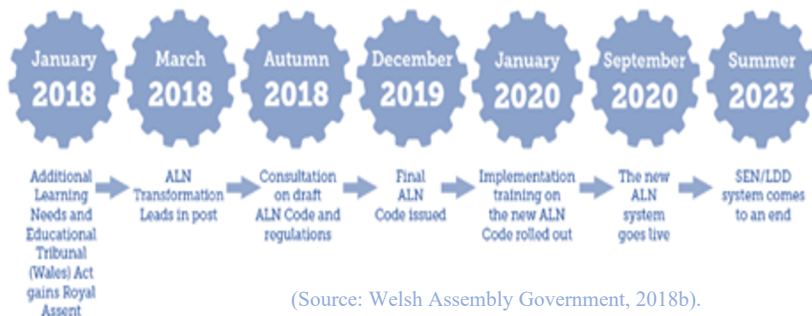


ALN implementation timeline



(Source: Welsh Assembly Government, 2018b).

Impending changes related to SEN/ALN Legislation reform within Wales

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Introduction – What is the new ALN legislation and why is it changing?

The Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Bill 2017 became an act after receiving Royal Assent in January of 2018. According to Welsh Assembly Government (2020) it is anticipated that the new ALN system will begin a phased period of implementation over 3 years from September 2021. During this time current special educational needs legislation will continue to apply within education until the conclusion of the implementation period. Therefore, the ALN Act is set to provide improved statutory framework linked to the support given to children with additional learning needs, as well as eventually replacing the existing SEN legislation along with the way in which children and young people with learning difficulties are assessed (Welsh Assembly Government, 2018a). A series of reviews of the current SEN provision undertaken by Estyn (2019) and Wales Audit Office (2018) described the present system to be outdated and no longer fit for purpose. Furthermore, The White Paper Legislative Proposals for Additional Learning Needs (2014) addressed multiple weaknesses within the current system, including the fact that the existing SEN Code of Practice varies across each local authority as it is not always accurately interpreted or implemented to a high standard. Therefore, Welsh Assembly Government (2018a) states that under the new ALN Act will create a legislative framework that is unified to support all children from 0-25 years who have an ALN in a fair and transparent manner. In order to achieve this fully inclusive educational experience and to be able to support learners with an ALN, particular focus will also be on the development of skills for practitioners. This will allow them to be able to deliver the new ALN system effectively (Welsh Government, 2018b; Williams, 2021).

SENCO– ALNCO

According to Welsh Assembly Government (2019) the ALNCO is a statutory role that under the new ALN Act will replace the existing non-statutory SENCO role. Their responsibilities will include the co-ordination of ALN within the setting, ensuring that the additional needs of all learners are being met and barriers to learning can be overcome. As well as supporting the children the ALNCO will manage the settings plans and work with staff to raise awareness of the ALN system, promoting early identification and instructing staff responsibilities resulting in a whole school approach to ALN and how children are supported (Edukey, 2019).

Williams (2020) states that an ALNCO should have adequate qualifications or experience to take on the role. These requirements are to ensure the children with ALN receive appropriate provision for their needs by staff who are sufficiently skilled. However, Williams (2020) goes on to state some implications, for example an ALNCO could also be a teacher within a school with designated teaching time, it may therefore be difficult for them to manage their time resulting in experiencing significant work related stress due to the pressures of managing two roles and a heavy work load and increasing demands from government and local authorities to implement the new ALN framework to the highest possible standard (Welsh Assembly Government, 2012; Smith, 2018) On the other hand, the Welsh Assembly Government (2021) outlined guidance stating that it is vital that ALNCOs have allocated and sufficient time away from their classrooms as well as resources to be able to plan and manage their ALN role appropriately. Additionally, the ALNCO should be kept up to date with procedures by undertaking training to support their responsibilities.

Increased collaboration

Increased collaboration is within the 11 aims of the ALN Act (2018). According to Welsh Government (2018b) collaboration between agencies is an essential and fundamental aspect of the new Act. The new system encourages information sharing and collaborative working, in order to ensure the early identification of specific needs which in turn allows the relevant support to be put in place, enabling children to reach their full learning potential and achieve positive outcomes. This is in harmony with Working Together to Safeguard Children Act (2018) as they outline the effectiveness of partnership working. Moreover, increased collaboration has a crucial role to play when supporting learners with ALN, as the services involved are responsible for providing efficient and effective child centred support. However, Armstrong (2015) uncovers that collaboration is complex, and challenges may arise for practitioners. These implications include, increased workloads associated with collaborative working as well as differences in opinions and professional outlooks when establishing mutual goals and targets. Additionally, there could be miscommunication across the agencies in terms of terminology used when discussing ALN as well as gaps in knowledge when addressing objectives and suggesting possible support strategies. Therefore, to improve collaboration more consistency is required. Also funding can be an implication when deciding on which agency covers the costs of resources and training (Aiston, 2002; Woods, et al. 2010). Contrastingly, Mora-Ruano, et al. (2019) and Louis, et al. (2010) states that increased collaboration has a powerful and positive effect on children with ALN, their achievements and the whole school community. Also, in countries such as Denmark, Finland and Norway dedicated time is given to ensure practitioners are working collaboratively with all relevant agencies. This is because they believe that promoting a collaborative atmosphere is key for school improvement as within ALN classrooms children reported feeling more supported and satisfied when the adults around them were working together (Schwab, et al. 2015). However, Dufour, et al (2006) discovered a lack of time and insufficient leadership support are among the factors that cause implications for improved collaboration.

Individual Development Plan (IDPs)

According to Welsh Government (2018b) and Dauncey (2021) IDP's are set to create a single unified plan to replace the existing variety of SEN plans. The revised process of producing an IDP is expected to be a simpler than current practice. The IDP will act as a legally binding document providing statutory protection and provision to support children with ALN in a meaningful way. However SNAP Cymru (2021) writes that there is a lack of specification and over-simplification regarding the creation of an IDP. There are a number of implications for practitioners, Edukey (2019) states that due to the phased implementation of the ALN Act, including the roll out of IDP's over a 3 year period, practitioners will be required to follow both the SEN IEP system and the new ALN IDP system until the child has moved completely to the ALN provision. This has resulted in staff expressing confusion and panic about how they will manage to differentiate between the two systems as different year groups of children will be at different points of conversion across the 3 year timescale (Welsh Government, 2018c). Furthermore, Cerebra (2017) explains that issues surrounding the transition to IDP's include the lack of a national template which could lead to inconsistencies across schools as well as significant financial implications as implementing the IDP system is said to be costly. This is reinforced by The National Deaf Children's Society (2018) stating that a national template or guidance on the content and format of an IDP has not yet been finalised therefore IDP's may differ amongst settings. However, Holtom and Lloyd-Jones (2014) revealed that the use of IDP's regardless of the format will broaden the range of support and intervention that will be offered to a child with an additional learning need. Also pilot IDP settings identified that the process provided better information than existing processes. Likewise, the Welsh Assembly Government (2019) lists the positive aspects of the new IDP system as a flexible document that details and depends on the individual child's needs, also the IDP time process is suggested to be much quicker in comparison to the current SEN system as the process of a statement being issued and statutory assessment and the can take up to 26 weeks whereas the IDP process will only take one term, which is roughly 12 weeks. Thus, ensuring that no child goes an extensive time without correct support in place for them (Torfaen County Borough, 2018).

ALN Act- Key Changes



(Source: Impact School Improvement, 2021).

Useful additional links

- SNAP Cymru:** <https://www.snapcymru.org/learn-for-families/aln-reform/> - this website provides an overview of the ALN/ SEN Reform, including explaining the upcoming changes to practice and the way in which ALN will be identified/ assessed and how needs will be met.
- Welsh Assembly Government:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=00eHozWw0pE> - explanation to 'what's happening?' with Additional Learning Needs in Wales.
- Welsh Assembly Government:** <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2018-06/additional-learning-needs-and-education-tribunal-wales-act-2018-implementation-a-guide-for-individual-development-plans.pdf> - a guide to the implementation Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018



Conclusion

To summarise the new legislation is set to provide an improved statutory framework and unified system that will have a positive effect on children and young people with additional learning needs. By embedding ALN within practice using one legislative framework, children will receive the support they need to achieve throughout their education. However, some issues can be identified including no set structure for IDP's, increased workload on ALNCOs, the phased roll-out of and having to follow two legislations. Therefore, it could be suggested that these issues could be reviewed before the complete implementation of the new ALN Act.