

Additional Learning Needs in Wales

Introduction. A complete overhaul of the 'Special Educational Needs' (SEN) was needed to support children and young adults, as this had remained stagnant for over 30 years and not fit for purpose. 12,000 children and young people had statements, out of the 105,000 learners classed as having SEN in the academic year 2015/16, which is equivalent to 1 in 5 learners. To raise aspirations and potential for learners, working together is key (Dauncey, 2016). The terminology will change, currently called SEN and following consultation, which practitioners fed into the draft Bill, whereby amendments were made and the Bill came into force 2017 (Welsh Government, 2020). Within the consultation, a timeframe was suggested, whereby practitioners and stakeholders agreed the time line as this seemed to be a consistent and manageable approach. It became an Act after receiving Royal Assent and is now known as the **Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018** (Dauncey, 2018). (Snap Cymru, 2018) mentions that guidance needed to be produced as there are major changes for the local authorities, schools and further education colleges therefore and new systems needed to be put in place. However, Welsh Government, remained focused on the changes and priorities, even though COVID-19 pandemic delayed the implementation fully, which the code will come into place in September 2021, which a phased approach will take place and fully implemented by 2024 (Learning Disabilities Wales, 2021).

Welsh Government have committed an estimated £7.2 million over a four-year period for the new legislation (Dauncey, 2018). For practitioners to have those essential skills, to be up to date and prepared for the changes, to ensure the setting reflects the new ALN and to support children, young people and have the knowledge to share with parents, the Welsh Government has invested £20 million package to support implementation of the ACT (Welsh Government, 2020). NHS bodies and Local Authorities have regards to the UNCRPD and UNCRC as there is a duty place on them, as stated in the code, where there are five principles based up on the convention which was develop by Children's Commissioner (Welsh Government, 2021).

0-25 Age Range. The proposed changes to have one system, and this will change from 0-16 or age 19, to cover the age range of 0 to 25 years (Snap Cymru, 2018). Therefore, a consultation was undertaken, again practitioners were able to feed in their views, and one of the questions focused on the 'age range' whereby 55% of respondent disagreed (Dauncey, 2016). However, (Minister for Lifelong Learning and Welsh Language, Alun Davies, 2016) stated there wasn't a high level of disagreement stated the Welsh Government. Furthermore, the respondents required clarification and information as to how this would work with the age ranges of 0-3 and 16-25 (Dauncey, 2016c). Therefore, an 'Early Years' expert group was set up whereby the Welsh Government included the views from practitioners and made those amendments during the legislative process of the Bill.

It was agreed that guidance would be developed and shared with practitioners and the childcare sector across Wales and that the 'Early Years' expert group would work with Welsh Government (Welsh Government, 2018). Furthermore, Welsh Government stated that the 'Early Years', which includes practitioners, will be fully integrated. To establish and strengthen referral routes along with working with multi-agency partners to support young children with ALN, each Local Authority will appoint a new statutory 'Early Years Additional Learning Needs Lead Officer'. Part of their role is to ensure those appropriate skills, mechanism and that practitioners are fully aware on supporting young children with ALN (Dauncey, 2016).

This too will improve transition, whereby a smoother process between practitioners at a non-maintained settings and schools, due to the multi-agency partnership (Welsh Government, 2018).

Improved outcomes for children and young people with the emphasis of IDPs.

Every child with those recognised ALN, will have an Individual Development Plan (IDP) as statements and Individual Education Plans (IEP) will be phased out (Snap Cymru, 2018). Therefore, if a practitioner from an Early Years setting identifies or has concerns of a child, they can refer to the local authority, whereby the Early Years Additional Learning Needs Lead Officer' can decide as to whether or not the child has ALN and if yes, they support that child, parent and setting by putting an IDP in place. (Welsh Government, 2018). However, (Dauncey, 2016) states as the local authorities are responsible for maintaining the IDP, there could be concerns for those children and young people who have more severe and complex needs. There were conflicting views over the process of IDP's from respondents to the consultation of the draft Bill, as they wanted consistency across Wales, clear definitions along with a criteria and guidance for preparing, maintaining and reviewing (Dauncey, 2016). Furthermore, (Welsh Government, 2018) stated they would consider the views of respondents with regards to IDP and ensure they would be easier to complete compared to the statement. (Snap Cymru, 2018) noted to support those needs for children and young people, the IDP should contain those identified needs, with an agreed outcome, review dates and success criteria. The length of the IDP may vary from child-to-child states (Welsh Government, 2018) however the main focus will be in equity in relation to protecting the child in terms of legal rights.

Early Years Practitioners (Dauncey, 2016) noted quality should remain at the forefront, therefore there needed to be support for practitioners to empower with knowledge and skills to ensure the quality remained across all areas and increase consistency. The article of the UNCRC are embedded within the code, therefore practitioners need to ensure the listen to children, and take their views into account, and ensuring those decisions that are made for the child all contributes towards to excellent outcomes (Welsh Government, 2021). Practitioners should not focus on the problem of the ALN that the child may face, but celebrating and praising their accomplishments, and focus on what they can achieve, which contributions empowering children and young people (Welsh Government, 2021). The Welsh Language is not forgotten, therefore if a child or young person requires the delivery of education in Welsh, this should be noted and every step should be taken, to ensure their needs are met. In all areas of the child's needs, if the child and their families are not in agreement with the ALN or IDP, they have the rights of appeal. Practitioners and Non-maintained providers must have regards to the guidance set out in the ALN code, for those in receipt of local authority funding to deliver Foundation Phase Nursery. Therefore, for practitioners to keep abreast of the ALN, they will continue to seek training, upskill their knowledge by attending events, use various digital platforms to ensure they have the essentials skills, to support those with Additional Learning Needs. (Welsh Government, 2021).

Conclusion. When talking about children and young people and their needs, the terminology we no longer refer to Special Education Needs (SEN) but be known as Additional Learning Needs (ALN). Previously SENCO were in place and these will be known as ALNCOs. The statements are to be replaced with Individual Development Plan (IDP) if the young people remain in education this will continue up until they are 25 years old, however there is an opportunity to appeal about the decision that has been made in relation to their ALN or IDP (Snap Cymru, 2021). More involvement with Children, young people and families to ensure they are being listened too, opportunities for questions about any concerns. (Welsh Government, 2021). (Snap Cymru, 2021) noted March 2021 the Senedd approved the Code and the three-year phased approach will commence September, 2021.

Further support for practitioners

For parents [ALN Factsheet for parents and children](#)
 For non-maintained [ALN Factsheet for non-maintained](#)
 For practitioners [e learning course for practitioners](#)
 For Local Authority [ALN Factsheet for Local Authority](#)
 Resources [Hwb resources](#)
 Further updates [ALN \(SEN\)](#)
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