

**PROJECT INFORMATION DOCUMENT (PID)  
APPRAISAL STAGE**

Report No.: AB5139

<b>Project Name</b>	Higher Education for the Twenty First Century Project
<b>Region</b>	South Asia
<b>Sector</b>	Tertiary Education (100%)
<b>Project ID</b>	P113402
<b>Borrower(s)</b>	DEMOCRATIC SOCIALIST REPUBLIC OF SRI LANKA
<b>Implementing Agency</b>	Ministry of Higher Education 18 Ward Place Colombo 7 Sri Lanka Tel: (94-11) 269-6679 Fax: (94-11) 267-1355 <a href="mailto:sec@mohe.gov.lk">sec@mohe.gov.lk</a> Ministry of Higher Education Sri Lanka
<b>Environment Category</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> A <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> B <input type="checkbox"/> C <input type="checkbox"/> FI <input type="checkbox"/> TBD (to be determined)
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### 1. Country and Sector Background

1. Sri Lanka is a country with a per capita income of approximately US\$2,000, and a population of around 20 million people. Basic human development levels are high, with a primary education completion rate of over 95 percent, a literacy rate of 93 percent, and life expectancy of 75 years. There is also a substantial degree of gender parity with Sri Lanka ranking high among developing countries in terms of gender development and gender empowerment. The higher education sector has about 390,000 students enrolled. There are 15 universities, 12 Advanced Technological Institutes (ATIs), about 12 private institutes offering degrees of foreign universities, and a number of private alternative higher education institutions offering diploma and certificate level professional qualifications.

2. Sri Lanka is poised to emerge from a country in conflict (CIC) to a country in peace (CIP). The nation is just emerging from a long period of armed secessionist conflict along ethnic lines. In this context, the country needs to develop a favorable climate for a vibrant multi-ethnic and multi-religious democracy. The higher education sector can play a central role in helping the transition to a country in lasting peace through the promotion of democratic values, respect for diversity, and the celebration of multiple cultures, through the scholarship, teaching and research of the universities.

3. Sri Lanka is also poised to make the transition from a low-income country (LIC) to a middle-income country (MIC). The past economic growth of the country has been driven mainly by private sector led expansion of services and industry, after the adoption of liberal and pro-market economic policies three decades ago. The future of Sri Lanka as a MIC will depend on knowledge-intensive activities such as banking and finance, insurance, information technology, communications, and hospitality and leisure services. In this context, intellectual and human capital is of vital importance to enable Sri Lanka to develop and compete effectively in the global knowledge economy of the twenty-first century. Sri Lanka urgently needs a higher education system that can produce well-educated, skilled, hard-working and enterprising graduates and innovative researchers capable of promoting dynamic economic development.

4. The higher education sector faces a number of urgent challenges [see *The Towers of Learning: Performance, Peril and Prospects*, the World Bank (2009)]. These include the fact that a considerable proportion of graduates currently fail to meet the employment requirements of the private sector and NGOs for graduates with good English language, ICT and soft skills; the moderate quality of courses and programs in the majority of higher education institutions (HEIs); the absence of a national qualification framework with pathways between the various types of HEIs, programs and courses; inadequate quality assurance mechanisms for the full state and non-state higher education sectors; the large proportion of students (nearly 60 percent) enrolled in external degree programs with minimal academic support; the poorer coverage and quality of higher education in lagging regions such as the Northern and Eastern Provinces; weak research and knowledge linkages between HEIs and the industrial and service sectors of the economy; and the need for HEIs to play a prominent role in the social and cultural life of the country, particularly to promote a favorable environment for a peaceful, pluralist, multi-ethnic society.

5. The key policy makers in the higher education sector are aware of the vital and central importance of developing the higher education sector to lead the economic and social future of Sri Lanka. The Ministry of Higher Education (MHE), the National Education Commission (NEC), the University Grants Commission (UGC) and the Sri Lanka Institute for Advanced Technological Education (SLIATE) and the Bank, in consultation with stakeholders in the higher education sector and more broadly in GOSL and the private sector, have worked together to conceptualize a framework for the development of the higher education sector (the NEC National Policy Framework on University, Technical and Vocational Education, 2009). The UGC has a corporate plan for the development of the university sector, and all universities have corporate plans for the development of their institutions. SLIATE has a corporate plan for the development of the alternative higher education sector. The World Bank Higher Education Sector Report (2009), produced through a close process of collaboration with high level policy makers, senior government counterparts, the private sector and researchers, contributes to the policy thinking of the country, and is the most comprehensive and recent analysis of the higher education sector in Sri Lanka.

6. The country's policy framework for higher education development seeks to: (a) meet the special expansion and quality needs of the system in the lagging regions such as the Northern and Eastern Provinces; (b) promote social cohesion and national unity through research, advocacy, teaching and community services among staff and students from different ethnic and religious groups; (c) strengthen the quality of graduates and diploma holders entering the public sector, such as medical personnel, nurses and health workers, school teachers and education

administrators, and other public officials, and particularly to deliver basic public services in the lagging regions such as the Northern Province, Eastern Province and other outlying poor areas; (d) improve the economic relevance of higher education by promoting skills in demand in the labor market, such as English, IT and soft skills of arts, management and generalized science graduates, as well as increasing the provision of courses such as engineering, technology, medicine, specialized health sciences and job-oriented higher education programs in the alternative higher education sector; (e) strengthen the governance and policy framework of the higher education sector, including establishing a National Qualification Framework covering both the higher education and training sectors, and promoting quality assurance mechanisms for the full higher education system, including both state and non-state higher education institutions, and all modes of delivery including external degree programs; (f) improve the quality of higher education institutions, staff, degree programs, curricula and assessment methods; (g) promote private-public partnerships and private sector involvement in higher education; (h) expand postgraduate education and research; (i) enable higher education institutions to diversify sources of funding including through, among other measures, workplace linkages, commercialization of intellectual services, technology brokerage offices, and business offices; and (j) diversify the provision of higher education by attracting franchises of overseas higher education institutions, and strengthening open and distance education opportunities.

7. The proposed Higher Education for the Twenty First Century Project (HETC) is based on the policy relationship built with the NEC, MHE, UGC and SLIATE by the Bank, the analytical work of the Bank's Higher Education Sector Report, *The Towers of Learning* (2009), and extensive consultations with policy makers, universities, research institutions, academics, the private sector, civil society, students, and development partners. The HETC will assist the higher education sector to implement a set of strategic and innovative initiatives directly derived from the Government framework, the Bank's technical analysis, and the consultation process.

## **2. Objectives**

8. The project development objective is to enhance the capacity of the higher education system, institutions and human resources to deliver quality higher education services in line with equitable social and economic development needs.

### **Rationale for Bank Involvement**

9. There are several compelling reasons for the Bank to assist the higher education sector in Sri Lanka. First, the project will directly and explicitly support the Bank's agenda to address the causes and the consequences of the conflict in Sri Lanka and assist the country make the transition from a country in conflict to a country at peace. Second, the higher education sector is vitally important to produce the skilled and competent human resources needed to enable Sri Lanka to make the transition from a low-income country to a middle-income country. Third, the government has recently developed a policy framework for the development of the higher education sector through broad stakeholder and beneficiary consultations, and made a strong commitment to accelerate development. Fourth, the Bank has been assisting the higher education sector through the IRQUE project which seeks to strengthen the quality and relevance of selected undergraduate degree programs. The proposed new project is aimed at broadening and deepening the level of engagement and support for the sector. Fifth, the International Development

Association (IDA) has been the largest education donor in Sri Lanka, accounting for a major share of foreign assistance to the Sri Lanka's education sector during the last fifteen years. Specifically in the higher education sector, IDA is the only development partner with an interest and capacity to assist the government to achieve its development goals for the sector. Sixth, the Bank has considerable international experience in assisting countries to develop the quality and relevance of their higher education systems. The interaction between GOSL and the Bank during the implementation of the HETC will enable Sri Lanka to benefit from the Bank's global experience and expertise.

### **3. Description**

10. The HETC is organized into four components. The first component will support national level developments in the higher education sector. The second components would assist the development of universities, with a special emphasis on improving the quality of programs and the employability of graduates. The third component will support the development of the alternative higher education sector, which provides employment-oriented programs in areas of importance for the economy. The fourth component focuses on human resource development, as well as monitoring and evaluation, studies and communication.

#### **Component 1: Institutionalizing Norms for the Higher Education Sector**

11. The objective of this component is to develop the institutional foundation of the higher education sector in Sri Lanka. The component will operate at the national level, and is organized into two complementary sub-components.

##### ***Sub-component 1.1: Development of a Sri Lanka Qualification Framework***

12. The Sri Lanka Qualification Framework (SLQF) will be a key reform to transform higher education, and would: (a) combine academic and professional higher education into a coherent framework by bringing together disparate higher education and tertiary level training sub-systems into a unified system; (b) facilitate the progress of learners within and between the higher education and training systems, and open pathways for transition between training and higher education; and (c) create the potential to combine institution-based learning with skills acquisition through placements at work. The SLQF will cover both the university and the alternative higher education sectors, public and private HEIs, and classify the HEIs according to the knowledge and skill levels and the types of awards offered by the various institutions. Based on this classification, the SLQF will establish processes for horizontal and vertical mobility between the different types of HEIs, including protocols for credit transfer and parallel entry.

##### ***Sub-component 1.2: Establishment of a Quality Assurance System for the Higher Education Sector***

13. At present, a quality assurance mechanism has been developed for conventional undergraduate education in universities. The HETC will expand the coverage of the quality assurance activities to cover the full higher education sector, including postgraduate education and research, distance education and external degree programs (EDPs), and the alternative higher education sector, both public and private. The aim of the quality assurance system is to provide

assurance to government and the public at large that HEIs are delivering education services in line with agreed quality criteria and standards. The quality assurance system will be based on institutional norms and standards, and sets of subject benchmarks. The quality assurance process will operate at two levels. First, the institutional level, where quality assurance reviews will be conducted at the overall level of the HEIs: these institutional reviews will be utilized to strengthen the quality of HEIs. Second, the level of study programs, where quality assurance reviews will be conducted for academic and professional programs in the HEIs: these study program reviews will be utilized by HEIs to improve existing academic programs and to develop new programs. The findings from the quality assurance reviews will be available in the higher education management information system. This will facilitate the use of the quality assurance reviews for institutional strengthening and program development.

## **Component 2: Promoting Quality Teaching and Learning**

14. The overall objective of this component is to improve the social and economic relevance, and the quality, of university education. The component seeks to achieve this objective through two performance-based grants. The first sub-component, University Development Grants (UDGs), will be made available to all universities to promote ethnic harmony and national unity and to improve the employment-related skills of their graduates, with the allocation of funds among universities linked to the achievement of results. The second sub-component, Quality and Innovation Grants (QIGs), will be made available to competitively selected Faculties and study programs to improve the quality of their degree programs and to implement innovative development activities. The implementation of this component will be decentralized to universities.

### ***Sub-component 2.1: University Development Grants***

15. The University Development Grants (UDGs) will assist all universities to develop the social and economic relevance of higher education, particularly in areas identified by civil society and employers as of prime importance. In this context, the UDG will support activities to promote social cohesion among students and staff of different ethnic groups. In addition, the HETC will support universities to: (a) improve the English language skills of students; (b) increase the IT skills of students; and (c) promote soft skills such as team orientation, industriousness, communications skills, and entrepreneurship. The activities under the UDG will place special emphasis on promoting the employability of arts, commerce and general science graduates. The UDG will be implemented over two rounds. The first round will start at the commencement of the project. The second round will start in the third year of the project, and incorporate lessons learned from the first round to strengthen performance. The allocation of funds for the second round will also be linked to the achievement of key results in the first round. Universities that perform well during the first round will be eligible for higher allocations under the second round, while universities that perform less well during the first round would have their allocations reduced. This link between funding and results is expected to serve as an incentive and reward for all universities to perform well.

### ***Sub-component 2.2: Quality and Innovation Grants***

16. The Quality and Innovation Grants (QIG) will support strategic university study programs. Activities financed under the QIG will include curriculum reform, modernization of teaching, learning and assessment methods, innovative activities to improve the employability of graduates, and activities to strengthen university-industry linkages, such as work-place internships for students, technology commercialization offices and business centers. The eligible study programs will be selected on a competitive basis. It is expected that the competition for QIGs will help motivate attitudinal changes towards innovation and excellence among university academic staff.

17. About 60 QIGs will be made available over three successive rounds. The universities will be categorized into three tiers for the competition, based on their stages of development:

- Tier one: universities in the Northern and Eastern Provinces;
- Tier two: new regional universities; and
- Tier three: established universities.

The competition for QIG grants will be within these tiers, so that a level playing field is available for universities at different stages of development.

### **Component 3: Strengthening Alternative Higher Education**

18. The objective of this component is to assist GOSL to develop the alternative higher education sector. Programs in the alternative higher education sector are typically more directly job-oriented than programs in the conventional university sector, and of lower unit cost. As a result, they offer an attractive policy option to expand higher education and meet the needs of the economy in skill-intensive occupations. The component will have two mutually complementary sub-components.

#### ***Sub-component 3.1: Modernization of SLIATE***

19. Under this sub-component HETC will support the introduction of modern methods of curriculum delivery, especially through greater use of contemporary knowledge resources, and the promotion of cooperative program models with industry and business. The learning environment of ATIs will be modernized to enable technology-intensive pedagogy and learning. Advantage will be taken of economies of scale and scope through such ICT concepts as mass computing, web-based delivery, enterprise information portals, data warehousing and cloud computing. Also, the link between the ATIs and the work-place will be strengthened through the participation of employers and professional organizations in program advisory committees to provide input and advice on the structure, organization and content of academic programs, and the appointment of employers' representatives as part time teachers in ATI programs whenever possible. The HETC will also assist SLIATE to establish a Leadership and Quality Development Center (LQDC) to facilitate leadership and quality development initiatives. The HETC will support the establishment of rigorous programs to improve the capacity of SLIATE and ATI management to: (a) support policy, planning and review activities supported by effective management frameworks; (b) assist the development and implementation of effective curriculum models; (c) oversee the delivery of effective teaching and learning; and (d) support

the establishment and embedding of a quality culture in all ATI programs and activities. The LQDC will assist the academic decentralization of the SLIATE system and the greater empowerment of the ATIs.

### ***Sub-component 3.2: Promoting Regional Equity of Access to Alternative Higher Education***

20. At present, there are important gaps in access to alternative higher education opportunities in certain regions, particularly the Northern Province, the estate sector in the central highlands, and the far South-Eastern region. The HETC will support the establishment of three new ATI in these regions to fill these gaps. This will assist the expansion of job-oriented higher education opportunities for educated youth from these under-served areas. These ATIs will also serve as models of the next generation of ATIs, with close linkages to the work place, both in terms of integrating students' work placements into the curriculum, and the participation of employers in the management and teaching of programs. The project will also provide special support for the modernization of six further ATIs located in Eastern, Northern, Uva, Central, North-Western and Western Provinces.

### **Component 4: Human Resource Development, Monitoring and Evaluation, Studies, Coordination, and Communication**

21. The objective of this component is to strengthen the organizational capacity and human resources of the higher education sector, and to support monitoring and evaluation, policy analyses and dissemination. The component will have two complementary sub-components.

#### ***Sub-component 4.1: Human Resource Development***

22. Under this sub-component the project will support human resource development (HRD) of staff in the higher education sector. The HETC will assist higher education institutions to strengthen the quality of their academic staff through suitable postgraduate (PhD, Masters) programs. Also, the HETC will assist the MHE, UGC and SLIATE to strengthen the leadership and management capacity of managerial staff in higher education institutions. The HRD activities will be based on a rolling plan which outlines the goals and targets for the HRD activities for management, academic and technical staff. Priority will be given for the human resource development of staff in the less developed HEIs, such as the ATIs and universities in the Northern and Eastern Provinces and the new, regional universities and ATIs in the distant provinces. The MHE will coordinate the human resource development activities, with inputs from the UGC for the university sector and SLIATE for the ATIs.

#### ***Sub-component 4.2: Monitoring and Evaluation, Studies, Coordination and Communication***

23. Under this sub-component the HETC will support monitoring and evaluation, expansion of the higher education management information system developed for the university sector to cover the alternative higher education sector, and policy studies and communication of their findings. The monitoring and policy studies would include attitudinal studies of staff and students from different ethnic groups to assess the impact of activities to promote ethnic cohesion and national unity, tracer studies of graduates to analyze their job search and labor

market experience, and beneficiary satisfaction surveys among staff and students of HETC supported institutions and programs. Other studies needed would be identified during implementation. These would include policy analyses for future policy formulation and strategy development. The studies would mainly be done by universities, research institutions, and private consulting firms. Institutions such as the NEC, the MHE, UGC and SLIATE may also undertake some studies. The resources for communication would enable the higher education authorities to ensure that study findings are appropriately disseminated to political authorities, policy makers, academics and researchers, students, and the general public.

### **Areas of Key Policy Focus**

24. The HETC will emphasize four key areas which are of national priority.
- The development of higher education institutions in the Northern and Eastern Provinces.
  - The promotion of ethnic cohesion and national unity through the higher education system.
  - The improvement of quality in the less developed higher education institutions, such as the newer regional universities and the ATIs.
  - The promotion of employable graduates. In this context, improving the employability of graduates in the arts and humanities, and the external degree programs, will be of central importance.

### **Promoting Social Cohesion and National Unity.**

25. The HETC will be a flagship Bank operation to promote social cohesion in Sri Lanka. Under the University Development Grant resources will be made available for activities that support social cohesion between members of different ethnic and religious communities in the HEIs. These activities would include intellectual, cultural and sporting events, and community services, among students of different ethnic and religious groups, and from different regions of the country. The resources for social cohesion would also be available for academics of different ethnic and religious groups to undertake collaborative research work on topics that can contribute to mutual understanding and respect for diversity among the different ethnic and religious groups in Sri Lankan society. The HEIs play a leading role in the intellectual and cultural life of a country, and the promotion of social cohesion through the HEIs can be of substantial long-term benefit in the future.

#### **4. Financing**

Source:	(\$m.)
BORROWER/RECIPIENT	0
International Development Association (IDA)	40
Total	40

#### **5. Implementation**

26. The HETC will be managed and executed by the MHE. The UGC, which is the apex body for the university sector, will assist the MHE to execute the project in the university sector. SLIATE, which is the apex body for the alternative higher education sector, will assist the MHE to execute the project in the ATIs. Project activities will be implemented at two levels: national level and community level. National level activities will focus on strengthening the overall higher education sector. Community level activities will be based on the decentralization principle that services should be delivered by the agencies closest to the beneficiaries: in this context, the universities and ATIs.

27. National level: The MHE will implement the following activities: the development of the Sri Lanka Qualification Framework; the establishment of a Quality Assurance system for the full higher education sector; human resource development of managerial and administrative staff; and project management and coordination, monitoring and evaluation, and studies. The UGC will work with the MHE to implement these activities in the university sector. SLIATE will work with the MHE to implement these activities in the ATIs. The Policy Planning and Development Unit (PPDU) of the MHE will facilitate and coordinate project activities at the national level.

28. Community level: The academic communities, staff and students from the universities, will implement the activities under component two of the project: the University Development Grant (UDGs) and the Quality and Innovation Grants (QIGs). The Vice-Chancellors of the universities will have overall responsibility for the implementation of activities under the UDGs. The heads of the beneficiary study programs that receive QIGs, such as the Deans of Faculties and Heads of Departments, will have responsibility for the implementation of activities under the QIGs. In addition, the universities will implement the academic staff development activities, such as Ph.D and Masters degree programs. The universities will be supported by Operations Technical Secretariats (OTS's) to facilitate and coordinate project activities at the community level.

29. The academic communities, staff and students of the ATIs, will implement the activities under component three of the project: the delivery of programs with modernized curricula and teaching-learning methodologies; and the expansion of enrollment. The Directors of ATIs will have overall responsibility for the implementation of activities within their individual ATIs. The ATIs will also make use of the private sector, professional institutions and universities, for their academic staff development activities.

## **6. Sustainability**

30. Several elements of the HETC will strengthen and support sustainability.

***Widespread consensus on development initiatives to strengthen the higher education sector:*** The HETC has been prepared through an extensive process of consultation among policy makers, administrators, technocrats, employers, academics, researchers and students. The development initiatives supported under the project are the priority measures identified by the community of higher education stakeholders. Hence, there is now broad and deep commitment and support for these development initiatives.

***High priority awarded by the higher education policy makers:*** The HETC supports the overall higher education development framework of the country. The development initiatives selected are all contained within the programs of the key higher education agencies, the NEC which advises the President on education policy, the MHE which manages the overall higher education sector, the UGC which is the apex body for the university sector, and SLIATE which is the apex body for the alternative higher education sector. Further, the two key initiatives under the HETC to enhance the employability of graduates, improving the English and IT skills of students, have been declared as national priorities by the President of the country. Hence, the higher education development initiatives assisted by HETC enjoy high priority in Sri Lanka.

***Decentralization of activities and empowerment of higher education communities:*** The HETC provides considerable scope for creativity and innovation, with substantial decentralization of activities and empowerment of universities and study programs. Experience of this approach in other countries, such as Argentina, Chile, India, Ghana and Vietnam, as well as in Sri Lanka in the past, shows that the empowerment of individual institutions creates strong ownership of project activities among the higher education community, and enhances the sustainability of activities.

The resource allocation schemes introduced with the two grants under the second component (UDG and QIG), in particular, are expected to be sustainable in the long run from several points of view. In technical terms, they will use well fine-tuned instruments which have proved their efficacy in many Bank funded projects. Institutionally, they will also use well-oiled modes of operation. Politically, they will become indispensable instruments to maintain the momentum within the academic community. Financially, the government is keen to buy into these schemes, and their performance-based principle is a precursor of the new resource allocation formula that the government is currently considering.

## **7. Lessons Learned from Past Operations in the Country/Sector**

31. The implementation experience of the current IRQUE project and the Bank's higher education projects elsewhere suggest several key lessons for the proposed new operation.

- (a) Decentralization of project activities to the level of individual institutions, such as universities and ATIs, creates more ownership and facilitates implementation. The project will adopt this model of decentralized implementation to individual higher education institutions for the majority of project activities. The only activities at the center would be policy formulation, strategy development, monitoring and evaluation.
- (b) Quality assurance activities are very useful for HEIs to improve their performance. The initial quality assurance reviews, such as the internal analysis of an HEI's strengths and weaknesses, facilitates the preparation of a sound medium-term action plan to develop the institution. The subsequent quality assurance reviews, with external and international peer reviewers, provides objective information on the progress of the development initiatives, and the international standing of institutions and study programs. This information can then be fed back into the future development of the HEIs.

- (c) Resources allocated on the basis of competition, such as the Quality and Innovation Grant, need to be provided through multiple rounds. This enables faculties and study programs that are unsuccessful in winning grants under the earlier rounds to improve their proposals and/or performance to win grants in subsequent rounds. In consequence, it provides an incentive and stimulus for study programs to improve their proposals and performance and become eligible for project funds over time.
- (d) Weaker higher education institutions (HEIs), such as the HEIs in the Northern and Eastern Provinces, and the newer universities and ATIs, need extra support for capacity building, especially during the early years of implementation. The project would devote special policy attention and funds for capacity building to the weaker HEIs.
- (e) A well-functioning monitoring and evaluation system is very important to ensure that there is strong implementation, with a focus on the key results and outcomes to be achieved through the project. Information from this system can also feed into program improvement and future policy design.
- (f) A strong communications strategy, where knowledge derived from policy studies and monitoring and evaluation activities is disseminated widely can be of great benefit. It makes information about the projects' activities available to stakeholders and beneficiaries, such as students, HEI staff and employers, and can serve to stimulate HEIs to strengthen their performance. It can also promote debate and discussion on higher education policies.

## 8. Safeguard Policies (including public consultation)

<b>Safeguard Policies Triggered by the Project</b>	Yes	No
<u>Environmental Assessment (OP/BP 4.01)</u>	[x]	[ ]
Natural Habitats (OP/BP 4.04)	[ ]	[x]
Pest Management (OP 4.09)	[ ]	[x]
Physical Cultural Resources (OP/BP 4.11)	[ ]	[x]
Involuntary Resettlement (OP/BP 4.12)	[ ]	[x]
Indigenous Peoples (OP/BP 4.10)	[ ]	[x]
Forests (OP/BP 4.36)	[ ]	[x]
Safety of Dams (OP/BP 4.37)	[ ]	[x]
Projects in Disputed Areas (OP/BP 7.60)*	[ ]	[x]
Projects on International Waterways (OP/BP 7.50)	[ ]	[x]

\* By supporting the proposed project, the Bank does not intend to prejudice the final determination of the parties' claims on the disputed areas

## 9. List of Factual Technical Documents

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