

Implications of the impending changes to the ALN Legislation

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Introduction

Welsh Government (2018b) states that the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018 (ALNET) is the new statutory framework, for children with additional learning needs (ALN), that will replace any existing legislation that relates to children with special educational needs. This legislative change was brought about to tackle the flaws within the previous system. These flaws included an ambiguous divide between children who require statements and those who did not, a distrust between parents/care givers and their local authority and a terminology that labelled children unfairly thus not taking the child's rights into account (Welsh Gov, 2018b).

IDP's

Under the new Act, statements and Action Plans will be phased out and replaced with a new statutory document, the Individual Development Plan (IDP). IDP's, unlike statements which cease when a child leaves compulsory education, will continue if the child accesses further education, up to the age of 25 (SNAP Cymru, 2021a). From September 2020 children who had action plans already in place will be converted onto an IDP, while children who have statements will begin the conversion over the two academic years of 2020/2021 and 2021/2022 (Welsh Gov, 2018a). SNAP Cymru (2019) states how an IDP will contain a standard format with mandatory fields that will be child specific. An action plan will be included along with evidence that supports these actions. The IDP's will be easily obtainable and if changes need to be made this can be done with ease. Welsh Government (2021a) states that ALNCo's, within schools, have a period of 35 school days, from the day it was brought to the ALNCo's, attention, within which to make a decision regarding ALN of a child, to compose an IDP along with delivering a copy of that IDP to the child and their parent. Practitioners believe that, although IDP's are beneficial, they are significantly more tedious than the previous process due to review meetings of each IDP being over an hour in length, however, on the whole, practitioners suggests that as the IDP offers a valuable way in which the insights of a child can be recorded, they can offer more clarity than the previous process. (Welsh Gov, 2014a).

Image: Ysgol Tanyfron (2021)

Conclusion

In summary the ALNET Act 2018 will provide children with ALN the support they require to reach their full potential and to defeat any obstacles to their learning journey. The Act aims to help identify a child's ALN early through a person-centred approach and once identified to put into place effective support and observations whilst creating suitable interventions to enable the child to reach their outcomes. Through collaboration of multi agencies and the implementation of IDP's the Welsh Government aim to have the new ALN system in place by September 2023 after a 3-year phased implementation starting in September 2021 as you can see by the image on the poster. (SNAP Cymru, 2021b). From the information gathered it is evident that the new system will be stretched in the short and medium term creating a risk that resources provided by local authorities will become drained but if all issues are addressed properly the system will be effective in the long term (Welsh Gov, 2021).

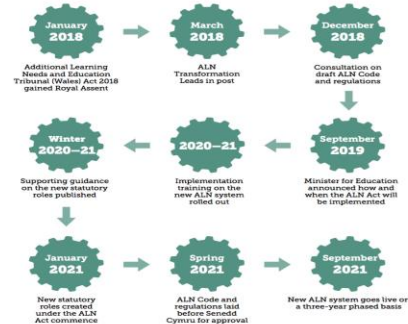
SENCo to ALNCo

The SENCo has been fundamental in ensuring that the correct support was given to children with special educational needs during their education. It has become apparent that over the years this role has evolved in importance. With the creation of the Additional Learning Needs Co-ordinator (ALNCo) the Welsh Government are developing the role further. The ALNCo will become the key contact point for the local authority's inclusion service (ALN Wales, 2019). Parent Partnership Services (2019) describes how the ALNCo will need to liaise with external multi agencies such as education psychology services, health, and social services, to help a child to reach their best educational outcomes possible. ALNCo roles commenced in January 2021 with all maintained mainstream schools within Wales having at least one ALNCo on staff. The ALNET Act states that ALNCo's should receive ample time and resources away from their teaching role. This will ensure their responsibilities are undertaken effectively (Welsh Gov, 2021b). Welsh Gov (2021c) stated that to determine what is classed as ample time, the headteacher of the setting should take into account the numbers of children with ALN at the setting as well as the severity of each child's ALN. However, Careers Wales (Senedd Cymru, 2017h) believes that an ALNCo's workload could potentially increase due to the maintenance and reviewing of IDP's of 23% of a learning population therefore finding ample time away will be increasing difficult. As the ALNCo role is a strategic role it is suggested that they form part of the senior management team as this will help to assist a setting with planning, managing, and delivering their responsibilities to ALN children (Welsh Gov, 2021a). As part of the senior management team the ALNCo can then collaborate with them to assist the reviewing of policies and practices that are being undertaken within their setting. (Welsh Gov, 2021b).

Increased Collaboration

Welsh Government (2021b) believes that the new Act will lead to increased collaboration of services who will work together to help identify ALN early and co-ordinate with each other to ensure adequate support is implemented to enable a child to achieve positives outcomes in their educational journey. It has been suggested that practitioners are of the opinion that a collaborative approach is vitally important to the success of the Act, however, a few parents/care givers have found it difficult to establish an acceptable plan of working collaboration due to the lack of trust in the old system (Welsh Gov, 2014a). Increased collaboration should be evident in the implementing of IDP's as they will contain additional learning provisions which will have been agreed upon by not just the education service but by the social and health services. The action plan created by the IDP will clearly state which agency is accountable for ensuring delivery of the specific elements within the plan (Welsh Gov, 2018c).

Additional learning needs (ALN) system implementation timeline



Person-centred approach

Welsh Government (2019) states that the new ALN Act will place the child at the centre of everything. Schools and local authorities are expected to take the same approach within their planning and support of ALN children. A requirement of the Act is that a child and their parents or care givers feelings, views and wishes are considered during all stages of an IDP process. This approach, as suggested by the Children's Commissioner for Wales (Senedd Cymru, 2017f) will see Article 12 of the UNCRC being implemented through the child's involvement in their IDP's. There are some key differences to note when the person-centred approach and the IDP'S are compared to assessing a child for a School Action plan. Welsh Gov (2014b) stated that a person-centred approach along with the IDP can widen the focus to presumably incorporate a vast range of additional needs as opposed to the previous system whose sole focus was special educational needs. However, Welsh Gov (2014a) believes there to be a large overlap of the two processes at they both share a common goal. Practitioners claimed that the person-centred approach could furnish them with more substantial information regarding the child therefore providing them with a holistic view of that child (Welsh Gov, 2014b). Furthermore, Welsh Gov (2021) points out that on conducting research, it was shown that a person-centred approach to planning could improve a child's and parents experiences when initiating an IDP meeting. However, PACEY Cymru (Senedd Cymru, 2017g) believes the person-centred approach should take into consideration whether the setting is suitable for the child and their individual needs as not every child will thrive in a mainstream, formal educational setting. PACEY Cymru suggests that through the person-centred approach alternative options that would better suit the child's needs are explored.