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Welsh Government

Early Years Speech, Language and Communication Training Framework for Wales

An All-Wales framework for practitioners working with babies and young children aged 0-5 years



Introduction

The Early Years speech, language and communication training framework for Wales (subsequently referred to as the early years training framework) is a tool that all practitioners can use, to identify their training needs regarding Speech, Language and Communication (SLC) development. The early years training framework replaces the All Wales Speech, Language and Communication (SLC) training pathway. It has been designed to align with Speech and Language UK's Skills Discovery Tool, the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018 (ALNET), Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care (ECPLC) and the Curriculum for Wales.

The early years training framework enables practitioners and leaders, at all levels, to clearly identify what training they need, how to access the necessary training and how to ensure training leads to meaningful improvements in practice, environments and outcomes for babies and young children.

It will offer opportunities to further develop workforce skills and knowledge in SLC so that every practitioner has access to information and training in order to promote positive outcomes for the babies and young children in their care.

There are many SLC training courses available across Wales which will meet the specified requirements, and not all courses will be available in all localities. Examples are given within the early years training framework, but this document does not attempt to provide an exhaustive course directory. In some cases, refresher training will be recommended and timescales specified. It is important that refresher training is factored into ongoing continued professional development (CPD) or learning plans and it would be beneficial for timescales to be agreed locally for this.



Identifying training requirements

Training requirements will vary within every setting. Leaders will need to identify what will meet the needs of individual settings and babies and young children, although all staff should have a universal level of understanding of SLC development.

The early years play a critical role in babies and young children's development and lay the foundations for lifelong learning and wellbeing.

Speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) are one of the most common types of additional learning need (ALN) in Wales. It is essential for adults to observe, notice and respond sensitively to all babies and young children, including those with SLCN, to enhance their understanding of the developmental needs of babies and young children.

This early years training framework aims to identify the key skills and knowledge needed by all enabling adults to support the SLC development of all babies and young children aged 0-5 years.

Implementing the early years training framework

The implementation of the early years training framework is the responsibility of local settings, authorities and partners, and local arrangements will inevitably vary. While some of the courses which meet the requirements are free, others require funding, and this will need to be planned for and communicated at local authority or regional consortium level.

Quality assurance arrangements will vary locally and are also the responsibility of each local authority and partners.



Why the early years training framework is important

It is crucial for all enabling adults working with babies and young children aged 0-5 years to have an understanding of speech, language, and communication development, as these foundational skills play a pivotal role in a child's overall development. Early and effective communication skills are essential for social integration, emotional well-being and academic success. Babies and young children with SLCN may struggle to fully engage with their peers, understand instructions, or express themselves effectively, which can lead to broader challenges in learning and personal development. By recognising the importance of SLC development, practitioners can better support babies and young children in overcoming these challenges, fostering their confidence, and ensuring they have the tools needed to succeed in all of their environments.



Data from PLASC 2026, WIMD 2025 and published research tells us that:

- 37% of children in Wales with ALN have SLCN, the most common type of ALN in Wales
- 34% of children with SLCN live in areas of high social disadvantage
- Children with lower vocabulary scores at age 5 are twice as likely to experience periods of unemployment in adulthood
- 81% of children with emotional and behavioural disorders have communication needs not previously identified
- 71% of children sentenced in the youth justice system in England and Wales had SLCN, (data gathered between April 2019 – March 2020).

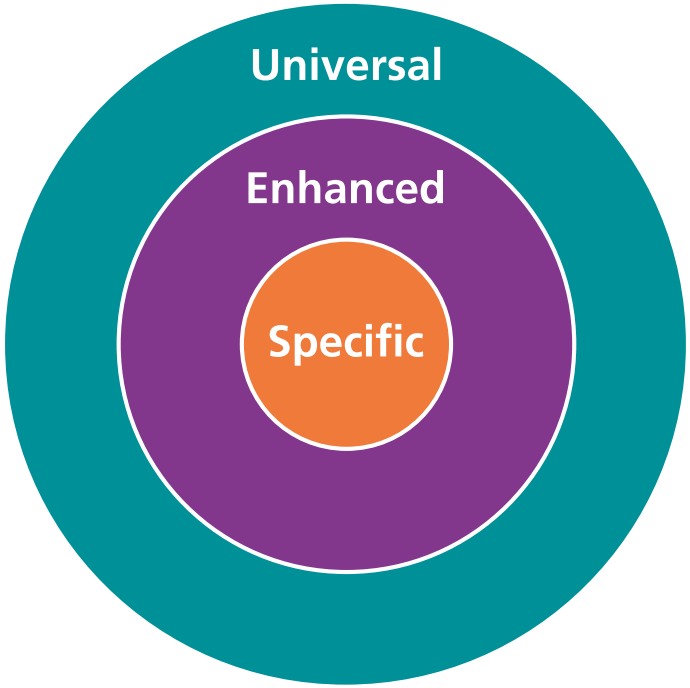
More information can be found in these infographics.

The three levels of the early years training framework

The early years training framework is divided into 3 levels that support the different roles of all enabling adults when working with all babies and young children, including those with SLCN. Within each level, consideration is needed about how to develop engaging experiences and effective environments to meet the needs of all babies and young children with SLCN. **The 3 levels are:**

Universal

Every adult working in an environment with babies and young children should have a Universal knowledge of SLCN. This level provides an introduction to understanding SLC development and how to support all babies and young children, including those with SLCN, within all aspects of their day-to-day life.



Enhanced

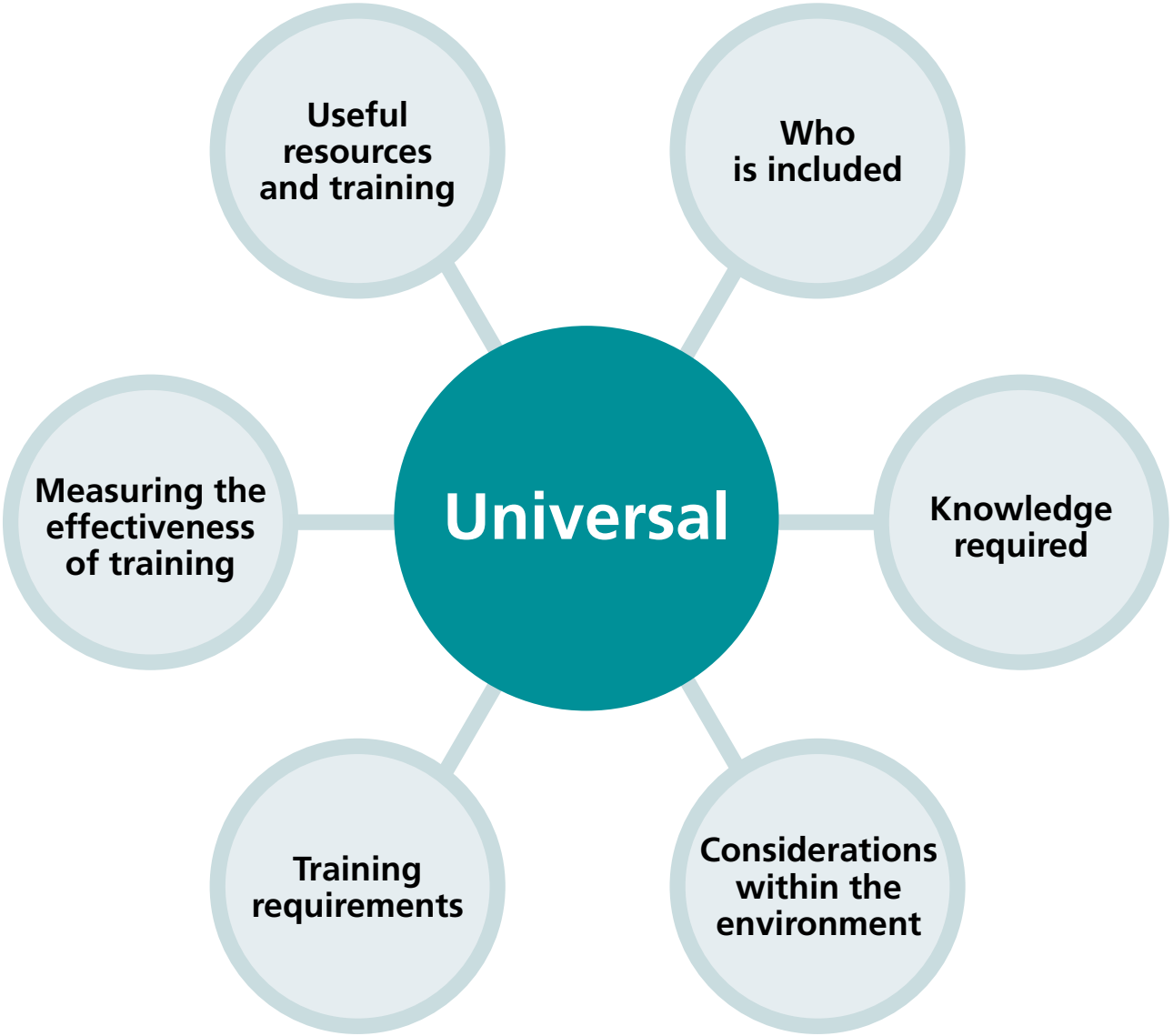
The Enhanced level aims to develop key skills for those adults working directly with babies and young children to identify and support SLCN.

Specific

The Specific level is for those adults who play a significant role in supporting SLCN and may provide direct specialist and specific interventions.

- **SLC Universal** – all enabling adults have a universal level understanding of SLCN and know how to create an effective environment for every learner to thrive.
- **SLC Enhanced** – all enabling adults working directly with babies and young children at risk of SLCN have an enhanced understanding of how to identify and support SLCN.
- **SLC Specific** – all enabling adults who have a specific role to support babies and young children with SLCN have specialist and in-depth knowledge of how to identify and support SLCN.

SLC Universal



SLC Universal (continued)

All enabling adults will have a universal level understanding of SLCN and know how to create an effective environment for every child to thrive.

Who is included	• Everyone who comes into contact with babies and young children during the day. This includes, but is not limited to: – administration staff – catering staff – childcare practitioners – childminders – leaders – nursery/reception staff.
Knowledge required	• A basic awareness and knowledge of SLC and SLCN. • Can explain the terms "speech," "language" and "communication," for example, that language includes both understanding and talking. • An awareness of how to identify features of SLCN. • An understanding and awareness of how to respond and engage with babies and young children who have SLCN. • A basic level of understanding of how learning more than one language has many benefits and does not cause SLCN.
Considerations within the environment	• An understanding of the influence of the environment on babies and young children's SLC development and identifying key features of a supportive communication environment. • The knowledge and confidence in using techniques to help babies and young children develop their SLC skills.
Training requirements	• A basic understanding of typical SLC skills. • Practical strategies for support for all babies and young children across activities. • The importance of SLC skills to learning and wellbeing. • Knowledge of the challenges related to SLCN and how they may impact on development and wellbeing.

SLC Universal (continued)

Measuring the effectiveness of training	• All practitioners should identify an increase in knowledge and confidence through: – self-evaluation tools – pre- and post-training questionnaires – quality assurance, which will be agreed locally. • A range of self-evaluation tools are available for practitioners and settings. These are included or discussed in the training courses within the pathway, and include: – Elklan checklists (only available to practitioners who have undertaken Elklan courses) – Speech and Language UK checklists are free and links are provided here for reference: Communication Supporting Classroom Observation Tool (CSCOT) – Speech and Language UK: Changing young lives.

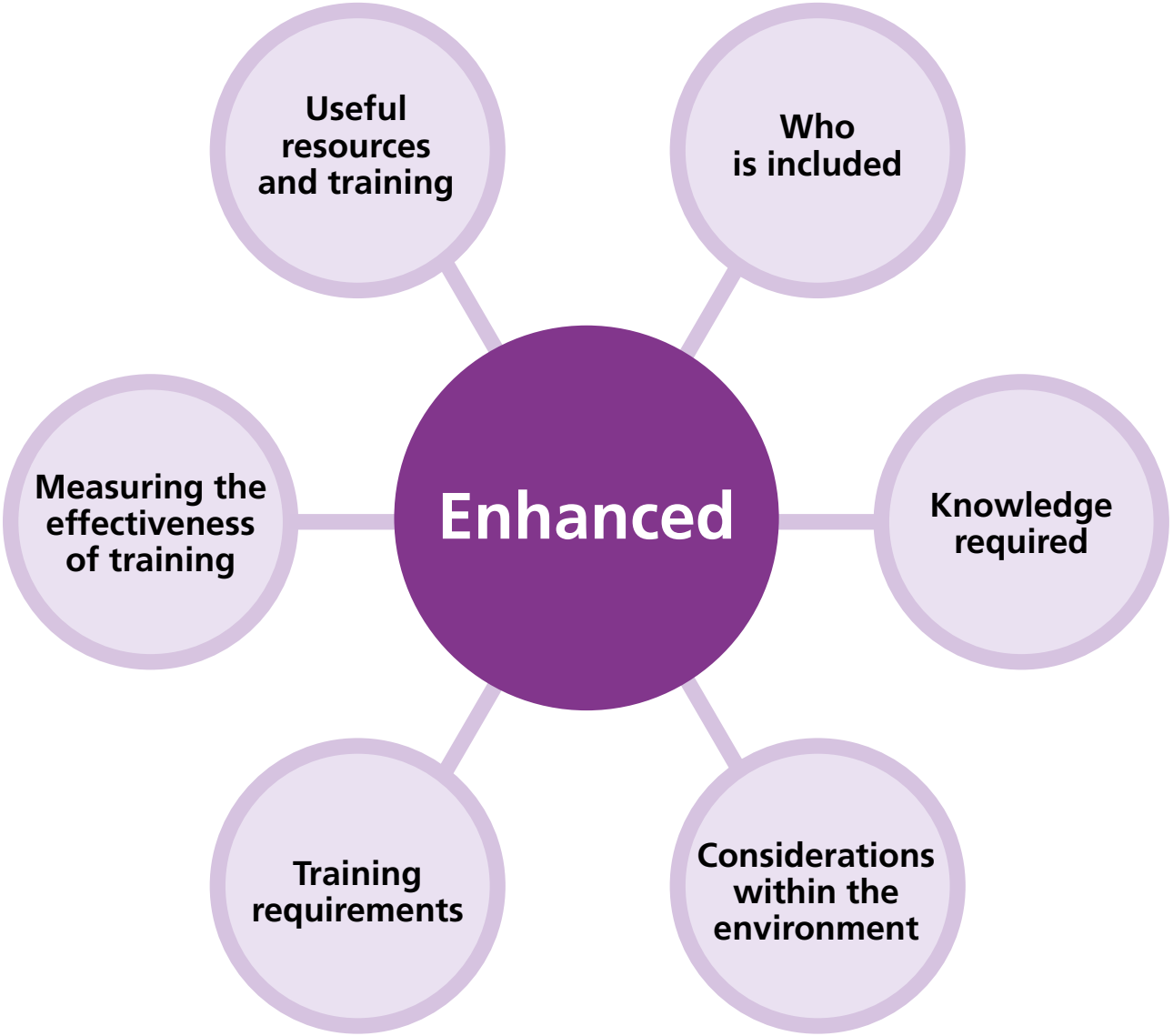
SLC Universal (continued)

Useful resources and training	• 'Introductory level' courses refer to entry level competencies in terms of SLC and SLCN. Examples of these can be found at: – Guidance for practitioners who provide Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care (ECPLC) for children aged 0-4 years – Skills Discovery Tool (Speech & Language UK) – Speech and Language UK's tools and training (includes specific training for childminders) – Talk with Me information and resources for families – Talk with Me information and resources for practitioners – Talk with me: Speech, Language and Communication (SLC) – ExChange – The Communication Trust (TCT) short course is an online introduction to Speech, Language and Communication (SLC). The course is free and takes approximately half a day to complete. • Elklan are training providers specialising in SLC. They train trainers to deliver courses locally according to need. Examples of Elklan courses include: – An Introduction to Speech, Language and Communication a short free e-learning course – Speech and Language Support for 0-3s | Elklan Training Ltd (Welsh language handbooks are available in Libraries across Wales) – Speech and Language Support for 3-5s | Elklan Training Ltd.

SLC Universal (continued)

Useful resources and training (continued)	• Hanen are also training providers specialising in SLC: – The Hanen Centre – Learning Language and Loving It™ Program for Early Childhood Educators (Welsh language handbooks are available in Libraries across Wales). • Welsh Government: – 'Developmental Pathways' Hwb playlist – 'Talk with Me' Hwb playlist. • Health & Care Learning Wales: Childcare, Play, Learning and Development (CCPLD): – The suite of Child Care, Play, Learning and Development (CCPLD) qualifications include SLC at level 2, level 3 and level 4. The content at levels 3 and 4 meet the competencies at universal and enhanced level, respectively. NB: previous entry level childcare qualifications did not include content to meet SLC competencies. • 'Y Ty Dysgu': – The parent-infant relationship and infant mental health e-learning course. • Bespoke training: – Bespoke introductory SLCN training arranged by local services. Bespoke training will be identified by a specialist (e.g. Speech and Language Therapist) and is specific to the needs of the setting or individual, e.g. Signing; Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC). While these are specialist topics, they may be relevant and necessary for staff at all levels of the pathway depending on the topic and the needs of the child or babies and young children.

SLC Enhanced



SLC Enhanced (continued)

All enabling adults working directly with babies and young children at risk of SLCN have an enhanced understanding of how to identify and support SLCN.

Who is included	• Those who work directly with babies and young children, including, but not limited to: – Early years additional learning needs lead officer (EYALNLO) – Leaders – Learning support assistants – Nursery/reception staff – Parents and carers – Volunteers. • All enabling adults who support typical SLC development as part of their role. • Those who are likely to be involved in identifying babies and young children with SLCN or work with those with SLCN. • All enabling adults providing targeted interventions for babies and young children with SLCN either as 1:1 or small groups, for example learning support assistants, leaders (targeted depending on cohort).
Additional knowledge required	• Skills and knowledge required for SLC Universal together with: – a thorough understanding of typical SLC development and causes of SLCN including risk factors – the ability to explain links between SLCN and other areas of development – a detailed understanding of SLCN to make informed decisions and support individual babies and young children.
Considerations within the environment	• Able to make adaptations to working practices and physical environments. • An ability to use a range of strategies to support babies and young children with SLCN. • Enhanced knowledge and understanding of how to create a communication-friendly environment to meet the needs of all babies and young children with SLCN.

SLC Enhanced (continued)

Training requirements	• How to adapt the activities to be developmentally appropriate for the needs of babies and young children with a range of SLCN. • An understanding of the specific range of needs related to SLCN. • An awareness of how to recognise behaviours that might indicate SLCN and an understanding of the impact of these needs on other areas of development. • Familiarity with identification tools or processes for referring babies and young children to specialist services, specific to local arrangements.
Measuring the effectiveness of training	• Increase in knowledge and confidence as identified through: – self-evaluation tools – pre- and post-training questionnaires – quality assurance, which will be agreed locally. • There are several evaluation tools for practitioners and settings: – Elklan checklists (available to practitioners who have completed an Elklan course) – What Works database for evidence of efficacy.
Useful resources and training	• Communication Friendly Settings – Early Years | Elklan Training Ltd • NCFE CACHE Level 3 Award in Supporting Babies and young children and Young People's Speech, Language and Communication • NAPLIC's DLD resources for schools and families • Speech and Language UK's tools and training • Speech and Language Support for 0-3s | Elklan Training Ltd • Speech and Language Support for 3-5s | Elklan Training Ltd.

SLC Specific



SLC Specific (continued)

All enabling adults who have a specific role to support babies and young children with SLCN have specialist and in-depth knowledge of how to identify and support SLCN.

Who is included	• Those who have a specific role within SLC and support babies and young children who have SLCN, including but not limited to: – Early years additional learning needs lead officer (EYALNLO) – Lead communication practitioner or SLC champion – Specialist practitioners who are supporting individual babies and young children with needs related to SLC. • All enabling adults who have a significant role in supporting SLCN, including, but not limited to: – Early years specialist teachers – Learning support assistants. • All enabling adults who spend a significant amount of their working life supporting babies and young children with SLCN. • Those who play a significant role in identifying and assessing babies and young children with SLCN. • Those who are likely to support other practitioners in working with babies and young children with SLCN.
Additional knowledge required	• Skills and knowledge required at the SLC Universal and SLC Enhanced levels together with the: – ability to identify babies and young children at risk of long-term SLCN – skills to support other practitioners working with babies and young children with SLCN – ability to provide specialist interventions to support specific babies and young children with SLCN.
Considerations within the environment	• An in-depth knowledge of the impact of the environment on SLC development and the ability to adapt the environment to ensure that all areas of the school are communication friendly. • The knowledge and confidence when using techniques to help babies and young children develop their SLC skills and advise other school staff on how to approach the curriculum and differentiate tasks in a pedagogically appropriate way.

SLC Specific (continued)

Training requirements	• An in-depth understanding of SLCN. • A thorough understanding of the behaviours that might indicate SLCN and a knowledge of the impact of these needs on other areas of development, for example behaviour and sensory needs. • Experience of using identification tools and interpreting these to plan and support babies and young children with specific SLCN while working in collaboration with specialist services such as speech and language therapists (SLTs), specific to your local arrangements. • Appropriate specialist knowledge of the particular needs of the babies and young children they work with, for example Deaf babies and young children, alternative augmentative communication (AAC) users. • How to advocate and raise awareness of SLCN among all enabling adults to create an inclusive and effective environment, including supporting babies and young children with engaging experiences and any transitions.
Measuring the effectiveness of training	• Increase in knowledge and confidence as identified through: – self-evaluation tools – pre- and post-training questionnaires – quality assurance which will be agreed locally. • There are several evaluation tools for practitioners and settings: – Elklan checklists (available once practitioners have completed a course) – What Works database for evidence of efficacy.

SLC Specific (continued)

Useful resources and training	• Communication Friendly Settings – Early Years | Elklan Training Ltd • Elklan's Higher Level Communication Practitioner Award • Elklan's specialist courses for practitioners Examples of specialist courses include 'Supporting pupils with hearing difficulties/unclear speech/verbal pupils with ASD' • NAPLIC DLD bubble toolkit • NAPLIC DLD friendly audit • RADLD (Raising Awareness of Developmental Language Disorder) • Speech and Language UK tools and training • Speech & Language UK training database • STAMMA • Training courses on selective mutism.

Appendix 1: Training record for settings

This template has been designed to help setting leaders to keep track of the training requirements and status of practitioners. It is provided as an Excel spreadsheet along with the electronic version of the pathway and is fully editable to enable practitioners to include e.g. bespoke local training. The Excel version is available for you to download at Speech, language and communication training resources – ExChange

		Name of course:			**Name of course:**			**Name of course:**		
Name of practitioner	Level of Skill (see competencies on pathway)	Required? Y/N	Completed? Y/N/NA	Date completed, if applicable	Required? Y/N	Completed? Y/N/NA	Date completed	Required? Y/N	Completed? Y/N/NA	Date completed

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Rydym yn croesawu gohebiaeth a galwadau ffôn yn Gymraeg / We welcome correspondence and telephone calls in Welsh