

# Impending changes to SEN/ALN legislation in Wales

**Introduction**— The current Special Educational Needs (SEN) Framework is rooted on a model establish 30 years ago and therefore no longer meets the current needs of SEN children (Welsh Government (WG), 2018). It will be replaced by a new system called Additional Learning Needs (ALN) and Educational Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018 (Dauncey, 2018). The Government aims to remove the term Special Educational Needs to erase the stigma and stereotyping of the children ALN, although the definition basis remains the same (WG, 2018). The Education Act (1996) (Legislation, 2020) states that a child or young person with ALN is somebody with bigger difficulty in learning than others of an equal age. Settings supporting children and young people with ALN must update their current SEN policies to new ALN policies (WG, 2018). The impending transition to the ALN legislation may be costly and time consuming (WG, 2018).

**Changes to individual plans**— Individual plans for children with ALN used to be separated into three plans- Individual Play Plan (IPP), Individual educational Plan (IEP) and Individual Learning Plan (ILP). These are also known as Statements of SEN and Learning Difficulty Assessments (Snap Cymru, no date). The ALN reform will replace these with an Individual Development Plan (IDP (WG 2018). The new IDP's will stay with the child from 0-25, therefore ensuring a better consistency and continuity between Local Authorities and schools. However, as the ALN reform is delayed until 2021 it places ALN children in limbo regarding their individual plans and statements. Snap Cymru criticised the delay as it would prolong a situation that has been troubling for years (Capital Law, 2019).

**SENCO to ALNCO**— The impending legislation will result in changes for the current role known as the Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO) and will be replaced by an Additional Learning Needs Coordinator (ALNCo) (SNAP Cymru, 2020). The ALNCo role is based on the SENCO role but in addition must be a qualified teacher as well as becoming part of the senior management team, thereby ensuring that all learners with additional needs are given integrity, value and worth within a setting (WG, 2018). However, this will put a lot of pressure on the ALNCo as they must decide whether a child in their care has an ALN and will need to produce and support the IDP (SNAP Cymru, 2020). As well as being a qualified teacher the ALNCo must have an extensive knowledge of training and experience working with ALN children (TSANA, 2015). However, funding and time to receive relevant training may cause complications for these educators (ESTYN, 2018).

**Age range**— Currently the SEN code only incorporates learners from the age of 0-16 which is also supported by the Learning Difficulties and/or Disabilities (LDD) post-16. The new statutory framework ranges from the ages of 0-25, therefore, supporting ALN children from birth, through school and if they continue to further education (Dauncey, 2018). Dauncey (2016) notes it will allow an integrated legislative framework, nurturing local authorities to work alongside each other while delivering consistency with statutory planning, therefore proving learners equal support pre and post 16 education.

**Conclusion**— Overall the new ALN legislation will benefit children, practitioners and multiagency workers as it provides an up to date perspective of the needs and wants of all (WG, 2018). However, delaying the impending changes puts many ALN children and parents waiting for a statement or support in an unfavorable position until the new legislation is able to commence (SNAP Cymru, 2020).

**Funding and costs**— The Welsh Government state that they will be investing in the education work force to make sure all practitioners working with ALN children have the correct training and skills (WG, 2017). According to Dauncey (2018) the impending changes will cost an estimated 7.2 million this being over a four-year period. A further £20 million funding package was given to help implement legislation, this included training for all staff (Dauncey, 2018). However, this funding may not be substantial enough for every practitioner working an ALN child to receive all the needed training for the new legislation. Therefore, schools may send one member of staff to the relevant ALN training and the knowledge that this practitioner then acquires will then be passed on to others through a cascading process. Suzuki (no date) writes that cascading can be ineffective, however, as the training taught can be changed and distorted via the minimal amount of time training is received and the capacity in which the practitioner remembers.