ASAR

Australian Sonographer Accreditation Registry

Standards for the Accreditation of Sonographer Courses



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Introduction

Background

The Australian Sonographer Accreditation Registry Ltd. (ASAR) has the following functions:

- To set uniform, minimum standards of sonographer training and education in Australia
- To accredit sonographer training and educational programs in Australia.
- To maintain a register of Accredited Medical Sonographers.
- To maintain a register of Accredited Student Sonographers; and
- To establish standards of continuing professional development (CPD) and monitor CPD requirements for sonographers to remain on the Register.

In 2010, ASAR commenced work to develop an accreditation framework for sonographer training and education programs in Australia with the intent of ensuring that the most effective outcomes were achieved for sonographers and more broadly the Australian public. This coincided with a number of significant changes in the landscape of education and training in Australia, including the introduction of the Strengthened Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) and national regulatory bodies for both the higher education (TEQSA) and Vocational Education and Training (VET) sectors (ASQA). At the same time, the Australasian Sonographers Association (ASA) was progressing a complementary project to develop an entry-level competency framework. The original version of the ASAR's Standards for Accreditation of Sonographer Courses (SASC) was published in 2011, along with the ASA's Competency Standards for the Entry Level Sonographer.

During 2019-2020, in response to the profession's evolution, a research collaboration between the ASAR, ASAR-accredited course providers, professional bodies and industry stakeholders began developing revised competency standards for sonographers. Utilising a Delphi research design methodology, a consensus-based contemporary framework was published in 2022[1]. Supporting peer-reviewed journal articles detail the development of this framework[2] and explain each of its components[3].

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The ASAR Course Accreditation Framework

The ASAR Course Accreditation Framework (CAF) establishes the policies, processes, standards and criteria within which courses are granted accreditation for a specified time, against transparent and defined requirements. The CAF comprises:

- The Standards for the Accreditation of Sonographer Courses
- The Professional Competency Framework for Sonographers
- ASAR's Course Accreditation Handbook
- ASAR's Course Accreditation Application Form.

Organisations seeking to achieve or maintain course accreditation, including re-accreditation, are advised that these documents must be read in conjunction with each other and their requirements in total must be complied with in order for a course to hold ASAR-accredited status.

Standards for the Accreditation of Sonographer Courses

The Standards for the Accreditation of Sonographer Courses (SASC) comprise a component of the CAF and provide specific criteria for measuring whether a course fulfils the prescribed requirements of the CAF. The SASC are used to assess every application for accreditation. To be successful, an application is required to satisfactorily address all criteria for all eight standards contained within the SASC, and any other requirements specified elsewhere within the CAF.

The SASC and their criteria have been developed in consultation with a representative committee of key stakeholders, including regulators, professional bodies, and academics. The development process has also ensured that the standards reflect and embrace the concepts and principles of the AQF and course accreditation from both the higher education and VET sectors. The standards will be subject to regular review.

There are eight standards with each standard detailing the outcome requirements for each aspect of the education provider's quality assurance arrangements. Each standard has a 'statement of intent' that describes the underlying motivation for the standard. The statement of intent is followed by a list of the criteria that are relevant to demonstrating the overarching standard.

Definitions

The definitions of terms referred to in the SASC are published in ASAR's Course Accreditation Handbook.

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The Standards

Standard One: Governance

The course owner and course provider demonstrate governance arrangements to produce graduates with the required graduate competency outcomes. The arrangements must cover quality assurance and improvement; course design and management; clinical placement and supervision; consultation and collaboration; and resourcing for effective course implementation.

Criteria

The course provider must:

1.1. Assure that all providers offering their course meet the provisions of these standards.
1.2. Inform ASAR of its intent to make any significant changes to the program including changes to key staff, program structure, and program content or licensing arrangements with course providers in the annual self-study report.
1.3. Inform ASAR of any adverse decision affecting its accreditation by recognised accrediting agencies.

The course provider is required to demonstrate:

1.4. The timely submission of self-study reports to ASAR.
1.5. The governance of the institution is characterised by sound business management practices that assure an appropriate degree of separation between academic and corporate governance arrangements. Governance structures identify and manage all potential and actual conflicts of interest by assuring an appropriate level of autonomy from any other business interests of a financial sponsor, owner, and/or potential employer.
1.6. Current quality assurance and accreditation in the relevant education and training sector in Australia.
1.7. That course development, monitoring, review, evaluation and quality improvement practices maximise the outcomes for students.
1.8. Collaborative approaches to course organisation and design have been used and involve academic staff and key stakeholders including employers and industry.
1.9. That the academic goals, processes, and services to students are accurately represented to prospective students and current students.
1.10. That credit transfer and the recognition of prior learning (RPL) is consistent with both the AQF and the expected outcomes of relevant regulatory authorities.
1.11. That students are provided with facilities, support and resources sufficient in quality and quantity to enable the attainment of the required graduate competency outcomes.
1.12. How formal agreements between the course provider and clinical service providers where students gain their clinical experience, are developed, implemented, monitored and their effectiveness assured.
1.13. That risk assessments of and risk management strategies for any environment where students are placed to gain their clinical experience are developed, implemented, monitored and their effectiveness assured.
1.14. A comprehensive transition plan for all existing students if ceasing operations.

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Standard Two: Course Goals and Outcomes

The course provider has a clearly stated educational philosophy for the course and can demonstrate that the course structure is sufficient to achieve the graduate competency outcomes. The course provider must also demonstrate that the structure and amount of clinical experience is appropriate for the graduate competency outcomes to be developed, with evidence of an integration of theory and clinical experience.

For the purposes of clarity: unsupervised clinical practice is not permitted for courses seeking accreditation with ASAR and cannot be counted towards a student's total clinical experience; students who complete more than 40% of their clinical placement experience off-shore will be ineligible for admission to the ASAR registry as a Category 1A Accredited Medical Sonographer.

Criteria

The course provider is required to demonstrate that:

2.1. The educational philosophy of the course is consistent with and responsive to the needs and expectations of the key stakeholders for the course.
2.2. For courses leading to sonographer accreditation with ASAR, the course must achieve outcomes at a minimum of AQF level 8.
2.3. The total length, structure and sequencing of learning experiences of the course are sufficient to allow all the graduate competency outcomes to be achieved.
2.4. The total clinical experience / placement is sufficient to allow graduate competency outcomes to be achieved and is continuous and integrated with the theoretical components of any course (recommended as a minimum of 3 days/week over a 2-year period, full-time equivalent).
2.5. Specific performance objectives for the clinical experience components of courses must be defined and lead to the achievement of graduate competency outcomes.
2.6. Specific structures and safeguards are in place for students who obtain clinical experience offshore - outside the Australian and New Zealand clinical setting.
2.7. The academic content of the course prepares students for the timing and length of clinical experience placements.
2.8. Where the structure of the course allows for alternate exit points these are outlined and the exit points meet all required standards for the exit qualifications.
2.9. The course is structured to encourage pathways to higher qualifications wherever possible and appropriate.

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Standard Three: Course Content

The course provider demonstrates that the course content takes as its primary focus sonography practice, that it comprehensively addresses the graduate competency outcomes including content related to foundation and critical practice competency outcomes, and that any elective content is complementary to the discipline of sonography.

Criteria

The course provider is required to demonstrate:

3.1. Mapping of the course content against the relevant Sonographer Competency Standards to demonstrate how the graduate competency outcomes are to be achieved.
3.2. That selection, organisation, sequencing and delivery of learning experiences, including clinical experience, is well integrated and allows for the effective scaffolding of practical and theoretical knowledge, providing students with the opportunity to attain all the required graduate competency outcomes.
3.3. That the central focus of the course is on sonography and contemporary sonographic practice addressing, across the length of the course and clinical experience, foundation, and critical practice knowledge, skills and behaviours.
3.4. That technology, including information technology and information management, to support patient management is integral to the course.

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Standard Four: Resources and Staffing

The course provider demonstrates that it has the learning and assessment materials, facilities and equipment, and staff to provide students with the support and the expertise necessary to attain their graduate competency outcomes.

Criteria

The course provider is required to demonstrate that:

4.1. Academic staff are qualified to fulfill their teaching and assessment responsibilities, including current competence in the areas of teaching and assessment.
4.2. In cases where an academic staff member's qualifications do not include sonography their qualifications are relevant to the education of the students (e.g., in cross-disciplinary/elective courses).
4.3. Staffing arrangements around course delivery are aligned with course outcomes.
4.4. Clinical supervisors are qualified to fulfill their supervisory responsibilities including current sonographer accreditation with ASAR where appropriate or being a suitably qualified and experienced medical practitioner.
4.5. The staff to student ratios for all learning and assessment activities, are adequate to enable students to achieve the graduate competency outcomes.
4.6. There is monitoring of staff performance including ongoing academic staff development.
4.7. The course provider has a professional development program in place for staff involved in the delivery of the course that includes teaching, learning and assessment as well as clinical development opportunities.
4.8. The design, size, state and currency of classrooms, laboratories, clinics (including those accessed for clinical experience), libraries, facilities and relevant equipment must enable the achievement of the clinical and educational objectives of the course.
4.9. Clinical supervisors are provided with support from the course provider to structure and deliver an effective clinical learning experience in the workplace.

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Standard Five: Teaching and Learning

The course provider demonstrates that contemporary, relevant and varied approaches to teaching and learning underpin the course and that the teaching and learning approaches provide Australian and international evidence-based best practice perspectives on sonography.

Criteria

The course provider is required to demonstrate:

5.1. A course curriculum that ensures the achievement of the program goals and provides for a diverse range of learning and clinical experiences.
5.2. Specific learning outcomes for the educational component of the course must be defined and lead to the achievement of graduate competency outcomes.
5.3. Specific performance objectives for the clinical experience components of courses must be defined and lead to the achievement of graduate competency outcomes.
5.4. A correspondence between content, clinical application, competency achievement and teaching and learning strategies.
5.5. An understanding of current Australian and international best practice teaching and learning approaches that are then reflected in the delivery of the course.
5.6. A commitment to the development of graduates who are safe and competent for entry-level practice.
5.7. Learning in the clinical environment is supervised in order to ensure that acceptable standards of patient care are maintained including that accurate and complete record keeping is undertaken.
5.8. A commitment to the development of graduates who have the desire and capacity to continue to learn throughout their careers and understand their professional responsibility for their continuing competence.
5.9. Teaching and learning approaches that promote communication, collaboration, research and leadership skills expected of accredited medical sonographers.
5.10. The equivalence of course outcomes for courses accredited by ASAR and delivered by the course provider in all delivery modes in which the course is offered (courses delivered on-campus or in mixed-mode, by distance or by e-learning methods).
5.11. That inter-professional learning and practice is encouraged.
5.12. An appropriate use of evidence-based simulated learning in relevant areas of the curricula.
5.13. Varied and relevant learning experiences that accommodate differences in student learning styles.

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Standard Six: Assessment

The course provider demonstrates that the course adopts an approach to assessment that is suited to the nature of the learning experiences and comprehensively linked to the attainment of the graduate competency outcomes.

Criteria

The course provider is required to demonstrate:

6.1. That graduates have achieved each graduate competency outcome on completion of the course.
6.2. That the type, level and number of formative and summative assessments give the student and the course provider valid, reliable and timely indications of the progress of the student towards the achievement of the graduate competency outcomes.
6.3. That the variety of formative and summative assessment types and tasks used across the course enhance individual and collective learning.
6.4. A variety of assessment contexts are used to ensure the demonstration of competency in a diverse range of clinical settings and cases.
6.5. Assessment is conducted in the clinical context to establish the consistent demonstration of the combination of skills, knowledge, behaviours that underpin quality sonographic practice.
6.6. That procedural fairness, independence, validity, reliability, and transparency of assessment is assured.
6.7. That the course provider remains ultimately accountable for the assessment of students in relation to all clinical assessment.
6.8. Grading policies and explicit grading criteria must be available to the student and linked to the course learning and performance objectives.

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Standard Seven: Research and Scholarship

The course provider demonstrates that the graduates' educational experience is informed by and fosters a spirit of inquiry, and that the students develop the skills to undertake and value research and apply it to their practice.

Criteria

The course provider is required to demonstrate that:

7.1. It fosters a culture of critical inquiry and innovation appropriate to the educational objectives of its courses among its staff and students.
7.2. Academic staff use current research in teaching and learning.
7.3. Academic staff are actively engaged in research and/or scholarship.
7.4. Students develop an understanding of all aspects of critical inquiry and skills in undertaking and applying research to their practice.
7.5. Students develop an understanding of the ethics of research.

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Standard Eight: Evaluation and Review

The course owner and provider regularly gather and consider evidence about how effectively the course is accomplishing its purposes and educational objectives. The outcomes of reviews inform planning and may lead to the revision of educational objectives, approaches to teaching, learning and assessment, and planning and budgeting priorities. There is an institution-wide commitment to continuous quality improvement

Criteria

The course owner is required to demonstrate that:

8.1. The course stakeholders, including academic and clinical staff and all providers, students, graduates, employers and (where applicable) practitioners are involved in the annual review of the course's educational effectiveness and determining the extent to which the purpose and educational objectives are being achieved.
8.2. Quality assurance processes operate and assist in determining the extent to which it is producing outcomes consistent with the course's purpose and educational objectives.
8.3. It considers and evaluates the quality of outcomes achieved (including rates of student retention, graduation, and employment or transition to further education) by benchmarking against appropriate comparators.
8.4. It takes steps to improve student outcomes as needed and in response to regular reviews.

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Appendix

Required Graduate Competency Outcomes for General Sonography and Discipline Specific Sonography Courses

ASAR accredits general and discipline specific sonography courses. The following information outlines the graduate competency outcomes that must be achieved for a course to be considered for accreditation by ASAR. In addition to five foundation units of competence common to all courses, the ASAR defines nine discipline specific units of competency. These are Abdominal, Breast (Discipline Specific), Cardiac, Gynaecology, Musculoskeletal, Obstetrics, Superficial Parts, Vascular (General), Vascular (Discipline Specific).

General Sonography Course

A general sonography course must enable graduates to achieve outcomes aligned to the Professional Competency Framework for Sonographers. For general courses graduates must achieve all five foundation units. In addition, the course must enable graduates to achieve the outcomes for five of the six critical practice units below.

Foundation Units of Competence	Unit 1	Professional and Ethical Practitioner
	Unit 2	Lifelong Learner
	Unit 3	Safety and Risk Manager
	Unit 4	Communicator and Collaborator
	Unit 5	Sonographic Practitioner
Critical Practice Units of Competence	Unit 6	Abdominal
	Unit 7	Superficial Parts
	Unit 8	Musculoskeletal
	Unit 9	Obstetrics
	Unit 10	Gynaecology
	Unit 11	Vascular (General)

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A general sonography course must have course content or curriculum of sufficient depth and complexity to enable graduates to competently perform the following ultrasound examinations at a minimum:

Abdomen • Abdominal organs and glands • Female and male pelvis	**Musculoskeletal** • Shoulder	**Superficial Parts** • Breast female and male • Scrotum • Thyroid and anterior neck
Obstetrics • 1st, 2nd, and 3rd trimester scans	**Gynaecologic** • Female pelvis	**Vascular (General)** • Deep Vein thrombosis (DVT) • Carotid

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Discipline Specific Vascular Sonography Course

A discipline specific vascular sonography course must enable graduates to achieve outcomes aligned to the Professional Competency Framework for Sonographers. For discipline specific vascular courses graduates must achieve all five foundation units. In addition, the course must enable graduates to achieve the outcomes of critical practice Unit 14 - Vascular (Discipline Specific).

Foundation Units of Competence	Unit 1	Professional and Ethical Practitioner
	Unit 2	Lifelong Learner
	Unit 3	Safety and Risk Manager
	Unit 4	Communicator and Collaborator
	Unit 5	Sonographic Practitioner
Critical Practice Units of Competence	Unit 12	Vascular (Discipline Specific)

A discipline specific vascular sonography course must have course content or curriculum of sufficient depth and complexity to enable graduates to competently perform the following ultrasound examinations at a minimum:

- Arterial and venous systems (upper and lower limbs)
- Cerebrovascular arterial and venous systems
- Visceral arterial and venous systems
- Renal transplant.

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Discipline Specific Cardiac Sonography Course

A discipline specific cardiac sonography course must enable graduates to achieve outcomes aligned to the Professional Competency Framework for Sonographers. For discipline specific cardiac courses graduates must achieve all five foundation units. In addition, the course must enable graduates to achieve the outcomes of critical practice Unit 8 - Cardiac.

Foundation Units of Competence	Unit 1	Professional and Ethical Practitioner
	Unit 2	Lifelong Learner
	Unit 3	Safety and Risk Manager
	Unit 4	Communicator and Collaborator
	Unit 5	Sonographic Practitioner
Critical Practice Units of Competence	Unit 13	Cardiac (Discipline Specific)

A discipline specific cardiac sonography course must have course content or curriculum of sufficient depth and complexity to enable graduates to competently perform the following ultrasound examinations at a minimum:

Adult cardiac structure and function, which includes but is not limited to:

- left ventricular function assessment
- valvular structure and function assessment
- commonly encountered congenital heart disease assessment.

A discipline specific cardiac sonography course must have content or curriculum of sufficient depth and complexity to provide graduates with knowledge of:

- Commonly encountered congenital heart disease assessment
- Stress echocardiography
- Transesophageal echocardiography
- Advanced techniques, such as contrast echocardiography and 3D echocardiography
- Complementary diagnostic techniques, such as cardiac catheterisation.

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Discipline Specific Obstetrics and Gynaecology Sonography Course

A discipline specific obstetrics and gynaecology sonography course must enable graduates to achieve outcomes aligned to the Professional Competency Framework for Sonographers. For discipline specific obstetrics and gynaecology courses graduates must achieve all five foundation units. In addition, the course must enable graduates to achieve the outcomes of critical practice Unit 10 - Obstetrics and Gynaecology.

Foundation Units of Competence	Unit 1	Professional and Ethical Practitioner
	Unit 2	Lifelong Learner
	Unit 3	Safety and Risk Manager
	Unit 4	Communicator and Collaborator
	Unit 5	Sonographic Practitioner
Critical Practice Units of Competence	Unit 14	Obstetrics (Discipline Specific)
	Unit 15	Gynaecology (Discipline Specific)

A discipline specific obstetrics and gynaecology sonography course must have course content or curriculum of sufficient depth and complexity to enable graduates to competently perform the following ultrasound examinations at a minimum:

- 1st, 2nd, and 3rd trimester scans including complicated pregnancies
- Female pelvis including fertility studies.

A discipline specific obstetrics and gynaecology sonography course must have course content or curriculum of sufficient depth and complexity to provide graduates with knowledge of the following ultrasound examinations:

- Abdomen, relative to maternal complications/diseases of pregnancy
- Paediatrics, neonatal period
- Superficial parts, relative to maternal complications/diseases of pregnancy, for example, thyroid, breast female and male.

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Discipline Specific Breast Sonography Course

A discipline specific breast sonography course must enable graduates to achieve outcomes aligned to the Professional Competency Framework for Sonographers. For discipline specific breast sonography courses graduates must achieve all five foundation units. In addition, the course must enable graduates to achieve the outcomes of critical practice Unit 7 - Breast.

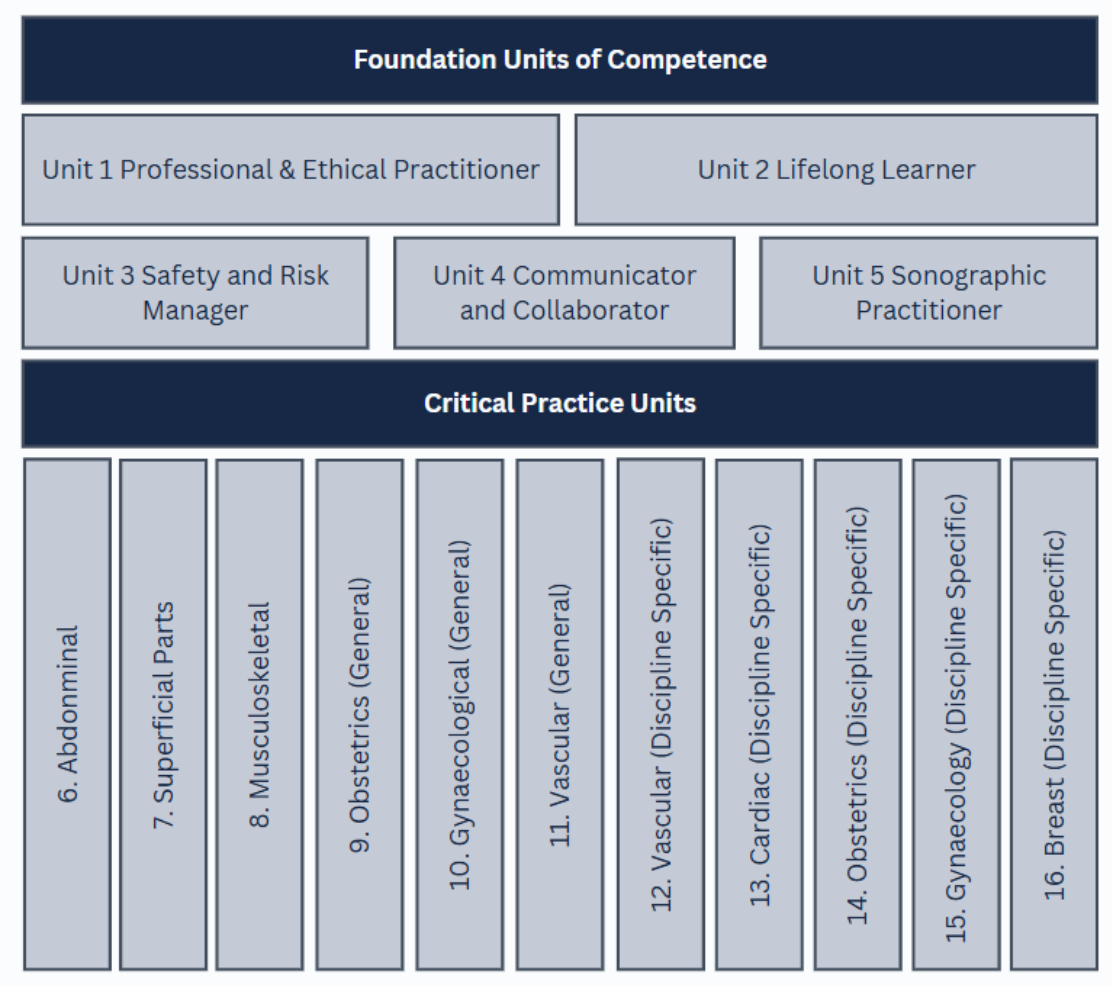
Foundation Units of Competence	Unit 1	Professional and Ethical Practitioner
	Unit 2	Lifelong Learner
	Unit 3	Safety and Risk Manager
	Unit 4	Communicator and Collaborator
	Unit 5	Sonographic Practitioner
Critical Practice Units of Competence	Unit 16	Breast (Discipline Specific)

A discipline specific breast sonography course must have course content or curriculum of sufficient depth and complexity to enable graduates to competently perform the following ultrasound examinations at a minimum:

- Female and male breast (including axilla).

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Overview:



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