

Introduction to the New Bill

The Welsh Government (2018) have initiated a reform of the current measures in place for children with Special Educational Needs (SEN). The Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act (Welsh Government, 2018) will replace this. The Welsh Government (2018) stated it was time for change as the SEN legislation has become outdated and no longer fit for purpose. The new Act, set to launch in September 2021, will provide an improved support system for children and young people aged 0 to 25 who have ALN. Prior to the launch date practitioners should continue to adhere to the principles underpinning the SEN system and to comply with the Education Act (1996, legislation.co.uk, 2021). As the new Act will be implemented in a gradual phased approach, until settings are aware of the new legislation.

The Individual Development Plan (IDP)

According to SNAP Cymru (2020), currently with the SEN system, all learners are given a statement. However, The New ALN Bill will replace SEN statements by providing all children and young people with ALN, with an IDP. Dauncey (2016) stated that statements are no longer fit for purpose, therefore are not addressing the children's needs. The Welsh Government have listened and acted upon people's views by launching a brand-new system that delivers advanced support for learners with ALN. SNAP Cymru (2018) stated that, IDP are straightforward and effective to use when supporting learners with ALN. This is because all key information is kept in an IDP, such as; their specific requirements, likes and dislikes and their unique goals. Unlike the statements under the SEN system, which were difficult to use, therefore time consuming. The IDP on the other hand are set out clearly to ensure all staff understand the process. The Welsh Government state this is to provide a transparent system in that all learners are treated fairly. All learners who currently have a statement will have their plan converted into an IDP. Until a child has moved to the new system, they will continue to follow plans set under the SEN. All IDP's must be prepared and maintained by the settings ALNCo. However, during this transitioning period, Dauncey (2016) states that practitioners are finding it difficult to follow due to the IDP's having no clear template, therefore can be difficult to use within settings as practitioners do not have the required training. If a child has been recently identified to have ALN and did not have a plan under the SEN, during the transitioning period, an IDP will be designed for the child based on their individual needs. Welsh Government (2018) have provided guidance for all to read to ensure all aspects of an IDP are clearly understood.

Implications on legislation changes to Additional Learning Needs in Wales

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SENCo to ALNCo

According to Welsh Government (2020) all settings should have a designated individual as the Additional Learning Needs Co-Ordinator (ALNCo), which supports section 60 of the new Act. The ALNCo must continue to meet their new roles and responsibilities as they previously did with the SEN system. The governing body appointed to the setting will ensure that the ALNCo is implementing the new changes, ensuring the new structure meets the children's individual needs. ALNCo's should already be highly qualified and experienced in the field of Early Years ALN. However, Welsh Government (2018) have stated that due to lack of consistency and understanding within the previous system, all practitioners are now required to attend additional training to enhance their continuing professional development. The main role of the ALNCo is to ensure the needs of children and young people with ALN are being met. To ensure this, a whole setting approach is required as communication with all staff is key. This will support the ALNCo to construct a plan in order to deliver their new role effectively. Another new responsibility for ALNCo is to create an Individual Developmental Plan (IDP) which is a support plan. Within their IDP, Additional Learning Provision (ALP) will be planned and structured according to the needs of the child. This aligns with the principles of the Equality Act (2010, legislation.co.uk, 2010). However, according to Ware (2019) the New Act has been described as difficult to understand which is confusing practitioners. To prevent this, the Welsh Government (2018) are providing all staff members with extensive training, which must be attended. To prepare for the transition, the Welsh Government (2018) are investing into the education system to ensure that staff have the correct skill set, and the setting has adequate resources (Powys, 2021). This is to ensure that ALNCo work in partnership and in collaboration with other agencies according to the New ALN code.

Welsh Language

Welsh Government (2019) state that, with the implementation of the New ALN Bill, it hopes to improve the delivery of the bilingual system for children in Wales. If a child's first language is Welsh, this should be noted in their IDP, and the ALNCo should implement all necessary measures to ensure they are taught through the medium of Welsh. Dauncey (2016) states that the New ALN Bill will adopt a person-centred approach to ensure all children's rights and concerns are listened to and acted upon. Dauncey (2016) also states that the Welsh language should get as much recognition as the English language, therefore the new Bill should ensure that it can be delivered in both languages. However, in contrast, The Minister for Wales (2017, Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists, 2017) did not accept recommendation 33, which supports Welsh Provision in the New ALN Bill for Wales. This is due to funding and budget cuts, therefore there is uncertainty to whether the Welsh Government could fund the training that ALNCo's would need to learn Welsh. Furthermore, he stated that this will be reviewed to ensure inclusive practice for all children. Donaldson (2015) suggests that the Welsh language within the new Bill needs more focus, to ensure all children can learn and use their Welsh in a confident way. This then supports the ethos of the New Curriculum (Welsh Government, 2020) that all children should be provided with new opportunities that promote the acquisition of new skills. Furthermore, a recent review from The Senedd Research (Welsh Parliament, 2021), has stated that the new ALN Bill will be a transparent system by provided fair and equal opportunities for all. This will resolve disagreements of implementing the Welsh Language, to ensure all children have access to education.

ALN implementation timeline



Conclusion

The New ALN Bill for Wales will reinforce new policies and procedures which will benefit all children with ALN. However, there are some barriers such as, no clear templates for IDP's, confusion around the role of the ALNCo and uncertainty whether the Welsh Language will be included in provision. These barriers can be addressed by regularly monitoring the implementation of the New ALN Bill for Wales, to ensure it is continuing to meet the needs of all children and young people with ALN.