

An analyses of the implications that the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) act will have in Wales.

Introduction of the term Additional Learning Need (ALN)

Dauncey (2016) identifies one change in legislation as a change in name from Special Educational Needs (SEN), to Additional Learning Needs (ALN). Dauncey tells us that the term SEN is now arguably outdated and the term ALN holds a wider concept. The new legislation for Wales involves changes to the ways that learners needs are identified and provided for and this change of understanding is what is responsible for the change of name. However, Dauncey (2015) puts forward key points arising from the white paper consultation and identifies that although four fifths of respondents agree that the new term Additional Learning Needs (ALN) is more inclusive, only half of young people consulted support the change suggesting that the new term does not help to remove negative labelling, and in fact it is not a change in term that is needed. It is actual provision that is more important to them. Why waste the expense of changing the name when this could be spent on improving provision. McLaughlin et al. (2006) agree with this and add that there are long standing concerns that labeling or classification is a social construction that reduces individual children to a label to which are attached negative stereotypes, expectations, and exclusion. Additionally, disability labels within a climate of limited resources and an education system inflexible in what it can provide, seem irrelevant and the classification or label of a child who needs additional support should not be a main concern in the new bill and certainly not something which money is being spent on. However, Meijer, Pijl, and Hegarty (1994) point out that other countries such as Scandinavian are far ahead of the UK in understandings of integration and inclusivity. In Scandanavia it is seen as a process not an outcome. This change in name from SEN to ALN, whether seen as relevant or not, reflects a positive process of change in understanding of inclusivity in Wales.

Individual Development Plan (IDP) to replace Statementing.

SNAP Cymru (2018) tell us that every child and young person aged up to 25 who requires any support that is additional to what is already provided by the curriculum, will have an IDP which will replace the already existing Special Educational Needs plans. However, ESTYN (2018) share findings of a recent inspection and state that schools are not keeping up to date with individual progress thus hindering their own ability to understand the best strategy for each individual. Furthermore, schools are not sharing information with other agencies and external staff resulting in a lack of understanding of how to individualise approaches to best meet the needs of individuals. This poses the question of how will schools be able to implement the changes needed to create IDPs which are based on information sharing and understanding individual needs, and suggests that perhaps this change is too much for an already struggling system. In response to this, the Welsh Government (2018) have stated that they acknowledge that some aspects need strengthening in order to implement this new act. This is being done in a number of ways which include the recruitment of four ALN transformation leads which will be working with local authorities to support them and their schools prepare for the implementation of the act. Furthermore, a significant portion of the ALN transformation program funding is being used to upskill the workforce to better meet the needs of learners with ALN. Collins (2018) adds to the criticism of IDPs by stating that there is no national template which may result in each different establishment producing different looking documents resulting in restricting one key aspect of IDPs being information sharing and multi-agency working. Collins identifies another criticism and questions the capacity of schools and colleges to produce and maintain IDPs and shares concerns for the costs of this. However, The National Assembly for Wales (2017) tell us that the bills proposed replacement of the existing SEN plans with IDPs will save the local authority education service costs in terms of fewer disagreements, regarding assessment and issue of IDPs than is currently the case with existing statements. SNAP Cymru (2017) identify further concern with the IDPs, which will take over from statementing, and puts forward parents responses which are that the bill is not explicit enough about children and young people with severe and complex needs, about which the IDPs will be developed and maintained by the LA. This has resulted in a concern that provision for children with severe and complex needs will be eroded.

Introduction to the role of the Additional Learning Needs Co-ordinator (ALNCo)

Welsh Government (2015) Introduce the new role of Additional Learning Needs Co-ordinator (ALNCo) as one of the changes this new ALN legislation brings to Wales. This new role not only has to be someone who is a member of senior staff but also in their new role, have to take it upon themselves to commit to individual learning and continuing professional development in relation to ALN. This is regardless of previous experience, qualifications and the education setting in which they are based. However, The University and College Union (2017) seek assurance that sufficient training, time and support would be provided to enable staff to carry out new duties placed upon them. Furthermore, the University and College Union make the point that it is stated that the new ALNCo will need to be in a senior role. Taking into consideration however, the amount of responsibilities being in a senior role has, and accompany this with the new job role list set out in the draft code, causes some concern in that time away from the classroom will be inevitable and this is seen as detrimental to the responsibility that the ALNCo role has to the children with ALNs in the classroom. The new ALNCo role needs to be seen as a full time role of its own right. However, Wallace (2014) points out that in recent years the role of the SENCo has become increasingly complex in its responsibilties and is now regarded as a senior management role. This shows that this role has been balancing senior management responsibilities as well as the in classroom teaching responsibilities for a while and it is only now that the new ALN bill has come out, that this has been highlighted, thus causing conern. The fact that only since the ALN bill has come out, concerns are being raised for things which have been going on previously, shows how outdated the previous SEN legislation was. (Dauncey, 2015). However, Beyer (2007) puts this lack of understanding of the job role down to inconsistencies in Wales in the way that legislation and its guidance are being followed, which is enhanced by guidance being complex and inaccessible to families and young people, resulting in a confusion of what the job role entails. SNAP Cymru (2015) suggest however, that the new legislation will bring with it positive change to the role as the role of the ALNCo must be a senior member of qualified teaching staff, where as the SENCo does not legally have to be this which has meant that the SENCo role has been designated to junior members of staff who are not qualified or experienced enough, and have not got sufficient influence within the school to be able to fullfill this important role and best meet the needs of children with ALNs.