

FUTURE CHANGES TO ALN LEGISLATION IN WALES

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What is the new legislation and why do we need this change?

The current system is over 30 years old thus the Reform has been long overdue (Education Wales, 2020; Dauncey 2021). To support and develop learning outcome for children with ALN, a reformed program has been created by the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018 (Welsh Gov, 2019). Special educational needs (SEN) and learning difficulties/disabilities (LDD) will be combined to develop a united, single approach for all young people from birth to 25 years old (Welsh Gov, 2018; ALN, 2019). Although implementation has been postponed for a year to allow for further dedicated training, development, and successful implementation (Williams, 2018; Lewis, 2019) the new ALN bill has been set to be integrated into schools from September 2021 over a phased 3-year period (Welsh Gov, 2020; Learning Disability Wales, 2021). However, Williams (2018), Dauncey, (2020) and National Deaf Children Society (2021) state that until the Act comes into force, obligations set out by the Education Act 1996 and the SEN Code of Practice for Wales are to remain in place.

Special educational needs (SEN) will be replaced by Additional learning needs (ALN)

The new ALN legislation will replace the outdated SEN program to provide a more unified approach to children who have an ALN (Welsh Parliament, 2020; Welsh Gov, 2021; Dauncey, 2021).

SENCOs will be known as ALNCOs (SNAP Cymru, 2021) With each school in Wales having at least one ALNCO (Welsh Gov, 2020). However, ALNCOs will not be required to be directly involved with the day-to-day practice of assisting every student with ALN (WG, 2021). Instead, Williams (2019) notes ALNCOs will have responsibility for the coordination of additional learning provision for pupils with ALN. ALNCO's will be competent when implementing strategies to support learners overcome any barriers (WG,2021). However, individuals involved with the deliverance of the new ALN legislation may require further clarification of responsibilities they are accountable for if they are to successfully support children with ALN (The Children, Young people and Education Committee, 2017).

According to Provision Map (2019) ALNCO's are to be highly knowledgeable experts in ALN with equivalent status to a high-ranking member of staff (Education Wales, 2019) and will have a responsibility of coordinating efficient provision for learners. However, the increased responsibilities of the ALNCO has been a worry for smaller schools where the ALNCO role is often carried out by the headteacher or added on to another member of staffs position as an additional responsibility (Hardy, Hobbs and Bham, 2020). ALNCOs will be required to provide training and support for staff members, as well as providing information and support to parents (University and College Union, 2017). However, according to Williams (2021) the 3-year phased integration of the new Legislation will provide ALNCOs time to fully digest and understand their new role and responsibilities. Thus, ALNCOs will be able to introduce procedures and practice; build valuable and collaborative relationships consequently implement the ALN legislation effectively (Cerebra, 2021).

Increased Collaboration

The academic achievement of children with SEN is often poor when compared to peers without any ALN (WG, 2018; Dauncey, 2018). However, the new legislation aims to deliver an inclusive education system, one that identifies ALN and provide intervention and support at the earliest opportunity (WG, 2017, SNAP Cymru, no date; PACEY, 2017).

Under the new Legislation, early years practitioners will be expected to work together collaboratively to provide children, young people and their families with consistent and beneficial support and advice thus helping them to achieve the best outcomes (SNAP Cymru, no date; WG, 2018; Welsh Parliament, 2021). This is supported by Article 3 of the UNCRC, whereby all children best interests are pertinent to decision's that may affect them (UNICEF, no date).

Practitioners will be required to provide a unified, collaborative method of assessment and planning ensuring early, timely and effective interventions are put into place for children with an ALN and that those interventions are monitored and reviewed frequently (WG, 2019). Practitioners are to be mindful that they support the involvement of the person with ALN, considering their wishes and opinions and that their views are considered throughout the planning procedure (WG, 2017; WG, 2019; UNICEF, no date). To encourage collaboration, the new legislation states health boards are to delegate a Designated Education Clinical Lead Officer (DECLO) who will play a pivotal part in refining effective collaboration between health, education, and social care in the delivery of services for children and young people with ALN (WG,2017; Estyn, 2018). According to WG (2017) and Education through Regional Working (2021), the introduction of the DECLO in each health service could help improve co-operation and collaboration between the health service and the local authority thus supporting the practitioners' responsibilities. However, some children with ALN will not require input from a health professional due to their health bearing no influence upon their ALN (WG,2018).

IEP's will be transferred to IDP'S

Individual Development plan's (IDP) are set to replace existing Individual Educational Plans, including statutory and non-statutory SEN or LDD plans (SNAP Cymru, 2014; Dewis Cymru, 2020; WG, 2020). Furthermore, IDPs may be requested by the parent, professional, or the learner, thus an increase in requests could be seen which may result in an increased workload for childcare practitioners (National Deaf Children's Society, no date). However, the procedure of generating and reviewing an IDP are thought to be simpler than statements of SEN (WG, 2017). The time taken to prepare an IDP will depend on the severity of the ALN (WG, 2019). However, a child with complex requirements may require expert involvement and increased interventions, resulting in more time and effort to formulate (WG,2019).

According to Welsh Government (2020) IDP's provide a simpler and improved system for assisting early years practitioners to support children with ALN (WG, 2020). However, if IDP's are to be valuable relevant professionals are to work together, whilst ensuring the child's best interest are at the heart of any development plans (SNAP Cymru, no date; UNICEF, no date; Gov.uk, 2017). However, if disagreements arise during collaboration regarding the needs of the child, the local authority or governing body will then take responsibility for deciding upon the best provision for that child (WG, no date).

Further Education Institution and the Local Authority will be responsible for preparing and maintaining an IDP for all children with an ALN (SNAP Cymru, no date). However, if a has severe or more complex ALN, Local authorities are likely to be accountable for the formulation of IDPs (SNAP cymru, no date). IDP's require adequate person-centred planning if they are to be a valuable and beneficial support for the child or young person (Children, Young People and Education Committee, 2017).