

Introduction

This poster will introduce the transformation of Additional Learning Needs in Wales. The new system was created by the Additional Learning Needs and Educational Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018 ('the Act'). It was passed by the Welsh Government in December 2017 and became an official Act in January 2018. From September 2020 children and young people, who have a newly identified ALN will be supported by the new Act and Additional Learning Needs Code (ALN Code). According to ERW (2018) The Act will not replace the duties of the Equality Act 2010 (Department for Education, 2010). However, the existing SEN legislation will apply until the end of the implementation period, which is scheduled to be in the summer of 2023 (Welsh Government, 2019).

The Act has created a new Additional Learning Needs (ALN) legislative framework for Wales and is aimed at improving the planning and delivery for Additional Learning Needs in Wales (Welsh Government, 2018a).

It will replace the two support systems that are currently in place for children and young people. These are the Special Educational Needs (SEN) framework which is implemented in Early Years settings and schools and the Learning Difficulties and/or Disabilities (LDD) which is in place for further education establishments (Welsh Government, 2018c)

The previous law for education of children and young people with special educational needs is 30 years old and therefore is seen as outdated for meeting the needs of today's learners.

Estyn (2018) state the 3 main objectives in the Act are:

1. To provide one legislative framework for children and young people aged 0-25 in schools and further education institutions (FEIs) who have been identified as having ALN
2. To promote an integrated, collaborative pathway of assessment, planning and monitoring which enables an appropriate timescale of assessment allowing for early and appropriate interventions.
3. To have a fair system for providing advice and information regarding concerns and appeals.

Changes to Additional Learning Needs in Wales

Introduction of Individual Development Plan's (IDPs)

The new ALN act will introduce Individual Development Plans (IDPs). An IDP is a statutory plan maintained by schools and further education establishments that describes a child or young person's ALN and states what provision is required for that individual. This new system will replace the existing support plans such as Statements, Individual Education Plans (IEPs) and skills plans for post 16 learners. IDPs will be provided to all children with an ALN, irrespective of the severity of their needs, which differs from the current statementing process which only issues statements to children with more complex needs.

According to the Welsh Government (2019) the benefits of the new IDP is that it must be prepared within 35 days of the school being made aware of a child or young person with ALN. Whereas currently issuing a statement can take up to 26 weeks (Welsh Government, 2004). Therefore delaying essential provision for a child with ALN. However, according to Dauncey (2016) there is significant concern amongst parents and carers about the legal status of IDPs, and whether they will lose the legal protection they feel a Statement of SEN provides.

One of the principles of the ALN code is that all agencies involved in providing support to children and young people with ALN work together in the best interest of the child or young person. The Act considers articles from the United Nations Conference of the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Article 12 of the convention states 'Every child has the right to express their views, feelings and wishes in all matters affecting them' (UNCRC, 1989). IDPs will be created with the consideration of the child and their parents or guardians. Producing an IDP will require a Person-Centred Approach (PCP) which will include a one-page profile. This identifies a child's personality, their needs and what is important to them (SNAP Cymru, date unknown). Preparing an IDP will be the responsibility of the ALENCo, with input from parents and all appropriate professionals. Securing additional provision and reviewing the IDP when required is also the responsibility of the setting whereas in the current legislation assessments and paperwork is prepared by both the SENCo and the local authority.

The practitioners role from SENCo to ALENCo

The new 'Act' has changed the terminology used for the current Special Education Needs Coordinator (SENCo) to Additional Learning Needs Coordinator (ALENCo) (Welsh Government, 2019). Not only has the name changed but the role has developed considerably. Section 60 of the 'Act' states that the role of ALENCo should be statutory, whereas the existing role of SENCo is non-statutory. It also states that the ALENCo should be part of the senior management team in settings or have direct communication with the senior management team.

The new job description for an ALENCo has increased substantially. Both a SENCo and an ALENCo's role is similar in a way that they have to ensure the needs are met for all learners who have ALN. However, an added role is that ALENCos now have the extra responsibility of strategic financial planning, deployment of resources and data collection and analysis. The ALENCo will be required to plan, deliver and manage the needs of all children and young people with ALN in their settings.

However Dauncey (2016) stated that although the Welsh Government had highlighted the importance of relevant training and qualifications for ALENCos, consultees displayed concerns about the administrative workload on the role and whether this may affect an ALENCo's teaching capacity.

Estyn (2018) suggest that as well as the ALENCo, all staff who work with children and young people with ALN have a responsibility for ensuring that the learners' needs are identified and provided for. Therefore, all members of staff should participate in workforce training in order to broaden their knowledge on ALN. Although the idea of training for all practitioners is idealistic, in reality the funding provided by the Welsh Government is not substantial (Dauncey, 2016).

Further Information

Additional Learning Needs Wales - What's happening?
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z2bkbs00Z68&feature=youtu.be>

A guide to IDPs - <http://www.snapcymru.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/IDP-Booklet.pdf>

Helping children and young people who need extra support to learn-
<https://gwwedill.gov.wales/docs/dcelts/publications/170222-easy-read-explanation-of-the-aln-bill-en.pdf>

How have Local Authorities (LAs) and Schools been preparing for the Act?

Estyn (2018) recommend that schools, local authorities and regional consortia should become knowledgeable with guidance and training materials produced by the Welsh Government, to implement the additional learning needs reforms effectively. Support and funding for implementing the Act in its settings include:

- Online e training for practitioners.
- Welsh Government grants to develop the Person Centred Practice (PCP).
- Funding to support the professional learning of the ALENCo.
- Local Authority funded courses for implementation of the Act.
- Welsh Government document Additional learning Needs (ALN) Transformation Programme that has been distributed to all settings.

Is enough being done?

Welsh Government have provided £20 million of funding to implement the ALN Act. However, Estyn (2018) have expressed concerns that not enough funding has been allocated to LAs and settings from the Welsh Government for training, to ensure that practitioners are fully prepared for the changes. This could cause concerns as schools will only be able to fund a limited number of staff to attend training and the risk of the message being filtered down to school incorrectly could occur (Dauncey, 2016).

Conclusion

SNAP Cymru (2019a) report that the current system is not inclusive and holistic. They say that sometimes families feel excluded from processes involving their child. SNAP welcome the new reform and feel it is a positive step forward for children and young people with ALN. However some concerns by parents and carers do show that they are still uncertain that IDPs are the way forward due to lack of legal standing. On a positive note, the Act is set to transform experiences, expectations and outcomes for children and young people with ALN. By using a PCP approach, the opinions of the children and young people as well as their parents and carers are taken into account. This can only be seen as a positive step forward for inclusive education.

Additional learning needs (ALN) timeline



(Source: Welsh Government, 2018a)