

Additional Learning Needs and Tribunal Wales Act (2018) – Implications for Practitioners

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(Source: ALN Timeline, Google Images).

Introduction

The most recent Special Education Needs (SEN) Framework in Wales will be replaced with the new Additional Learning Needs and Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018. The Welsh Government (2018) and The National Assembly (2018) welcome the changes stating the existing SEN Framework was unfit for purpose and in need of a complete overhaul. Welsh Government (2018) suggests the changes are required to ensure learners in Wales receive a fully inclusive education, where each individual is able to reach their full potential. Early identification of needs is required and addressed confidently by practitioners using a range of flexible and responsive strategies, but where the learners is involved in all decisions that are made, this is agreed by Nasen, (2020), SNAP Cymru (2021). NI Direct (2021) states the term 'Special Education Needs' is a legal term for children with a disability or a learning difficulty. According to Welsh Government (2018) approximately 23% of learners attending mainstream schools in Wales have an SEN. The Senedd Cymru (2021) states from September 2021 all learners with an ALN will be supported following the new ALN Act. according to Welsh Government (2019). Snap Cymru (2021) insists the current SEN Framework remains in place until the fully implementation of the new ALN Act. Estyn (2018) states how the act has three main objectives:

- 1 - to provide a unified legislative framework.
- 2 - to promote and integrate a collaborative, multiagency approach.
- 3 - to have a fair system with clear information and advice to resolve any concerns or appeals.



(Source: ALN Aims, Google Images).

Change of Age

Previously the SEN code only supported learners aged 0-16 with additional legislation Learning Difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD) supporting learners over the age of 16 (Dauncy, 2018). The introduction of the new ALN Act now covers all learners from 0-25years, the aim is to create a smoother transition experience for the learner. As suggested by (Welsh Government, 2018b) having the two different systems was too complex, not user friendly, and caused delays in transitions and interventions. As a result, Davies (2019) and the Department for Education (2010) state the importance of practitioners having a clear understanding of child developmental stages and the expectations of learners during vital transitional periods

Collaboration

Provision Map (2021) states having a more unified approach throughout the ages will provide consistency and a continual plan for learners. However, to ensure smooth transitions practitioners need to have positive working relationships with the local authority and other multi agencies to ensure consistent planning in regards the learner. According to Dauncey (2018) a multi-agency approach is set out in the White paper. Dowling (2010) would agree suggesting a close working partnership between parents and different practitioners is crucial, especially during key transition periods. Every Child Matters (2005) states the importance of multiagency work for practitioners, as they can learn from other experts that may specialise in a subject area and also collaboration can help with problem solving. Akinnubi et al (2012) would state effective communication is key to collaboration within practitioners working in education and care..

From SENCo to ALNCo

According to the Welsh Government (2021, a) under section 60 of the Act, all maintained mainstream settings must have a designated ALNCo. The Welsh Government (2021) goes on to discuss how the ALNCo should have a high skill set and a wealth of experience when working with learners with a wide range of ALN. Provision Map (2021) states the importance of the SEN role, and It needing to be developed further to link in with the changes to the ALN Act (2018). Welsh Government (2019) recommends the ALNCo is part of the senior management team and is able to plan, deliver and manage staff when supporting learners, including the training of staff. According to Teachers Union (2021) the current changes to the role will increase the work load for ALNCo's, with 58% also being a class teachers. The Welsh Government (2021) insists time away from the class is dedicated in order for the ALNCo to complete their duties to meet the Regulatory Impact Assessment for the Act.

Conclusion

The introduction of the Welsh Governments ALN Act 2018 is an exciting time for both practitioners and learners. There are a number of changes which will have advantages and disadvantages for all involved. As identified above the change of age to whom the law is aimed; having a more collaborative approach to supporting learners with ALN; and additionally the changes to the role of the ALNCo. The Welsh Government (2018) lists a range of support available to practitioners and families to ensure a consistent and smooth transition to the new Act.

Further Reading

Additional Learning Needs Transformation Programme - <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2018-09/additional-learning-needs-aln-transformation-programme-v2.pdf>
Additional Learning Needs Transformation Programme – Frequently Asked Questions - https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-02/aln-frequently-asked-questions-2_0.pdf