. It does not, however, provide equivalencies between qualifications issued in different sectors.
At the same time a team of external experts (Mr Peter Noonan of Peter Noonan Consulting Ltd, Ms Andrea Bateman of the University of Ballarat, Professor Jack Keating of the University of Melbourne, and an international adviser, Professor Michael Young of the University of London Institute of Education) undertook some initial work on a detailed model for the credit matrix.

The recommendations arising from this work were that:

- the common measure to underpin the credit matrix should be based on the level of complexity and the amount or volume of learning involved
- eight to ten levels of complexity were recommended, each with a descriptor covering two ‘domains’ of learning (cognitive and applied)
- volume of learning would be best defined in terms of average learning time.

**NEXT STEPS: OCTOBER 2003–JUNE 2004**

In October 2003, the VQA Board considered these recommendations, noted the high level of support indicated by the consultation, and endorsed further work on the credit matrix proceeding.

This work, which was outlined in the publication *The Credit Matrix: Next Steps*, would build on the initial work, take into account the issues raised in the consultation feedback, and aim by June 2004 to provide a full, detailed model for the credit matrix and an accompanying set of guidelines for applying it.

The model would take particular account of the issues raised in relation to the AQF, and would be informed by a number of ‘on the ground’ modelling projects which would help to test the model and the guidelines.

It would be accompanied by a program of ongoing informal consultation, with a particular focus on ensuring effective links with industry, with higher education, and with other important initiatives in Victoria and nationally.
Work on the detailed model and guidelines began in November 2003. It was undertaken by a team of external experts comprising Mr Peter Noonan of Peter Noonan Consulting Ltd, Ms Andrea Bateman of the University of Ballarat, and Professor Jack Keating and Dr Shelley Gillis of the University of Melbourne.

The main tasks were to develop the levels and level descriptors, the approach to determining volume, and an accompanying set of definitions and guidelines.

**Levels and level descriptors**

A particular emphasis was placed on this aspect of the work, largely because defining increasing complexity in a way that will work across all kinds of learning is, in itself, a complex task.

The approach taken was to develop an initial set of descriptors – brief descriptions capturing the main features that are indicative of increasing complexity. The descriptors were based on models available elsewhere, local and national research, and expert advice.

In developing the descriptors it became clear that it would be difficult to capture complexity of learning effectively by using just two overall domains, as recommended in the initial work. Instead, a framework of five domains was identified, with complexity determined by the nature of the knowledge, problem-solving, application, autonomy and accountability involved in the learning.

A further key consideration was to make sure the descriptors were worded in a way that did not tie them to a particular sector, whether school, vocational education and training (VET), or higher education.

With an initial hierarchy of descriptors drafted using the five domains, the next step was to test it against a range of qualification units.

Expert practitioners were asked to select the five draft descriptors – one for each domain - that best matched the complexity of learning required to achieve the outcomes of a qualification unit successfully. Units selected and practitioner expertise covered Doctorates, Bachelor and Masters Degrees, Diplomas and Advanced Diplomas, the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE), the VCAL, and VET Certificates I to IV.

The 240 responses received were then subjected to rigorous and objective statistical analysis.

This very thorough analysis, together with further consultation and trialling by modelling projects, yielded two possible sets of levels and descriptors: one with six levels (included on page 17), and one with eight levels.

Overarching level descriptors, drawing on the five specific domain descriptors, were also developed – a set of six for the six-level option, and a set of eight for the eight-level option. The six-level set is included on page 19.

**Volume**

The recommended approach to volume follows the approach outlined in the initial development report. It is based on points which are calculated by estimating the number of hours of learning, on average, that underpin successful achievement of unit outcomes, and dividing the hours by ten.

**Definitions and guidelines**

An initial set of definitions and guidelines was developed in tandem with the work on levels, level descriptors and volume, with the intention, in the first instance, of their being used by modelling projects to test the model.
CONSULTATION AND TRIALLING

In addition to the input from expert practitioners, advice on the useability and usefulness of the model was provided by members of the VQA Credit Matrix Board Working Group, The VQA Credit Matrix Stakeholder Reference Group, and a newly established VQA Credit Matrix Industry Forum. Members of these groups are listed in Appendix I.

A workshop for invited guests and experts from a range of state and national bodies, institutions and authorities, and feedback from an ongoing program of presentations at state and national conferences and workshops, were also key sources of advice.

Initial trialling was undertaken by two modelling projects, established by the VQA as collaborative initiatives and led respectively by the Gippsland Education Precinct (GEP) and the IT Skills Hub.

Both projects focused on testing the model and the guidelines by using them to assign levels and points to units drawn from qualifications in Art and Design and Information Technology respectively.

In order to provide an early indication of the relative merits of six or eight levels, the GEP used the six-level model and the IT Skills Hub the eight-level model.

OUTCOMES

Feedback, both from consultation and initial trialling, indicated that the model:
- will promote flexibility and clarity, and assist greatly in qualification design
- is relatively quick, and in most respects easy to understand and use
- delivers a common approach and a common language for describing and comparing achievement that is usable across the range of different qualifications
- has the potential to deliver against its stated purposes and make it easier, for example, to ensure learning is built on, rather than repeated
- does not appear to conflict with the intent or outcomes of the AQF qualification-specific descriptors
- has the potential to work with, and add value to, the AQF.

There is a need, however, to:
- simplify the language and make sure that all audiences have access to information that is clear and easily understood
- confirm, through more widespread testing and trialling, the optimum number of levels
- determine whether, in some instances, the more detailed information provided by the individual domain descriptors might, in fact, be more useful than the briefer, but more ‘on balance’ snapshot provided by the level descriptors
- further investigate the approach taken to determining volume, especially in respect of its applicability to informal learning
- clarify formal roles and responsibilities for assigning levels and points, and how quality will be assured
- further explore and clarify the relationship between the credit matrix and field of study
- maintain close linkages with related state, national and international institutions and initiatives.
The work ahead - towards implementation

The work successfully completed on the detailed model, the feedback above, and the continuing high level of support for the credit matrix overall, provide the starting-point for the next phase of work.

The work outlined below was endorsed by the VQA Board at its meeting in June 2004. It includes a further round of formal consultation towards the end of 2004 and, subject to the outcomes of that consultation, implementation of the credit matrix in 2005.

Between now and December 2004, the aim is to:

• set up an extensive program to fully test, trial and finalise the model, covering as wide a range of different industry areas and fields of education and training as possible
• refine and finalise the guidelines, and other key support and information documentation
• develop an implementation plan
• keep Victorian stakeholders and national/interstate colleagues informed of progress and consult on aspects of the work as necessary
• conduct a formal consultation on the final detailed model and the implementation plan towards the end of the year
• report on the outcomes of the above to the VQA Board in December.

If the work on the model and the implementation plan goes smoothly, and the outcomes of the consultations are positive, we will be ready after December to move to implementation.

It is too early at this stage to spell out how that implementation might proceed – development of an implementation plan is part of the work of the next six months. Key considerations that will underpin that work include:

• the outcomes of discussions to link the Credit Matrix to other Victorian initiatives such as the Post Compulsory Framework for Education and Training, the Curriculum Reform 2004 project, the VCAL, and the work in progress on a new Qualifications Framework for Design
• the potential to link to national developments such as the forthcoming review of the AQF descriptors for VET qualifications, and the initiatives arising from the High Level Review of Training Packages
• the outcomes of continued discussions with stakeholders and key groups such as our Credit Matrix Industry Forum, with state and interstate colleagues, and with key national bodies such as the Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST), the Australian Qualifications Framework Advisory Board (AQFAB), and the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA).
In conclusion

The credit matrix has the potential to transform the design and use of qualifications in Victoria. We have made significant progress towards making that potential a reality in the work completed to date. That work has been underpinned by a commitment to consultation – and the consultation has shown us that there is strong stakeholder support for the concept of the credit matrix.

The next phase of work, as described in this paper, will seek to move the credit matrix on from being an optimistic prototype to an operational system. It will be challenging, and we aim to ensure that it is also firmly underpinned by the views of everyone who has an interest and involvement in qualifications.

To that end we aim to keep everyone informed of work in progress and will welcome any comments or suggestions. We look forward also to involving everyone in the consultation later this year, and to receiving your views – this time not on a concept, but on a proposed working system.
For more information on the credit matrix, refer to the VQA credit matrix publications listed on the next page. All the VQA publications listed can be downloaded from the VQA website (www.vqa.vic.edu.au). If you would like copies mailed to you, telephone (03 9637 2806) or email (vqa@edumail.vic.gov.au).

Regular updates, new publications, and notices of any workshops will be posted on the VQA website (www.vqa.vic.edu.au).

If you took part in the consultation and provided us with an address, we will make sure you receive hard copies of any new information or items of interest.

If you are new to the credit matrix and would like to be added to the mailing list, or if you have any queries, comments, or suggestions, contact the VQA by telephone (03 9637 2806), by facsimile (03 9637 2422) or by email (vqa@edumail.vic.gov.au).
References

**DOCUMENTS**


**WEBSITES**

http://www.anta.gov.au
http://www.aqf.edu.au
http://www.dest.gov.au
http://www.det.vic.gov.au
http://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au
http://www.vqa.vic.gov.au
Appendices
Appendix I:  
CREDIT MATRIX STEERING AND ADVISORY GROUPS

VQA CREDIT MATRIX BOARD WORKING GROUP

The Credit Matrix Board Working Group is responsible for steering the credit matrix project.

Chair: Ms Virginia Simmons, Director, Chisholm Institute of TAFE

Members: Mr Stuart Hamilton, Chair, Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority

Ms Linda Heron, General Manager, HR, Learning and Development, Coles Myer

Ms Pam Jonas, Manager Policy and Research, Group Training Victoria Australia (until June 04)

Mr Peter Laver, Chair, Victorian Learning and Employment Skills Commission (until June 04)

Ms Julie Moss, Managing Director, Photography Studies College

Ms Elizabeth Ward, Principal, Presbyterian Ladies’ College
VQA CREDIT MATRIX STAKEHOLDER REFERENCE GROUP

The Credit Matrix Stakeholder Reference Group has the key role of providing expert advice on the credit matrix project.

Chair: Professor Iain Wallace, former Vice-Chancellor, Swinburne University of Technology

Members: Mr Andrew Blair, President, Victorian Association of State School Principals

Mr Richard Carter, Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Victoria University

Dr Evelyn Cheah, Research Division, Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training (until February 2004)

Mr Peter De Natris, Manager Adult, Community and Further Education (until February 04)

Ms Louise Doolan, President, Victorian TAFE Students’ and Apprentices’ Network

Ms Judy Douglas, Learning and Development Manager, Qenos Ltd

Mr John Firth, Assistant General Manager, Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority

Ms Pat Forward, Federal President, TAFE Division, Australian Education Union

Mr Mark Frankland, Senior Project Officer, Australian National Training Authority

Ms Penny Gould, Acting Director, Professional Recognition Unit, Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training

Ms Valerie Hazel, Senior Policy Officer, Office of Training and Tertiary Education, Department of Education and Training, Victoria

Ms Gail McHardy, Executive Officer, Parents Victoria

Mr Ian Marshman, Senior Vice-Principal, The University of Melbourne

Dr Robert Pargetter, Principal, Haileybury College

Ms Helen Reeves, Pathways Project Officer, Gippsland Education Precinct

Ms Julie Ryan, President, Careers Education Association Victoria

Ms Maria Tarrant, Director, Policy, Business Council Australia

Ms Anna Vlass, Assistant Principal, Box Hill Senior Secondary College
VQA CREDIT MATRIX INDUSTRY FORUM

The Credit Matrix Industry Forum provides expert guidance and advice to inform the design and application of the credit matrix.

Facilitator: Ms Pam Jonas, Manager, Policy and Research, Group Training Australia Victoria

Members: Mr Denis Bingham, Manager Employee Development and Performance, Pacific National
Ms Kris Botha, Human Resources Manager, Cabrini Hospital
Mr Terry Cubley, Employee Development Consultant, Holden Learning
Ms Judy Douglas, Central HR Adviser, Qenos
Mr Geoff Gwilym, Manager Professional Development, REIV
Mr Mark Hardy, Victorian Manager – Professionals Division, Skilled Engineering
Ms Karon Hepner, Group Human Resources Manager, Eurest Australia P/L
Ms Sue Kent, Training Manager, MEGT
Mr David McInnes, Manager of Learning and Development, Linfox
Ms Susan Naylor, Australian Retail Association of Victoria
Mr Arthur Reiger, Group Manager, HR Shared Services, Group Human Resources, Telstra
Mr Michael Russell, RTO Manager, Learning and Development, Coles Myer
Appendix II:
DRAFT LEVELS, DOMAINS AND DESCRIPTORS (SIX LEVELS)

**Note:** The levels, domains and descriptors below were used for consultation and trialling in the first half of 2004. They will be revised to incorporate feedback from the more extensive testing and trialling that will take place between now and the end of 2004.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level 6</th>
<th>Application</th>
<th>Autonomy</th>
<th>Accountability</th>
<th>Problem-solving</th>
<th>Knowledge</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individual or group activities are self-directed and are undertaken within few parameters, performed with minimal guidance.</td>
<td>Activities are undertaken with full accountability for own processes and outputs and full accountability for processes and outputs of others, with few established parameters.</td>
<td>New guidelines and processes are developed individually or in collaboration with others, to address non-routine problems.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Level 5 | The skills and knowledge to be acquired are to be integrated, contextualised, and applied to influence future contexts. | Activities are undertaken with full accountability for own processes and outputs, and full accountability for processes and outputs of others, within broad parameters. | Conceptual frameworks are used to formulate and test problems that make a significant contribution to theory, method, or practice. | New knowledge, in that the learners must create and interpret new knowledge through original research, or other advanced scholarship of a quality to satisfy peer review. |

| Level 4 | The skills and knowledge to be acquired are to be integrated, contextualised, and applied in complex and changing contexts involving broadly defined and unpredictable variables. | Activities are undertaken with full accountability for own processes and outputs, and some accountability for processes and outputs of others, within defined parameters. | New guidelines and processes are identified and developed to predict and/or address significant, complex, or emergent problems. | Theoretical and abstract. |

| Level 3 | The skills and knowledge to be acquired are to be applied and contextualised in changing contexts involving defined but unpredictable variables. | Activities are undertaken with full accountability for own processes and outputs, within defined parameters. | New guidelines are developed individually or in collaboration with others, to address non-routine problems. | Concrete, with some elements of abstraction or theory. |
### Appendix II: Draft levels, domains and descriptors (six levels) continued from previous page.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Application</th>
<th>Autonomy</th>
<th>Accountability</th>
<th>Problem-solving</th>
<th>Knowledge</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>The skills and knowledge to be acquired are to be applied in changing contexts involving defined and predictable variables.</td>
<td>Individual or group activities are undertaken within defined parameters, performed with some discretion under frequent guidance.</td>
<td>Established guidelines are interpreted and applied with variations to processes, to address routine problems.</td>
<td>Concrete in reference, with some comprehensive understanding of relationships between knowledge elements.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>The skills and knowledge to be acquired are to be applied in stable contexts involving defined and predictable variables.</td>
<td>Individual or group activities are undertaken within clearly defined parameters, performed with minimal discretion under close guidance.</td>
<td>Activities are undertaken with some accountability for own processes and outputs, within defined parameters.</td>
<td>Concrete or factual in reference, and basic in comprehensive understanding.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix III:
DRAFT LEVEL DESCRIPTORS (SIX LEVELS)

Note: The level descriptors below were used for consultation and trialling in the first half of 2004. They will be revised to incorporate feedback from the more extensive testing and trialling that will take place between now and the end of 2004.

Level 6
Apply, integrate and contextualise skills and knowledge to influence future contexts. Activities are self-directed and are undertaken within few parameters, performed with minimal guidance; with full accountability for own and others’ processes and outputs, with few established parameters. The knowledge learnt is new, in that the learners must create and interpret new knowledge through original research, or other advanced scholarship of a quality to satisfy peer review. Problems are tested and formulated using conceptual frameworks which make a significant contribution to theory, method, or practice.

Level 5
Apply, integrate and contextualise skills and knowledge to influence future contexts. Activities are undertaken within broad parameters performed with minimal guidance; with full accountability for own processes and outputs, and some accountability for others, within defined parameters. The knowledge learnt is strategic, in that learners must demonstrate a critical awareness of current problems or insights generally agreed to be at the forefront of a field of learning. Problems are tested and formulated using conceptual frameworks which make a significant contribution to theory, method, or practice.

Level 4
Apply, integrate and contextualise skills and knowledge in complex and changing contexts, involving broadly defined and unpredictable variables. Activities are undertaken with full accountability for own and others, within broad parameters; with minimal guidance. The knowledge learnt is theoretical and abstract. Significant, complex, or emergent problems are predicted and/or addressed using new, identified and developed guidelines and processes.

Level 3
Apply and contextualise skills and knowledge in changing contexts, involving defined but unpredictable variables. Activities are undertaken within defined parameters performed with a significant degree of discretion under general guidance; with full accountability. The knowledge learnt is concrete, with some elements of abstraction or theory. Non-routine problems are addressed using new guidelines developed individually or in collaboration with others.

Level 2
Apply skills and knowledge in changing contexts involving defined and predictable contexts. Activities are undertaken within defined parameters performed with some discretion and under frequent guidance; with some accountability within defined parameters. The knowledge learnt is concrete in reference, with some comprehension of relationships. Routine problems are addressed using established guidelines that are interpreted and applied with variations to processes.

Level 1
Apply skills and knowledge in stable contexts involving defined and predictable variables. Activities are undertaken within clearly defined parameters with minimal discretion and under close guidance; with some accountability within defined parameters. The knowledge learnt is concrete or factual in reference, and basic in comprehension. Routine problems are addressed using established guidelines and processes and precedents.
Making qualifications work for Victorians by

• safeguarding the standard of Victorian qualifications
• ensuring qualifications work for Victoria’s economic future
• providing qualification options that help Victorians achieve their career and personal ambitions

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