

WALES ADDITIONAL LEARNING NEEDS REFORM - IMPENDING CHANGES.

Introduction

According to the Welsh government (2019) A learner has ALN if he or she has a learning difficulty or disability which calls for additional learning provision, as practitioners, it is therefore important to ensure children are getting the help and support they need to develop and thrive. However according to the Welsh Government and Dauncey (2018) the ways in which learners' needs are identified and provided for has evolved and the current SEN legislation is arguably out of date. Therefore, to continue to support and develop inclusive education a new ALN act is due to be rolled out in Wales. The Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Bill was passed by the National Assembly for Wales on 12 December 2017 and became an Act on 24 January 2018. According to Welsh Government (2018) the new system will go live in September 2021 and will bring a more unified system to support learners from 0-25 years.

SEN to ALN

Legislation in relation to SEN is currently part of the Education Act (1996). Snap Cymru (2021) states that the current definition of SEN applies to children and young people with a wide range of needs, however the legislation primarily focuses on those children and young people with more complex needs who are entitled to a statement of SEN issued by the local authority. Under the new legislation The new term, Additional Learning Needs (ALN) will be applied within a single legislative system that will support learners from 0 – 25, creating a more cohesive and unified framework. However, a report by the Welsh (2014) Government found that many people did not feel there was a need to change from SEN to ALN that it would only cause confusion among children, families and practitioners. Furthermore, If different local authorities and research articles continue to use both terminologies, especially during the transition stage then this could increase confusion.

Individual Development Plans

The new ALN reformation will replace existing statements with Individual Development Plans. Unlike statements these IDPs will continue up to the age of 25 years old. Furthermore, the Welsh Government (2020) has stated that IDPs will be available to all learners with ANL not just those with more complex needs. According to The IDP is intended to be a flexible document that will vary in length and complexity depending on the different needs of learners and the way in which an individual learner's needs develop and change over time. This however may have an implication for practitioners and ALNCOS as it will potentially cause an extra workload. The Welsh Government (2019) estimates that the creation of the IDP will increase the number of learners with a statutory plan by 94,350. Furthermore, Pilot tests by Holtom and Lloyd-Jones (2014) resulted in many practitioners feeling that the new IDP processes were more time consuming than current processes.

SENCO to ALNCO

The role of SENCO has always been important in ensuring that children with special education needs and disabilities receive the support they need. According to over the years the SENCO role has grown in importance. However, Under the new legislation the role will be developed further and known as the 'ALNCO' – Additional Learning Needs Co-ordinator. According to the Welsh Government (2019) the role of the ALNCO is intended to be a strategic one.

However, this change could potentially mean an increase in workload for ALNCOs as according The Welsh Government estimates that creation of the IDP will increase the number of learners with a statutory plan by 94,350. to there are currently children with ALN that are not statemented and therefore will require an IDP. Research by Bath University (2020) found that current SENCOS already feel that they are not able to fully offer all the support needed due to time pressures and funding constraints



Conclusion

In conclusion the new ALN reform, may bring implications such as confusion, increased workload and potentially a strain on parent/practitioner relationships. Overall, the new system should be beneficial as it will bring a more unified approach to supporting children and young people throughout their education, regardless of the severity of the needs. It will allow for many learners who are not getting the required support, to access the help they need. Snap Cymru (2021) agrees and states that every child and young person deserves an education system that responds to their individual learning requirements and the hope is that the new proposals for ALN go some way to meeting these aspirations.