

# From Special Educational Needs (SEN) to Additional Learning Needs (ALN) Wales

## Introduction

Children and young people with Additional Learning Needs (ALN) are more likely to experience lower educational outcomes. As ALN is present in almost 25% of learners, and the former SEN system is built on a 30-year-old model, there were calls for a new system to better support learners with ALN (Education Wales, 2020). Aimed at creating a consistent system to "protect and strengthen the rights" (Welsh Government, 2016) of children and young people with additional learning needs in education, the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (ALNET) Bill, part of the Additional Learning Needs Transformation Programme, ensures inclusivity and equality. Central to this new system is agencies working closer together to ensure those in education up to 25 years of age receive the support they need to realise their potential. Education Wales (2020) states that children and their parents will take a more active role in deciding what is best for the child and contribute to the plans put in place to ensure the child's needs are supported effectively.

## Key Changes

SEN – ALN

SENCo – ALNCo

IEP  
Statements  
School Action  
School Action Plus } IDP  
(Snap Cymru, no date)

Includes children and young people aged 0–25 years in education (Welsh Government, 2016).

September 2021: Phased roll out begins (Kirsty Williams, 2020)

## SEN → ALN

Some practitioners have expressed confidence that children will receive more effective support quicker under the new ALN system than with the previous system (Welsh Government, 2017). Multiple agencies that play an important role in supporting children with ALN will be able to meet when required to discuss progress where previously multiple agencies would meet at an annual review. Central to this is the child themselves and parents as they have been recognised as having the best knowledge of their children and knowing what is best for them (Welsh Government, 2017a). Increased collaboration is key to the ALN reform. All agencies involved with the child can share information and create a single, consolidated, central plan for a child with ALN. This creates greater continuity and provides a greater understanding for parents (Welsh Government, 2017b).

Under the new ALN system there will be clear rights of appeal for families who are unhappy with the ALN support they receive as it is a lawful requirement of those working to support children and young people with ALN to adhere to the new code (Education Wales 2020). However, Conn and Hutt (2020) note that one of the concerns practitioners raised were regarding the school's greater accountability for children with ALN and fears of the legal repercussions if they cannot provide the right support and or demonstrate that the school is taking the appropriate measures to support individuals with ALN. Despite the impact of COVID-19, the new ALN system remains a priority and will begin in September 2021 with a phased approach. Training on the ALN system is available online (Kirsty Williams, 2020) which can be found at <https://hwb.gov.wales/news/articles/20686965-8669-40ac-bdc5-599f4a4dfe8b> (Welsh Government, 2021).

## SENCo → ALNCo

Under the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) 2018 schools will be required to employ at least one practitioner to support learners who have additional learning needs by overseeing that additional learning provision is in place (Welsh Government, 2019). According to Central South Consortium (2021) the role of the SENCo lacked a clear description that applied nationally. Instead, duties could be appointed depending on the needs of the individuals attending the school. Therefore, the role of the SENCo nationally was not consistent. However, the roles of the new ALNCo have expectations that are clearer suggesting that ALNCo's themselves will have a better understanding of their role in providing effective support to children with ALN.

However, concerns were raised about whether the timescales given to ALNCo's to complete certain duties were realistic, especially for those who also have teaching responsibilities. In comparison, some of these duties will now be the responsibility of the ALNCo whereas previously they were undertaken by more practitioners than the SENCo alone (Welsh Government, 2019). Another role is to actively work with the headteacher to decide on a budget for ALN support and provision (Central South Consortium, 2021).

Where other practitioners are concerned Central South Consortium (2021) states that identifying ALN is still a responsibility of the teacher and that the ALNCo works together with the senior management team (SLT) in ensuring provisions are in place to break down barriers to learning, although the ALNCo now has the role of guiding SLT.

## IEP → IDP

According to Snap Cymru (no date), under the new ALN reform, statements will no longer be issued. Individual Education Plans (IEP) will be replaced with Individual Development Plans (IDP). An IDP will be created for each ALN child identified by the school as having additional learning needs. IDPs will be in place for each child and young person, whilst in education, until the age of 25 whereas the former SEN system would support children and young people until the age of 16, or 19 whilst in further education.

Parents and the child will work with professionals to create an IDP consisting of the collective ideas of all involved. IDPs will set out ways forward for the child and how to progress. These documents are to be used and referred to daily and not just hidden away and taken out occasionally (Welsh Government, 2017c).

However, concerns were raised about the timescales related to completing IDP's. It was thought that the severity of a child's needs should be reflected in the timescales for completing the necessary duties to create an effective IDP. There were fears that timescales may result in rushing IDP's which may make them less relevant and effective (Welsh Government, 2019).

## Additional learning needs (ALN) timeline



(Source: Snap Cymru, 2018)

## Conclusion

The new ALN system promotes increased collaboration and information sharing with parents and multiple agencies (Welsh Government, 2017b) and focuses on the voice of the child, giving them increased opportunities to have a say in their own learning and development (Education Wales, 2020). IDPs provide one central plan to replace the former system of having various documents (Snap Cymru, no date). This suggests that plans are now streamlined and clearer. Although IDPs offer a single consolidated plan (Welsh Government, 2017b), with the child's voice, parental involvement and the views of the professionals involved with the child central to process (Welsh Government, 2017c), one would agree that the timescales given to ALNCo's to complete IDPs could compromise the quality and effectiveness of the IDPs. That said, Welsh Government (2019) states that at least one practitioner should be appointed for the role of ALNCo, suggesting that some settings will have more than one ALNCo. This may raise questions about school budgets for employing the staff required to ensure that ALN related duties are carried out thoroughly, so children receive the most effective support.

## Further Reading

- For a simple, clear visual overview of the key changes regarding ALN reform visit Impact Wales (2020) at: <https://twitter.com/ImpactWales/status/1334747833610756097/photo/1> (Accessed: 6<sup>th</sup> June 2021).
- Welsh Government (2020) *The additional learning needs transformation programme: frequently asked questions*. Available at: <https://gov.wales/additional-learning-needs-transformation-programme-frequently-asked-questions.html> (Accessed: 6<sup>th</sup> June 2020).
- Snap Cymru (no date) *ALN/SEN Reform*. Available at: <https://www.snapcymru.org/help-for-families/aln-reform/> (Accessed: 4<sup>th</sup> June 2021).