The role of the special educational needs coordinator (SENCo)
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**Audience**
Local authorities (LAs) and education professionals.

**Overview**
This guidance provides advice to LAs and education professionals on the role of the SENCo and helps them to support a more consistent approach to SENCo practice across Wales.

**Action required**
LAs and educational professionals should consider this advice in relation to the expected support that SENCos can provide with respect to planning, target setting and interventions for learners with special educational needs (SEN).

**Further information**
Enquiries about this document should be directed to:
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**Additional copies**
This document can be accessed from the Learning Wales website at gov.wales/learning
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1. Introduction

About this guidance

This guidance relates to the Welsh Ministers’ duty to promote the education of the people of Wales and their power in relation to the promotion or improvement of the economic, social and environmental well-being of Wales. It provides advice to the governing bodies and staff of maintained nursery, primary and secondary schools and local authorities (LAs) on supporting the role of special educational needs coordinators (SENCos) in Wales.

In this document, the term ‘education setting’ is used to refer to maintained nursery, primary and secondary schools. The term ‘parent’ has its usual education law meaning: it covers natural parents (whether married or not); anyone else with parental responsibility in respect of a child or young person; and carers (those who have care of a child or young person). There is guidance for schools on applying this definition in “Parents” and “Parental Responsibility”: Guidance for Schools (2007).

The Welsh Government is committed to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) as the underpinning basis for its policies concerning children and young people in Wales. The approach outlined in this guidance is based upon and consistent with the provisions of the UNCRC: including that children have a right to an education (Article 28), and that children who have any kind of disability should have special care and support so that they can lead full and decent lives (Article 23).

The guidance also aligns to our goal within the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 to be a more equal Wales by supporting an inclusive, equitable education system where all learners are supported to overcome barriers to learning and participation.

This is non-statutory guidance. However, the guidance should be used to clarify the role of the SENCo and to encourage the sharing of good practice among education professionals.

General principles of meeting the educational needs of learners with special educational needs (SEN)

LAs have a legal responsibility to ensure suitable educational provision is made available to all children. In doing so, they must have due regard to the Special

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1 Section 10 of the Education Act 1996 (http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1996/56/section/10). The Secretary of State’s function under section 10 in relation to Wales has been transferred to the Welsh Ministers (National Assembly for Wales (Transfer of Functions) Order 1999 (S.I. 199/672) and Government of Wales Act 2006, Schedule 11).
4 http://www.legislation.gov.uk/anaw/2015/2/contents
Educational Needs Code of Practice for Wales⁵ (2004) which provides practical advice to them, education settings and others on carrying out their responsibility to identify, assess, and provide for learners with SEN. LAs should also consider the Inclusion and Pupil Support (IPS)⁶ (2016) guidance, which provides a foundation for them and maintained schools when planning an inclusive education service that focuses on a model of differentiated support for all learners. The IPS guidance highlights the need to support learners who may require extra support to ensure they receive the most suitable education they need and deserve.

Supporting learners with SEN is a matter for all education settings and their staff. The Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCo) plays a pivotal role in ensuring the coordination of special educational provision is delivered to those learners, within their education setting, who have SEN. The SENCo will work with other teachers and parents to make sure learners with SEN receive support during their education. Much more than that, the SENCo is critical to the development of a culture of high aspirations and improved outcomes for learners with SEN. Although the SENCo is a non-statutory role, the vast majority of education settings will have access to a SENCo.

Subject to the National Assembly for Wales approving new legislation on additional learning needs (ALN), the Welsh Government intends to introduce Additional Learning Needs Co-ordinators (ALNCOs), a statutory role that will replace existing SENCOs. The experience and responsibilities of ALNCOs would be prescribed in regulations made under the new primary legislation. The guidance in this document will be updated in accordance with these changes.

**Purpose of this guidance**

The purpose of this guidance is to support the delivery of a more inclusive education system by clarifying the role of the SENCo, whoever that may be, and thus supporting a more consistent approach to SENCo practice across Wales. It provides advice on planning, target setting and interventions that will support learners with SEN.

The key aims of this guidance are to:

- clarify the roles and responsibilities of SENCOs and others involved in ensuring suitable educational provision is made available to learners with SEN
- highlight the principles of the SENCo role
- signpost SENCOs to professional development opportunities and resources to help further enhance their knowledge and expertise in the field of SEN.

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2. Roles and responsibilities

LAs and education settings have responsibilities to ensure suitable educational provision is provided to learners with SEN. This section provides an overview of the specific roles of the SENCo, LAs, governing bodies, teaching practitioners, learners and parents, in ensuring provision is delivered.

The role and responsibilities of SENCos

The SENCo is the individual with overall responsibility for ensuring the coordination of provision for all learners with SEN within the school is undertaken. The role should be viewed in the same light as other strategic roles undertaken within the school.

The SENCo, working closely with the headteacher, senior management and fellow teachers, should be closely involved in the strategic development of SEN policy and provision. The SENCo has responsibility for day-to-day operation of the education setting’s SEN policy and for coordinating provision for learners with SEN, particularly through School Action and School Action Plus.

SENCos should adopt the key principles of an effective SENCo which include a focus on:

- their own professional development
- leading, developing and supporting colleagues
- working in partnership with learners, families and other professionals.

Further information on the key principles of an effective SENCo can be found at Annex A.

The *Special Educational Needs Code of Practice for Wales* provides advice on the role of SENCos in a range of education settings. The key responsibilities that should apply to all SENCos include:

- overseeing the records of all learners with SEN but ensuring the relevant information about the individual is collected, recorded and updated
- liaising with and advising colleagues
- managing the SEN team of teachers and/or learning support assistants
- contributing to the professional development and training of staff
- ensuring liaison with parents and other professionals in respect of learners with SEN
- liaising with external agencies including the LA’s support and educational psychology services, health and social services, voluntary bodies and also Careers Wales for school-aged learners approaching post-16.

When a learner is known to have SEN when they arrive at the education setting, the SENCo, headteacher and other staff should:
• in a timely fashion, seek to use information arising from the learner's previous educational experience to provide starting points for the development of an appropriate curriculum for the child

• ensure that the learner’s learning styles are taken into account to ensure there are planned opportunities for continuity and progression

• identify and focus attention on the learner's skills and highlight areas for early action to support the learner within the class

• use the curricular and baseline assessment processes to allow the child to show what they know, understand and can do, as well as to identify any learning difficulties

• ensure that ongoing observation and assessment provide regular feedback to teachers and parents about the learner’s achievements and experiences and that the outcomes of such assessment form the basis for planning the next steps of the learner's learning

• involve parents in developing and implementing a joint learning approach at home and in school.

It is vital that the SENCo has sufficient time and resource to undertake their responsibilities effectively, including time away from teaching. The headteacher should ensure that the SENCo is supported in this way. The role should not generally be combined with other, non-teaching, responsibilities.

SENCos will also support schools in monitoring the impact of interventions and their outcomes for learners with SEN as part of the school’s full range of attainment and learner related information.

SENCos will manage a large amount of information about learners with SEN and be knowledgeable about SEN issues generally; this information and knowledge can contribute to the school’s monitoring and systems.

**The role and responsibilities of local authority education departments**

LAs, in partnerships with schools, should place the highest priority on their statutory duty to promote high standards of education for all children, including those with SEN. The delivery of educational provision for learners with SEN will often be led by the LA’s inclusion team.

LAs, usually via their inclusion teams, should make effective arrangements for SEN by ensuring that:

• the needs of learners and young people with SEN are identified and assessed quickly and matched by appropriate provision

• high quality support is provided for education settings – including, through educational psychology and other support services

• effective arrangements for sharing good practice in provision for learners with SEN are in place
• learners with SEN can benefit from co-ordinated provision – by developing close partnerships with parents, schools, health and social services and the voluntary sector
• strategic planning is carried out in consultation with schools and others to develop systems for monitoring SEN and having accountability for SEN.

The Special Educational Needs (Provision of Information by Local Education Authorities) (Wales) Regulations 2002 require LAs to publish their policies on SEN and information about how the authority is:

• promoting high standards of education for learners with SEN
• encouraging learners with SEN to participate fully in their school and community and to take part in decisions about their education
• encouraging schools in their area to share their practice in providing for learners with SEN
• working with other statutory and voluntary bodies to provide support for learners with SEN.

Under the same regulations, LAs must also publish their general arrangements, including any plans setting out objectives, targets and timescales covering local arrangements for:

• identifying learners with SEN
• monitoring the admission of learners with SEN to maintained schools in their area
• organising the assessment of learners’ SEN statements, including any local protocols for doing so
• providing support to schools with regard to making provision for learners with SEN
• auditing, planning, monitoring and reviewing provision for learners with SEN (generally and in relation to individual pupils)
• supporting learners with SEN through School Action and School Action Plus
• securing training, advice and support for staff working in SEN
• reviewing and updating the policy and development plans on a regular basis.

The role and responsibilities of school governing bodies

All maintained school governing bodies have important statutory duties in relation to children with SEN. School governing bodies should, with the headteacher, decide the school’s general policy and approach to meeting children’s SEN. They must set up appropriate staffing and funding arrangements and oversee the school’s work. The school governing body may also appoint a committee to monitor the school’s work for children with SEN.

School governing bodies have legal duties under the Education Act 1996 to:

• use their best endeavours, in exercising their functions in relation to the school, to secure that, if any registered pupil has SEN, the SEN provision which their learning difficulty calls for is provided
- make sure that the 'responsible person' makes all staff who are likely to teach the child aware of those needs. The 'responsible person' is generally the headteacher, but may be the chair of the governing body or a governor appointed by the governing body to take that responsibility. If the 'responsible person' is the headteacher, it may be helpful for one other governor to have an interest in special needs
- make sure that the teachers are aware of the importance of identifying children who have SEN and of providing appropriate teaching
- consult the LA and the governing bodies of other schools when it seems necessary to coordinate special educational teaching in the area
- make arrangements to allow children with SEN to join in the everyday activities of the school as far as is practical
- report each year to parents on their policy for children with SEN
- have regard to the Special Educational Needs Code of Practice for Wales when carrying out their duties towards all children with SEN.

The governing body must admit a child whose statement of SEN names their school. Before naming a school in a statement the LA must consult the governing body of that school.

The parents of children with statements of SEN have the right to state a preference for a particular maintained school for their child. The LA must meet the parents’ preference as long as the school is suitable for the child, the other children at the school are educated effectively, and resources are used efficiently.

**The role and responsibilities of teaching practitioners**

Provision for pupils with SEN is a matter for the education setting as a whole. The headteacher, the SENCo or the SEN team and all other members of staff, especially teaching assistants (TAs), have important responsibilities. Teachers in particular should play an active part in helping to identify learners with SEN and delivering suitable provision for their needs.

Working closely with the SENCo, teachers, and teaching assistants where appropriate, should:

- be involved in the development of the education setting’s SEN policy
- be fully aware of the education setting’s procedures for identifying, assessing and making provision for pupils with SEN
- liaise with and advise fellow teachers regarding learners with SEN
- monitor the progress of learners with SEN and advise parents and the headteacher accordingly
- ensure involvement in appropriate continuous professional development (CPD) that leads to enhancement of skills to support learners with SEN.
The roles and responsibilities of learners and their parents

Learners with SEN have a unique knowledge of their own needs and circumstances, and have their own views about what sort of support they would like to help them to make the most of their education. They should feel confident that they will be listened to and that their views are valued. Schools should ensure that the learner is placed at the centre of decisions about their educational provision and encourage learners to play an active part in making these decisions.

Parents hold key information and have a critical role to play in their child’s education. Parents have unique knowledge and experience to contribute to the shared view of their child’s needs and the best ways of supporting them. Parents should work closely with schools and where necessary LAs, to ensure that any provision provided is in the best interests of their child’s needs.

Effective deployment of support staff

Learning support staff can be an important resource to the SENCo when coordinating provision of support across the school. Learning support staff can provide specialist skills to support learners with SEN, and will offer both practical and administrative support to the SENCo. The SENCo should, therefore, have a role in the coordination of learning support staff and be given the opportunity to feed in to how they are deployed within the setting. Learning support staff are one of a number of resources available to SENCos.

Local SENCo networks

Many LAs will have established SENCo networks. SENCo networks act as a hub for SENCos to share best practice across education settings and keep up to date on local and national developments. Many SENCo networks will discuss approaches to measuring learners’ achievement and progress and monitoring learner outcomes and expectations. Network sessions can also be used as a professional development opportunity.

LAs will be able to advise on any SENCo networks in their area.
3. Professional development

The professional development of education practitioners is fundamental to the effective operation of the SEN system. Education settings are responsible for ensuring systems and processes are in place to identify the professional learning needs of its workforce and should provide appropriate support to meet those needs. Schools in particular should be utilising their school development plans to perform this function. As part of this, each school setting should have access to at least one individual with advanced skills. Generally this individual is the SENCo.

Teaching practitioners have responsibility for their own professional learning and development. All should undertake appropriate professional learning in relation to SEN to ensure they remain equipped to meet the needs of all learners. This is particularly important for those taking on the role of the SENCo.

There are a range of education providers who offer support and professional learning to different education settings on specific teaching approaches for learners with SEN, as well as on specific types of SEN. Formal qualifications are available through further education and higher education provision and informal training opportunities may be available through special schools, LAs and regional consortia.

All teaching practitioners are required to register with the Education Workforce Council\(^7\) (EWC) who will maintain the registration and the professional standards for the teaching profession in Wales. All SENCos and teaching practitioners should ensure their registration includes an up-to-date record of their role and their Professional Learning Passport, hosted by EWC, which enables them to record and plan their professional learning in respect of SEN.

Resources

Teaching practitioners who need to improve their knowledge and/or skills in relation to different types of SEN are able to access information, guidance, tools and/or training materials, which have been developed by the Welsh Government, via the Learning Wales website\(^8\) and the Hwb digital learning platform\(^9\). Some examples can be found at Annex A.

LAs also provide information on specific SEN types and advice on the services that they can offer.

There is a variety of information available online regarding SENCos. YouTube, for example, holds a vast amount of information and shared practice in undertaking the role of a SENCo (N.B. Always check the credibility of a video and the date it was put up to ensure its relevance. The Welsh Government is not responsible for the content of any external web link).

\(^7\) http://www.ewc.wales/site/index.php/en/
\(^8\) http://learning.gov.wales/?skip=1&lang=en
\(^9\) http://hwb.wales.gov.uk/
Annex A: Exemplifying the role of an effective SENCo

The professional teaching standards currently set out the requirements for all teachers, including SENCos and the leadership standards set out the requirements for headteachers as well as being used as a tool to support the leadership development of all practitioners. Professional standards are also available for higher level teaching assistants and all these standards are currently contained within the same document. The standards set out clear expectations for meeting the needs of all learners, including those with SEN. These professional standards are currently under review with new standards being expected to be available from September 2017 for teachers and by September 2018 for teaching assistants.

To provide further support and direction for the work of SENCos the following breakdown is intended to serve as a useful checklist for SENCos and schools to exemplify the range of activities that a SENCo may carry out in meeting professional standards through the specific nature of their role. The checklist can be used for a number of purposes including self review and/or to support school development planning.

Professional context

To know and understand statutory and regulatory frameworks and relevant developments at national and local level, including:

- laws and associated guidance on SEN, including the policies and procedures set out in the Special Educational Needs Code of Practice for Wales; their implications for the education setting, the SENCo and others; and how to put them into practice
- laws and associated guidance on disability equality, the actions they require in respect of learners with disabilities; and how they might best be carried out relevant guidance on data protection, confidentiality and health and safety
- the seven core aims of Children and Young People: Rights to Action and how the education setting can help learners with SEN to achieve those entitlements
- the legal framework that supports other statutory services.

To know and understand high incidence SEN\textsuperscript{11} and how they can affect learners’ participation and learning, including:

- how learners’ development can be affected by having SEN and a range of other factors including the physical and social environment in which they are taught
- barriers that impact on achievement, including those related to SEN
- the four areas of need set out in the \textit{Special Educational Needs Code of Practice} and the educational implications of these.

Use evidence about learning, teaching and assessment in relation to learners with SEN to inform practice, including:

- demonstrating knowledge of current best practice
- showing evidence of improving practice through action research in your setting
- having a critical understanding of learning, teaching and behaviour management strategies and how to select, use and adapt approaches to remove barriers to learning
- having a critical understanding of approaches, strategies and resources for assessment (including national tests and examinations) and how to select, use and adapt them to personalise provision and remove barriers to assessment.

Strategic development of SEN policy and procedures

Work strategically with senior colleagues and governors to:

- advise on and influence the strategic development of an inclusive ethos, as well as of policies, priorities and practices
- ensure the objectives of the school’s SEN policy are/can be reflected in the school improvement plan
- establish appropriate resources to support the teaching of learners with SEN, and the means of monitoring their use in terms of value for money, efficiency and effectiveness

\textsuperscript{11} High incidence special educational needs are those which occur more frequently in the general population.
• develop and provide regular information to the headteacher and governing body on the effectiveness of provision for learners with SEN to inform decision making and policy review

• ensure that progress of SEN learners is tracked through the whole school tracking system.

To understand strategic financial planning, budget management and how to use resources in line with best value principles, including:

• the ways in which funding for learners with SEN is provided to education settings, including local funding arrangements and, where appropriate, how to seek additional resources to support students with SEN

• how funding for learners with SEN is used in their education setting

• how to manage and make best use of available financial, human and physical resources, including how to use tools such as provision mapping to plan, evaluate and improve provision for learners with SEN, including identifying ineffective or missing provision.

To provide evidence of strategies for improving outcomes for learners with SEN, including:

• having a sound understanding of strategies for removing barriers to participation and learning for learners with SEN

• knowing about strategies for addressing stereotyping and bullying related to SEN

• understanding the potential of new technologies to support communication, learning and teaching for learners with SEN

• mapping provision and evaluating the impact on outcomes.
Coordinating provision

Strategically develop, use, monitor and evaluate whole school systems to:

- identify learners who may have SEN (through robust tracking), using classroom observation, data, assessment and other forms of monitoring
- inform all staff about the learning needs, behaviour and achievement of learners with SEN
- help colleagues to have realistic expectations regarding the behaviour of learners with SEN and set appropriately challenging targets for them
- plan approaches and interventions to meet the needs of learners with SEN, geared to removing or minimising barriers to participation and learning
- recording and review the progress of learners with SEN towards learning targets
- assess the effectiveness of provision for learners with SEN
- coordinate appropriate arrangements (in classroom practice and for the examinations/tests themselves) for learners sitting national tests and examinations
- coordinate liaison with other education settings to promote continuity of support and progression in learning when learners with SEN transfer.

Using tools for collecting, analysing and using data to:

- know how the education setting, LA and national data systems work, including relevant national initiatives
- analyse and interpret relevant, local and national data as well as the education setting’s data, in order to inform policy and practices, expectations and targets for improving the learning of learners with SEN.

Deploying staff and managing resources to:

- ensure the most efficient use of teaching and other expertise to support learners with SEN
- make flexible and innovative use of the available workforce, recognising and utilising resources’ particular strengths and expertise.
Leading, developing and supporting colleagues

Providing professional direction to the work of others to:

- lead on developing policies and practices concerning learners with SEN and promote collective responsibility for their implementation
- take a leadership role in promoting a whole school culture of best practice in learning and teaching in relation to learners with SEN
- promote improvements in learning and teaching, offering examples of good practice for other teachers and support staff in identifying, assessing and meeting the needs of learners with SEN
- ensure all members of staff recognise their statutory responsibilities towards learners with SEN
- help staff to achieve constructive working relationships with learners with SEN and their parents.

Leadership and development of staff to:

- be aware of the range of professional development opportunities available to the education workforce (including support staff and newly qualified teachers) to improve their practice in working with learners with SEN
- give feedback and provide support to teaching and non-teaching colleagues on effective learning, teaching and assessment for learners with SEN
- model effective practice and coach and mentor colleagues
- advise on, contribute to, and where appropriate coordinate the professional development of staff so that they improve their practice in relation to learners with SEN
- support the training, induction and professional learning of trainee and newly qualified teachers and teaching assistants, where appropriate, in relation to relevant professional standards.
Working in partnership with learners, families and other professionals

Engage with external sources of support and expertise to:

• understand the role and value of families and carers of learners with SEN
• know about the range of organisations and individuals working with learners with SEN and their role in providing information, advice and support
• understand the principles of multi-agency
• apply child-centred planning
• know how to draw on specialist support and resources for learners with SEN, including from special schools and other specialist services or provision
• develop effective working partnerships with professionals in other services and agencies, including voluntary organisations, to support a coherent, coordinated and effective approach to supporting learners with SEN. This should include transition planning for learners post-16
• know how to interpret specialist information from other professionals and agencies to support appropriate learning and teaching for learners with SEN and support colleagues in making use of such information.

Consulting, engaging and communicating with learners, colleagues and parents to enhance learners’ learning and achievement to:

• ensure that learners with SEN are involved, whenever appropriate, in planning, agreeing, reviewing and evaluating the provision made for them
• communicate effectively with parents of learners with SEN, taking account of their views and providing them with timely and relevant information about the achievement, targets, progress and well-being of those learners.
Annex B: Examples of Welsh Government resource materials

Learning Wales

SEN and Inclusion materials:

Specific learning difficulties framework:

Hwb

SEN activities:
http://hwb.wales.gov.uk/resources/resource/82088186-1854-40ae-994d-8790c0b08f13/en

Developing basic literacy skills:
http://hwb.wales.gov.uk/resources/resource/00647064-a54c-46c4-8b18-d69a7d7e1075/en
Annex C: Useful contacts

Sensory impairment
1. Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB)
   Contact: 0303 123 9999
   http://www.rnib.org.uk/wales-cymru

2. Action on Hearing Loss (Royal National Institute for Deaf People)
   Contact: 0808 808 0123
   Textphone: 0808808 9000
   http://www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk/default.aspx

3. SENSE Cymru – services across Wales for deafblind people and their families
   Contact: 0300 330 9280
   Textphone: 0300 330 9282
   http://www.sense.org.uk/content/sense-cymru-wales

Speech and language
4. AFASIC Cymru - unlocking speech and language
   Helpline: 0300 666 9410
   Tel: 02920 465854
   http://www.afasiccymru.org.uk/

Learning difficulties
5. Learning Disability Wales
   Tel: 02920 681160
   https://www.ldw.org.uk/

6. Dyslexia Action
   Tel: 02920 481122
   http://www.dyslexiaaction.org.uk/

7. Dyslexia Wales
   Tel: 0808 1800 110
   http://www.walesdyslexia.org.uk/

8. MENCAP Cymru
   Helpline: 0808 808 1111
   https://www.mencap.org.uk/

9. Special Needs Advisory Project (SNAP) Cymru
   Tel: 0845 120 3730
   http://www.snapcymru.org/

Autism
    Tel: 0808 800 4104
    http://www.autism.org.uk/
Mental health
11. Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)
   http://www.mental-health-matters.org.uk/page7.html

12. Mind Cymru
    Cardiff: 02920 395123
    http://www.mind.org.uk/

Medical-based support organisations
13. National Attention Deficit Disorder Information and Support Service (ADDiSS)
    Contact: 0208 952 2800
    http://www.addiss.co.uk/

General support organisations
14. Action for Children
    Contact: 0300 123 2112
    https://www.actionforchildren.org.uk/

15. Barnardo's Cymru
    Cardiff: 02920 493387
    http://www.barnardos.org.uk/wales

16. Children in Wales
    Cardiff: 02920 342434
    http://www.childreninwales.org.uk/

17. Action for sick children
    Freephone: 0800 744519
    http://www.actionforsickchildren.org.uk/

Public bodies
18. Equality and Human Rights Commission
    Advice: 0808 800 0082
    Textphone: 0808 800 0084
    http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/

19. Health and Safety Executive
    Infoline: 08701 545500
    Cardiff: 02920 263000
    http://www.hse.gov.uk/

20. Children’s Commissioner for Wales
    Swansea 01792 765600
    Tel: Conwy 01492 523333
    https://www.childcomwales.org.uk/

21. Contact a Family – for families with disabled children
    Free Helpline: 0808 808 3555
    http://www.cafamily.org.uk/
22. National Health Service Direct Cymru
   Tel: 0845 46 47
   http://www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk/contactus/feelingunwell/