

# Guidelines for writing and translating into Easy Read Welsh

Making information in Welsh easy to read and understand for people with learning disabilities



## English language Easy Read Guidelines

Am I making myself clear? Mencap's guidelines for accessible writing  
<http://november5th.net/resources/Mencap/Making-Myself-Clear.pdf>

How to make information accessible: a guide to producing easy read documents - *Change*

[www.changepeople.co.uk/freebies-download.php?id=30](http://www.changepeople.co.uk/freebies-download.php?id=30)

Making written information easier to understand for people with learning disabilities - *Department of Health*

[www.dh.gov.uk/prod\\_consum\\_dh/groups/dh\\_digitalassets/@dh/@en/documents/digitalasset/dh\\_121927.pdf](http://www.dh.gov.uk/prod_consum_dh/groups/dh_digitalassets/@dh/@en/documents/digitalasset/dh_121927.pdf)

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## Learning Disability Wales

Learning Disability Wales is a membership organisation that works with its members and partners to create a Wales that values and includes every child and adult with a learning disability.



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## Mencap Cymru

Mencap Cymru want people with a learning disability in Wales and their parents and carers to be valued equally, listened to and included. Our projects and services help people to get their voices heard, become more independent and have a say in the future of their communities.



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## Supported by Estyn Llaw and the Welsh Language Board



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# Introduction

## Communication

As a human race, one of our most valuable attributes is our ability to use language to communicate with each other. Language is our way of conveying the picture we paint of the world about us to other people. It enables us to look more closely at the picture, analyse it and form an opinion on what we see. If that opinion affects us in such a way as to make us want to express it, we can then put words together to describe what we think and feel.

This ability that has developed within us has been so useful to us throughout the ages. It allows us to invent, create and improve the world around us in a beneficial way. Of course, the opposite can be true as well, when language is used destructively!

But we do have a choice – a choice to look at what we have created, form an opinion about it, accept or reject it and use it or turn our backs on it. This choice motivates us to develop control over our own little world, develop our identity and strive to create a path along which we are happy to tread and a goal we endeavour to achieve – this for us is the purpose of our existence.

## Communication and people with a learning disability

People with a learning disability, however, are often not able to take advantage of this medium to the same extent. As human beings, we all have needs and since each individual is unique, each person's needs are different. The individual is the only person who can choose or distinguish what is suitable to meet those needs.

Often people with a learning disability have specific needs. It is, therefore very important that they understand what is happening in the world around them so that they can distinguish and choose what is relevant for them. For those who have language skills, whether they be listening or reading skills, it is important that the information that is prepared for them is easy for them to understand. This is the only way they can get to know what their rights are, make independent choices and express their opinions to others so that they are included in the every day life of their communities. Within each community in Wales, most people are able to speak English and the ability to understand this language is more or less expected of everyone. All too often services are only available through the medium of English, even for people with communication difficulties whose first language is Welsh.

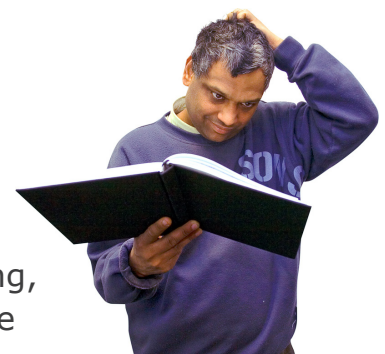


# Guidelines

## Expression and difficulties that arise

Research has shown that differences within the brains of people with a learning disability affect the way that they receive information, process that information and communicate it to other people.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, learning disability is not a question of intelligence. Despite the difference, research has shown that the brain has an amazing ability to change and that children with a learning disability can process information better if that information has been adapted to meet their needs as individuals.

One thing is certain, people with a learning disability are going to have a better understanding of information if it is delivered in the language that they hear every day. There is a wide range of communication difficulties amongst people with a learning disability but for those who are able to process language through reading or through listening, we need to give some thought into how we might use the language medium to present information.



Some people who work in the field of language skills of people with a learning disability have noticed that some language characteristics cause difficulty. This, no doubt, will affect their expression and their ability to communicate. For example, if they do not understand the sentence pattern, they will not be able to process the information. Since different language processing difficulties arise within the wide range of learning disabilities that exist, it is difficult to specify precise instructions on how to make information easy for people with a learning disability to understand. We can but work continually with individuals to constantly build upon what we know, keeping in mind that the brain has a special ability to change and form new connections; new cells are created in the brain when reacting to learning situations and the experience of the individual. We can begin by using simple and clear expression and avoid some characteristics that tend to cause difficulty for people with a learning disability in general.

## What information to include

If information has been prepared for the public in general, it is not sufficient to simply translate the information into a language that is easier to read, but rather to select the information that is really important for people with a learning disability to know. This will mean you will need to cut out information that is not relevant. Your easy read will often then become a 'summary' of the main document. Sometimes you may have to

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<sup>1</sup> 'Learning Disabilities in Children: Symptoms, Types and Testing' – [http://www.helpguide.org/mental/learning\\_disabilities.htm](http://www.helpguide.org/mental/learning_disabilities.htm)

add information where information needs more explanation. Often this is when the original document assumes prior knowledge of words and terms used.

You will also have to make a decision on what order to put the information in. For people with learning disabilities, put the information in a logical or sequential order. This can mean that the order of the information can be quite different from the original.

Having decided what information to include, the next step is to choose the most suitable words and sentence constructions to present that information. Short, everyday words with a clear meaning and a simple sentence construction are of great significance when presenting information that can be easily understood. Being able to easily understand the information helps people to retain it and link it to the next piece of information thus creating a meaningful concept that they can relate to. This will give them confidence to move on and feel the satisfaction of understanding. Through this understanding, the power to communicate then lies in their hands.

## Sentence Construction

Having chosen the suitable words the next step is to construct a sentence pattern that is simple and clear. The best form is a short sentence without sub-clauses presented in the active voice. By using the active form of the verb, this makes it obvious to the reader who is responsible for what, for example:

**Mae Dafydd yn bwyta'r gacen.**

Here it is quite obvious who is doing what. But by using the passive form of the verb, the meaning is not quite so straightforward:

**Bwyteir y gacen gan Dafydd.**

The information also needs to be written in a way that makes the readers feel they are a part of the sentence, that it has been prepared specifically for them. This helps to make the relationship between the information and the person reading it clear. The information then becomes relevant and is embraced by the reader as part of him or herself.

One useful tool in this context is the suffixed pronoun 'chi'. By greeting the reader directly it is immediately obvious that the information is relevant to the reader. Many of the people we spoke to believed it is better to use the more formal form 'chi' rather than the more informal 'ti'. This conveys

a feeling of well deserved respect towards the reader. Also, preceding the verb with 'fe', allows the text to flow more naturally.

Respect is a key word when dealing with people with a learning disability. One thing is clear, using a good standard of language to present information is a form of respect that should not be dismissed. Simple, everyday language is not synonymous with language that is full of English idioms or borrowed expressions that have been transformed into Welsh. Such a language gives rise to ambiguity, is nebulous, misleading, causes confusion and lowers the value of the information.

## Choosing words

In order to make the text easier to read, it's important to choose appropriate words. Here are a few suggestions that could be beneficial when choosing words.

### Spoken words

During discussions with people who work in the field of learning disability and people with a learning disability themselves it was emphasized that information presented in a 'familiar' language is the most beneficial. The next step for translators or for those writing the original document is to try and decide what features lie within this familiar language.

Familiar language does, of course, include simple, everyday words and these are best presented in short, clear sentences.

### Parochial words

The view in general is that very parochial words are best avoided unless the document has been written locally for a group of local people. Strange dialect has a tendency to confuse people with a learning disability, even though many of them accept that not everyone in Wales speaks in the same way. A sentence such as:

Ma'n bryd i mi throi hi am y ciando, decini.

would be likely to confuse someone from Ceredigion and a sentence such as:

Pwy ôn nhw weti 'ny?<sup>2</sup>

would look rather strange to someone from Gwynedd.

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<sup>2</sup> 'Cymraeg, Cymrâg, Cymrêg... Cyflwyno'r Tafodieithoedd' – Beth Thomas a Peter Wynn Thomas



Below are examples of words best avoided for an audience that lives outside the radius of familiarity:

<b>dishmoli</b>	<b>acha</b>	<b>wherthin</b>
<b>syflyd</b>	<b>biti</b>	<b>ercyd</b>
<b>sbïo</b>	<b>hafflau</b>	<b>decini</b>
<b>styrio</b>	<b>andwyo</b>	

The information will be easier to understand by using simple words that are familiar to everyone in Wales. This point is discussed further under the heading Dialect (page 16).

### **Borrowed words**

Our everyday language is littered with borrowed words so it is likely that many of these words are more familiar to people with a learning disability than some Welsh words that are widely recognised but only spoken by a small minority of the Welsh speaking population. Words such as 'atal' or 'cludo' can cause confusion sometimes and maybe words such as 'stopio' or 'cario' are easier to understand. However, it is sometimes better to use another more common Welsh word or find a different way of wording the sentence. Maybe 'rhwystro' would be more acceptable than 'atal' or 'mynd â' something instead of 'cludo'.

Instead of:

Roedd y tywydd yn atal y cwch rhag cludo'r plant i'r ynys.

one could say:

Roedd y tywydd yn rhwystro'r cwch rhag mynd â'r plant i'r ynys.

Consideration should be given to the fact that mutated forms of borrowed words often cause difficulties for people with a learning disability. Since many of them learn to read by word recognition, mutated borrowed words look a bit odd and unfamiliar, for example:

<b>tiwb</b>	<b>&gt;</b>	<b>diwb</b>	<b>canslo</b>	<b>&gt;</b>	<b>ganslo</b>
<b>tiwn</b>	<b>&gt;</b>	<b>diwn</b>	<b>ciwb</b>	<b>&gt;</b>	<b>giwb</b>

The message, therefore, is to use borrowed words if the Welsh word is too unfamiliar, but it is better still to avoid using them and choose different words to present the information.

## Difficult factual words

According to some specialists in the learning disability field it is important to keep factual accuracy within the information. Detailed facts help understanding, and since the problem people with a learning disability have is not a lack of understanding, but rather difficulties with information, presenting important facts in an easier way is going to give them a more detailed picture, that will help to fill the gaps in their comprehension and give them a better notion of what will happen to them or what they need to do. The challenge is to present the details in a way that can be easily understood.

When changing documents into Easy Read there is generally more freedom to concentrate on some parts of the information, expanding upon them in a simple way to convey the message. If an Easy Read document needs to be translated into Welsh, the translator has more freedom to paraphrase the information in order to use the easiest words, i.e. that there is some degree of reforming the message within the translation in order to communicate the message in the simplest form. The goal is to achieve this without losing the meaning.



Some factual technical words might have an important place in the English document but are impossible to translate into simple Welsh. An explanation of these words is then needed. There might be an equivalent explanation in the English document but there might not be. If there is no explanation, the word might be easier to understand in English. It is, therefore, fitting to explain the Welsh word when translating, even if there is no English explanation, in order to ensure clarity in the Welsh text. Usually, this explanation should follow straight after the difficult word. For example, in a sentence such as:

These services are sometimes called Replacement Care

because the Welsh term **Gofal Amgen** is possibly more difficult to understand than the English **Replacement Care** (because the English

term is in regular use) it is good to give an explanation of the Welsh term straight after the term itself:

Weithiau mae'r gwasanaethau hyn yn cael eu galw'n **Gofal Amgen**.

Mae **Gofal Amgen** yn meddwl bod rhywun gwahanol yn edrych ar eich ôl am ychydig..

## The Plural Forms of Words

When learning to read, people with a learning disability or people with special needs learn the plural form of different words. They do not have much difficulty with plural forms of simple, everyday words, as they are used to hearing plural words being spoken. In some instances they are likely to be more familiar with the plural word than the singular, with words like 'morgrug', 'gwenyn', 'moron'. With plural words that look a bit more difficult, e.g. words where the letters within the word have been changed, making them look unfamiliar, there might be a way around it by changing the sentence construction a little so that the word appears in its singular form, e.g.

Bydd y **swyddfeydd** i gyd ar gau o 5 o'r gloch ymlaen.

Bydd **pob swyddfa** ar gau o 5 o'r gloch ymlaen.

## Prefixes and Suffixes – words that look strange

Some words that have prefixes or suffixes can cause a certain amount of confusion for some people. Seeing the original word within the prefixed or suffixed word can confuse some people. With the word 'arnofio', for example, the reader, more often than not, knows the word 'nofio' but with the prefix 'ar', it is no longer a familiar word. However, if it is used in relation to learning to swim, it is more than likely that the reader will learn the word and remember it afterwards.

Some words that include prefixes or suffixes, words such as 'echdoe' and 'tramor', are common enough to recognize. But what about 'rhyngweithio', 'rhyngwladol' and 'tanddaearol'. If such words need to be used, it might

help if the translator or writer sends a note to the people who support the people with a learning disability to say that they have been used. Help might be needed to explain the meaning of these and a simple explanation of why the letters have been added. Some people with a learning disability have a great desire to learn and understand more.



Similarly some adjectives can cause the same problem. Adjectives that are quite common, such as 'swnllyd' and 'agored', are easy enough to recognise. The following examples, even though they are just as common, are probably not as easily recognisable:

**blodeuog, ysgrifenedig, diflanedig, crynedig,  
gweledig, oeraidd, Cymreigaidd, Iliwgar**

One way to decide whether or not to use a word would be to ask yourself: 'How often is the word heard spoken in everyday life?'

## Mutations

Participants at the consultation events had different opinions about mutating words. Some believed that mutations might cause difficulty while others felt it was best to use them, since mutations are also part of the spoken language. In the field of education, however, there was no reason to believe that mutations are a problem and this was confirmed by people with a learning disability themselves. Very often, when reading the mutated word, they read the original word and it does not seem to hinder understanding. Although, this is not always the case with borrowed words as previously mentioned.

This also brings us back to the importance of maintaining the standard of the Welsh language – correct syntax does not have to sound unnatural. More often than not, it flows more naturally when those little features that are inherently Welsh sit neatly in place. This language belongs to people with a learning disability as much as it belongs to any other Welsh speaking person and they have the right to read it at its best, because the better the standard of the language, the better it conveys the intended meaning.

Little linguistic details clarify the meaning further just as factual details do with information. The language itself needs to relish in those natural essences that illuminate its virtues and which are more likely to enrich

than to perplex. For those who have language skills, what they need is the confidence to ask someone if the occasional letter causes difficulty, not just accept that it is something beyond their comprehension. As long as the answer is simple and clear, they will have learnt something that will enhance their taste of language.

## Prepositions

As prepositions have a specific function in relation to the verb with Welsh prepositional verbs, choosing the preposition that is relevant to the context is of great importance in order to make the meaning clear, for example:

talw rhywbeth **i** rywun

ond

talw **am** rhywbeth

ysgrifennu **at** rywun

sôn **wrth** rywun

gwrando **ar** rywun neu rhywbeth

siarad **â** rhywun

If you are not sure which preposition to use in some contexts, there are lists to be found in ***Gramadeg y Gymraeg***, Peter Wyn Thomas on page 583 – Atodiad 6.1, Estyn berfau, enwau ac ansoddeiriau; under 'Arddull Ysgrifennu', ***Ysgrifennu Clir*** (Adran Cymraeg Clir Canolfan Bedwyr) on page 23; a reference is also made to them within the covers of ***The Welsh Academy English-Welsh Dictionary*** under the corresponding English word.

It is worthwhile also to ensure that the preposition â (with) has a circumflex. Keeping the circumflex shows the difference between the preposition 'â' and the conjunction or relative pronoun 'a'. Usually the circumflex does not pose a problem for people with a learning disability.

## Idioms

However, one thing that does need to be **avoided** in Welsh Easy Read information for people with a learning disability are the numerous **idioms** found in the Welsh language. Many people with a learning disability, especially the ones with autism or aspergers, take language literally and expressions such as 'mynd dros ben llestri' (going over the dishes) or 'talw trwy ei drwyn' (paying through his nose) would be incomprehensible to them. Although introducing such idioms would not be a bad thing altogether, especially if the person with a learning disability is high functioning, as people with aspergers usually are. Many people can learn not to take things quite so literally and there are stories of some people turning their difficulty on its head and using such idioms to tease.

However, with regards to information where it is very important that people with a learning disability understand, it is probably better to keep the idioms for situations where understanding is not vital.

## Punctuation

In order to reduce the elements that might cause confusion, it is better to use only the simplest possible forms of punctuation:

1. It is good to use the **full stop**, of course, when needed, to show where one piece of information has ended and another is about to begin.
2. Without a doubt, the **question mark** is needed.
3. If possible, it is best to use simple sentences without sub-clauses and therefore lessen the need for **commas**. However, it is better to use them if it makes the meaning of the sentence clearer.
4. **Bullet points** can be useful if examples or lists that expands upon the information are needed, for example:

Gallwch gael cyfle i wneud llawer o wahanol weithgareddau yn y digwyddiad hwn. Gallwch

- chwarae pêl-droed
- chwarae pêl-rwyd
- gwneud athletau
- chwarae badminton.

Using bullet points in this way is much better than listing the words and putting a comma or semi-colon in between each example.

5. Usually, people with a learning disability do not have difficulties with the **apostrophe** in words such as 'sy'n' and 'mae'n' and using the apostrophe also makes the word sound more like the spoken language, reflecting what is heard when people speak. However, some people tend to use 'mae eich' rather than 'mae'ch' because the meaning looks clearer in this context.
6. It is better to avoid **brackets** if possible. If an explanation of a word or phrase is necessary, it is better to write a sentence of explanation alongside or underneath, for example:

Rydyn ni am wneud yn siwr bod **cydraddoldeb** ym mhob rhan o'n gwaith.

Mae **cydraddoldeb** yn meddwl bod pawb yn cael eu trin yn deg ac yn gyfartal.

rather than:

Rydyn ni am wneud yn siwr bod **cydraddoldeb** ym mhob rhan o'n gwaith (mae **cydraddoldeb** yn meddwl bod pawb yn cael eu trin yn deg ac yn gyfartal).

It is more than likely that there is too much text to digest with both the unfamiliar word and the brackets. Splitting it into two sentences with two spaces in between is easier to deal with.

7. It is fine to include the occasional **dash** if it helps to clarify the text, for example:

Efallai na fyddwch chi'n cael cymryd rhan oherwydd eich

Oedran - am eich bod yn rhy ifanc neu'n rhy hen

Crefydd - oherwydd beth rydych chi'n ei gredu neu ddim yn ei gredu

8. In some instances the **hyphen** should also be avoided, for example, when stating the length of a meeting. It is better to put:



Bydd y cyfarfod yn para o 11 o'r gloch y bore



tan 3 o'r gloch y prynhawn.

with two pictures of clockfaces showing the specific times alongside, rather than:



Bydd y cyfarfod yn para o 11yb-3yp /  
Bydd y cyfarfod yn para o 11am-3pm.

This, of course, does not include the hyphens **which are part of the Welsh orthography**. These have an important function within the language.

9. If someone is quoted within the text, **single quotation marks** are sufficient.

So, as you see, things are not black and white. The best guideline to follow here is: avoid punctuation where possible and use it only if you must. You need to look carefully at each piece of text, considering your audience as you do so.

## Dialect

Like everyone else people with a learning disability are likely to adopt the forms of the spoken language – the vocabulary, the syntax and the expressions that are used within their home area. The language spoken at home is the language they are going to understand best. There is far more attached to words and expressions than their superficial meaning.

Words that children become familiar with develop a personal and emotional meaning that is unique to them. The circumstances and experiences that they have as they become familiar with a word is different in every case. The experience of a child who has a pet cat at home as he gets to know the





word 'cat' is going to be quite different to the experience of a child who does not have a pet cat. Dialect words are also going to mean more to a person. For example, the word 'tishen' is more mouth-watering for somebody from South Wales than the standard word 'teisen'.

However, as they grow up and expand their horizons, people with a learning disability come to accept that not everyone speaks the same throughout Wales and that people in other areas use words that are either variations or completely different to the ones they are familiar with.

When learning to read Welsh at school children with special needs use language that is common throughout Wales. The All Wales Reading Test allows a variety of forms that are a part of the regional dialects. However, the material in the test does not include words or idioms that are likely to discriminate against some children because they are more familiar in some areas. In order to choose words that are likely to be familiar to everyone, two strategies are used.<sup>3</sup> When two words with the same meaning are used in different areas of Wales, e.g. tost/sâl, crac/blin, brwnt/budr, it is the word that is used in the literary style that is chosen. If neither word is more literary than the other, the way of solving this problem is to avoid using either word and find another way of saying what needs to be said.

Standard spoken Welsh, used for teaching purposes or media broadcasting, does maintain standard syntax even though its mode reflects the spoken word. This form is generally safer to use with written information for people with a learning disability as it avoids those mischievous little forms that often slip into the spoken language.



3 'Datblygu Profion Darllen Safonedig Ar-lein yn y Gymraeg', Robot Powell' – <http://www.aber.ac.uk/mercator/images/powell.pdf>

However, there is nothing to beat dialect when communicating verbally with people with a learning disability. It is very likely that dialects throughout Wales have been developed to meet the needs of a close society within an area where the inhabitants tended to interact daily. Considering the widespread social hardship throughout our history, it is not surprising that there are so many expressions of care, closeness, sympathy and friendship within the Welsh language. If this is the language that is familiar to people with a learning disability, this is the language that is going to make them feel safe and comfortable, and confident enough within their own home area to venture outside it.

Keeping this in mind for speaking in general, maybe we should be more careful when communicating information where it is important that the meaning is clear. As human beings we have a tendency to speak carelessly, slipping over words hastily and very often cutting words until they are almost unrecognizable. Very often we also leave words out because we take it for granted that the listener is so familiar with the expression, the missing word will come to mind without it even being spoken. When clear expression is vital, maybe we should not take this for granted with people with a learning disability, but rather ensure that we use a clear sentence construction to get the message over in the best possible way.

A language of this kind might well become a familiar language, the language where it is important to concentrate in order to understand the meaning, a language that is reflected in the written language and through mastering this, the power to communicate will strengthen.

# Symbols and pictures

As well as written information, including pictures and symbols to explain the text further is important to people with a learning disability. When translating, do not forget to translate any text that appears on the symbols and make a note of them to send to the client when returning the work. The client should either be able to change them or ask someone to do it on their behalf. There are plans to prepare bilingual symbols but until those are available they will need to be changed manually.



If there is a reference in the English Easy Read document to an Easy Read publication or booklet, with a picture of the document alongside of the text, have a look to see if a Welsh version has been published. The client will then be able to use a picture of the Welsh version for the Welsh text.

# Developing language and vocabulary - developing experience

People with a learning disability are often in the dark regarding matters that are relevant to them as individuals. This puts them at a great disadvantage and makes them helpless and vulnerable in the world at present. Unless they understand the information that explains what is going to happen, there is no way they can express the difficulties they face. If they do understand, this in turn will enable them to control their lives for the better. By presenting information in clear language and trying to ensure they understand what is being said, giving an explanation when needed and sometimes introducing new words to extend their horizons in whatever way works for them, their understanding and their experience and their control will develop, raising the standard of their everyday lives. It would be beneficial, if possible, for the writers and translators to have a closer contact with their audience especially if that audience is local. This would definitely make things easier in the long run.



It is just as important to find ways of communicating information to the ones who do not have listening and reading skills. There are many different mediums available to meet the needs of different kinds of learning disabilities, such as sign language, videos, electronic software etc. These are, of course, fields that are quite different to what is being discussed here but we need to remember the importance of communicating as much information as possible to every individual whatever barriers they face. As one parent emphasized in earnest, however profound the disability, it is '*communication, communication, communication!*' that is needed – achieving this is our goal!



# Fast track references

1. Use **simple, everyday words**
2. Simple **sentence construction** in the **active voice**
3. Make the information **relevant to the reader** by **greeting him/her**
4. **Maintain a good standard of the language** in order to ensure that the meaning is clear
5. Choose suitable words – **spoken but not parochial**
6. If possible, **avoid borrowed words**
7. Include **important facts by explaining them** in a simple way
8. **Mutations – no problem!**
9. **As little punctuation** as possible
10. **Welsh words on the symbols**
11. The aim is to **communicate!**



**Learning Disability Wales**  
**Anabledd Dysgu Cymru**



Llais anabledd dysgu  
The voice of learning disability



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