

Additional Learning Needs (ALN) in Wales



A guide for parents and carers on additional learning needs (ALN) and Individual Development Plans (IDPs)

This information applies only to families in Wales. It explains the replacement of the term special educational needs (SEN) with additional learning needs (ALN). It also sets out the new system to support the learning of children and young people with ALN in Wales, which was phased in from September 2021.

Over time, Statements of SEN, School Action, School Action Plus, and Learning and Skills Plans will be replaced with Individual Development Plans (IDPs). IDPs will support children and young people with ALN aged 0 to 16, and 16 to 25, if they are in school or further education colleges.

The information in this guide is based on the Additional Learning Needs Code for Wales 2021, is the Welsh Government's guide to schools, local authorities and colleges on how to support children and young people with ALN. This guide is accompanied by an example IDP on our website at ndcs.org.uk/additional-support-education-wales.

The Additional Learning Needs Code for Wales 2021 contains more information on different parts of the new system and is available to download from the Welsh Government's website at gov.wales/additional-learning-needs-code.

Terms

We use the term 'deaf' to refer to all types of hearing loss from mild to profound. This includes deafness in one ear or temporary hearing loss such as glue ear.

We use the word 'parent' to refer to all parents and carers of children.

We use 'learner' to refer to children and young people in education.

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Learner's rights

- Parents, carers or any learner, even if the learner has mild or moderate deafness, can ask for an IDP if extra support would help their learning. All requests must be considered.
- Sections of the Code of Practice highlight deafness as an ALN. Deaf learners should be given an IDP assessment.
- Parents, carers and the learner should be at the centre of the process of creating the IDP and helping to decide what kind of additional learning provision (ALP) is best for them.
- An IDP stays with a learner and is reviewed regularly throughout their time in education. If a learner's needs change, the support in their IDP may change or their IDP might be stopped. However, parents, carers and learners should be told about any plans to change or stop an IDP and contribute to the decision-making process.
- Education and health organisations should work together to support a learner. An IDP may include learning support from health professionals, such as a speech and language therapists.
- The communication needs of a parent, carer and the learner must be considered in any meetings to discuss the IDP.
- Learners have a right to an independent advocate – someone who helps learners to understand the process of getting or reviewing an IDP and helps them to voice their opinions on their support needs. Councils should be able to provide this service for free.
- Parents, carers and learners have the right to challenge decisions around an IDP at every stage, including decisions on whether to provide, review, change, continue or stop an IDP and the support outlined in a learner's plan.
- You can appeal to the Education Tribunal Wales if you cannot resolve certain disagreements at school, college or local authority level.

Section 1: Additional learning needs (ALN)

What does ALN mean?

You might be used to the term special educational needs (SEN). The term ALN now replaces SEN, but the definition is very similar.

For children and young people of school age or over, ALN is defined as:

- having greater difficulty learning than others of their age
OR
- having a disability which prevents or hinders them from using the facilities provided for education or training for others of the same age in mainstream schools or further education colleges (Equality Act 2010).

Children who are not yet in school are considered to have ALN if they are likely to have either of the above in the future.

We believe that deafness fits within the definition of ALN and that when requesting an IDP, deaf learners are well placed to receive one.

If a school, college or local authority suggests that deafness, in particular mild or unilateral deafness, is not an ALN, you can refer them to the Code which outlines how the IDP process should work.

It specifically mentions deafness as an example of ALN (see paragraphs 2.27 and 2.34 of the Code) and that those with lower levels of deafness can still have support needs (see paragraph 2.38 of the Code).

To qualify for an IDP, a deaf child or young person must have both ALN and require additional learning provision (ALP).

What do we mean by additional learning provision (ALP)?

ALP is the support given to a child or young person with ALN to help with their learning. It is different to the level of support generally given to learners of the same age. This could be support in a nursery setting, school or further education college in Wales, or even support to a family to help with their baby's development.

ALP takes many forms and can include:

- support that takes place inside or outside the mainstream classroom
- support for a deaf learner's family
- hearing devices and assistive listening technology
- training for those working with a deaf learner
- support from a specialist professional like a Teacher of the Deaf (ToD) or a speech and language therapist
- naming a particular school or college with specialist support available for deaf learners

Who can have an Individual Development Plan (IDP) assessment?

Children (0 to 16), and young people (16 to 25) attending sixth form or college, considered to have ALN that needs ALP, are eligible for an IDP assessment to determine whether a support plan is needed and, if so, what that support should include.

IDPs are for children with all levels of need from mild to complex. The length and content of the IDP will vary, depending on the child's needs. Information in Welsh Government guidance (paragraphs 2.27, 2.34 and 2.38 of the Code) suggests that deaf children and young people are eligible for an IDP assessment.

If your child has a temporary deafness, professionals may consider factors such as how long the child has had the hearing loss, when deciding whether or not to assess for an IDP.

Deaf young people

While those aged 16 to 25 are only eligible for an IDP if they attend college or sixth form, other deaf young people may be able to access different types of support. Including:

- Disabled Students Allowance to cover disability related costs in Higher Education
- Access to Work for financial support in employment

For more information, please visit ndcs.org.uk/money-and-benefits.

Section 2: Individual Development Plans (IDPs)

What is an IDP?

You might have been familiar with School Action, or School Action Plus, Statements. or Learning and Skills Plans. All these will be replaced by IDPs over time.

An IDP is a legal document that outlines what ALP a learner should have to support their learning. Generally, it is the duty of the school or further education college to prepare and maintain the IDP. However, in the case of pre-school children, learners with more specialist needs, or if a learner is in care, the local authority will hold responsibility for the IDP.

Those coordinating plans will often seek advice and support from other relevant professionals, including ToDs, audiologists, and speech and language therapists.

The new system will take a more integrated approach to supporting learners, with various professionals working together. Each health board in Wales will have a Designated Education Clinical Lead Officer (DECLO) responsible for making sure education and health authorities work together.

An example IDP can be found on our website at ndcs.org.uk/additional-support-education-wales. It explains in more detail the information you can expect to see in an IDP.

How do you get an IDP?

The first step is to ask for one as soon as possible.

If your child, or a child you care for, is identified deaf at their newborn screening or before they start school, you can ask your local authority for an IDP. The Early Years Additional Learning Needs Lead Officer (EYALNLO) will be the key point of contact.

If deafness is identified when a learner is school or college age, or they have not had an IDP before would now like one, the school or college is the first point of contact. Every school and college has an Additional Learning Needs Coordinator (ALNCo) who will be the key point of contact.

Parents, carers and learners can ask for an IDP. You do not have to wait for a professional to refer a learner into the IDP system. A professional, such as an audiologist working with a deaf child or young person can refer them for an IDP, but they should talk to parents or carers about this first.

I've asked for an IDP, what's next?

Once you've asked for an IDP, the local authority, school or college should decide whether to provide an IDP. They should give you a copy of that IDP within 35 school days of your request. They may only take longer than 35 school days if there are reasons that make this deadline impractical. The sooner your request is made the better, as the deadline of 35 school days does not include school holidays.

If the IDP is first prepared by the local authority when your deaf child is a baby or infant, the IDP is likely to be made the responsibility of the school once they start education.

When the IDP is prepared, the school, college or local authority must make sure that learners and parents or carers are at the heart of the process. They must consult with you and the learner about their needs and what support would be best for them.

Learners, parents or carers, and key professionals who support them, will be asked to share their thoughts on the learner's needs and be invited to a meeting to discuss their support further.

A key part of involving learners and their parents or carers in the process is understanding how a learner wants to communicate their needs. This includes which language you all want to use in the process, and how that communication happens (paragraphs 4.13 and 4.14 of the Code). If a deaf learner or a deaf parent or carer would prefer to use British Sign Language (BSL) during the meetings to discuss the IDP, the school or college must make sure that happens. If anyone prefers to communicate in Welsh, the school or college should take this on board.

Learners and parents or carers must see a draft copy of the IDP and have an opportunity to comment on what it contains. If either are not happy with the IDP, the school or college should consider these concerns.

What is covered in an IDP?

An IDP is a legal document. They might look different across different schools, colleges and local authorities and might be on paper or digital. However, every IDP must include certain information and particular headings. If the school, college or local authority does not use the headings outlined in the Code, that document may not be legally binding, and you can challenge them on this issue (paragraph 23.5 of the Code).

The IDP contains all the details about a learner – their ALN and what kind of ALP they need to support their learning. The focus is on the desired outcomes and how to achieve them.

Language

If English is not your first language or you would prefer to communicate in British Sign Language (BSL) or Welsh in meetings, you can add this to Section 1A.10 in an IDP.

One Page Profile

The One Page Profile (Section 1C of an IDP) is a summary of the learner's character, likes and dislikes, gifts and talents and important information for professionals working with them to know about. The learner (and, particularly in the case of younger children, their families) should play a key part in creating this profile.

You might like to include information about communication preferences, hearing devices and useful technology, and key deaf awareness tips.

The Code (paragraph 23.24) suggests using the following headings in the profile:

- What is important to the learner?
- What is important for the learner?
- What is working and should be built on?
- What is not working and needs to change?

Important

A One Page Profile on its own can be helpful but is not a full IDP or legal document – it's a summary of a learner and their general needs. The details of any learning support provided to them by law comes later in the IDP. Do not accept any suggestion that the Profile alone is the same as having an IDP.

Outline of ALP

An important part of an IDP is Section 2 which describes a learner's ALP. Every deaf learner will have different needs and may require different types of ALP.

The IDP is designed to look at outcomes (what you want to happen eventually). The outcomes can be long term or short term, but each outcome should be written in a way that is SMART. SMART stands for specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, timebound. The longer-term outcomes might be broken up with smaller targets or milestones. It is possible that the longer-term outcomes might stay in the IDP for several years.

You should be able to track progress over time with the IDP, as the document should stay with the learner and continue to be reviewed throughout their school and college years, for as long as they need support.

The Welsh Government's guidance states that IDPs should give clear information on what support will be provided. For example, IDPs should not just state that a deaf learner 'will have access to a ToD' but should also outline how often visits from the ToD will be.

Other information

An IDP includes lots of other sections, including:

- an outline of a learner's ALN
- any disagreements about what should be included in the plan
- planning for any transition arrangements
- the date by which the plan should be reviewed

A template of an IDP can be found here on our website and explains in more detail the information you can expect to see in an IDP.

It's important remember that the level of detail in an IDP will be different for each learner. Those with more complex needs are likely to have more detailed information than those with fewer needs.

How is a decision made on what kind of ALP to provide?

A meeting should be held to discuss the ALP. This will usually include the school or college ALNCo. Every school or college must have an ALNCo, who will be your first point of contact on any issues. If a learner has not started school yet, your main point of contact will be the EYALNLO at your local council. Other professionals may be invited to this meeting if they can provide specialist input on a learner's needs.

Learners and parents or carers will also be invited to the meeting. The new system is designed around the concept of person-centred planning (PCP) which means that learners and their families are at the centre of the process of deciding what is the best learning support for them. Everything should be clearly explained, and families and learners should be supported and encouraged to ask questions and raise concerns.

What happens before the IDP meeting?

It's important that the professional coordinating the IDP assessment gathers information on the learner's ALN. This information will be used to decide whether to offer ALP and, if so, what kind of ALP to offer.

Information might include:

- reports on assessment and targets from teachers or support staff
- evidence from previous support interventions or observations in the classroom
- reports from specialist professionals such as ToDs, audiologists and
- speech and language therapists

These reports should be shared before the meeting. If you need help understanding them, you can ask the ALNCo or EYALNLO as they have a responsibility to ensure learners and parents or carers can understand the information.

The information learners and their parents or carers provide is very important. This is your opportunity to explain the impact of deafness on their learning.

The more information that you can provide about your child's deafness and anything that they are finding difficult in their learning, the better chance you have of getting the right kind of learning support.

You are likely to be asked for the following information:

- What do you like most, admire or appreciate about your child?
- What has happened since the last review? (Where applicable.)
- What do you think, from your perspective, are your child's aspirations for the future?
- What do you think is most important in your child's life, at the moment?
- What do you think is important for your child to help them develop and progress?
- What do other people need to know or do to help your child?
- What is going well at the moment, from your perspective?
- What is not going so well at the moment, from your perspective?
- Do you have any questions you would like to ask?

What happens in the IDP meeting?

The meeting to decide on the content of the IDP is a crucial meeting. Its aim is to decide whether a learner should have an IDP or continue to have an IDP and, if so, what should be included in the plan, including an outline of the support that a learner will receive.

During the meeting the ALNCo, or person leading the meeting, should make sure that learners and parents or carers have an opportunity to discuss any suggestions around their support needs.

This is a chance to have a say on the support a learner needs or to highlight things that you think they will find challenging. If you're not happy with anything, or professionals in the meeting are suggesting options that you disagree with, it is important that you speak up. Your opinions should be considered and any differences of opinion recorded in the IDP.

Learners of all ages will be encouraged to attend the meeting and talk about the support they feel they need. Those arranging the meeting should ensure that any communication needs are met to enable this to happen. If a learner needs support to express their opinions, they can ask for an advocate - a service provided for free by the council.

For most, these meetings will usually take place at school or college. Learners can let the ALNCo or the person leading the meeting know if there is anything that would help them feel more comfortable. They might not be able to meet all a learner's requests, but they should consider them.

What happens after the meeting?

After the meeting, parents and carers should be sent a copy of the learner's IDP or a letter outlining any decision not to provide an IDP. If you're unhappy with the content of an IDP or with a decision not to provide an IDP, learners and parents or carers have the right to challenge this.

Every IDP should be reviewed at least once a year, but if a learner, parent or carer, or anyone else working with a learner, thinks the IDP should be reviewed more frequently, a request can be made to do so.

Reviewing an IDP

IDPs must be reviewed at least once a year. In some circumstances, an early review might be suggested. For example, if there is a significant change in a learner's deafness. Moving to a new area can also trigger a review of an IDP to see how these needs can best be met with the ALP available in the new area.

You can ask for a review earlier than the date noted in an IDP. The school, college or local authority must conduct the review, unless they consider it unnecessary.

Relevant factors might include:

- the length of time since the plan was prepared or reviewed
- if there has been a change in circumstances which might affect the plan
- if new evidence or information has come to light which might affect the plan

Professionals can also request an early review of an IDP, but parents or carers must be contacted if an early review is to take place and given a chance to contribute.

A progress report should be provided before the IDP review meeting. Any new information should be shared before the review meeting. The purpose of the review is to see if the outcomes listed are being achieved and whether the ALP being given is working for a learner. Again, the opinions of the learner and parents or carers are important.

If you are not happy with any element of the support, this is your chance to say. If at the end of the meeting there's an agreement to change the IDP then the school, college or local authority must give the learner and their parents or carer a revised copy of the IDP. The same is true even if there are no changes to the support provided. The date for the next review must also be included in the IDP.

Transition planning

Preparing for the next stage in a learner's education – whether it's starting school or nursery, moving schools or going to college, moving to a new classroom or moving on to independent living – is called transition planning. A well-planned, smooth transition will give learners the best chance of adapting to the new setting.

Transition-planning may be discussed at an IDP meeting. However, it may be useful to have a separate meeting specifically about transition-planning. Whatever your situation, you can record discussions on transition in Section 3C of the IDP.

Support discussed under this section, should still be entered as ALP under Section 2 of the plan.

Nursery and primary school

The transition into a learner's first education setting can be an anxious time for learners and parents or carers. To make things smoother, ask to visit the school or nursery with your child so they can become familiar with the surroundings. It is also helpful to consider if any deaf awareness training or adaptations are needed at the new nursery or school.

Secondary school

The transition from primary to secondary school can be more challenging. At school learners may move around the building for lessons, have different teachers for different subjects, meet new pupils who might not understand deafness, and find there is more noise in general. Again, it is useful to visit a new school, maybe more than once, to meet key people and to see whether deaf awareness training or any adaptations are required.

Careers and college

Young people will start to consider and make decisions around their future education and careers options.

We know that many deaf young people worry about how their deafness will affect their career. However, with the right support and adjustments, deaf young people can do most jobs hearing people can. If this is something a learner is worried about, ask for direct careers advice, so that they understand the support available to them.

If a learner is thinking about college, they may want to explore the different options and support that colleges can offer.

Smaller transitions

Even if a learner is just moving between classrooms, the transition section of the IDP can serve as a useful prompt to talk about any support that is needed to help this move.

Whatever transition takes place, the IDP Review meeting should include people from the new setting. This might be the ALNCo, a teacher or another representative.

What happens if there's a disagreement?

From time to time there may be disagreements about whether a learner has ALN, whether an IDP is provided, or what is outlined in the IDP.

The process is meant to give plenty of opportunities to address and resolve these disagreements before they get any worse. Raise concerns at any point with the ALNCo, EYALNLO or the person coordinating a learner's plan.

If the school or college is not addressing concerns, you can take the matter up with your local authority. However, there are also other steps you can take.

Important

Some of the more formal ways to challenge decisions have time limits. You should be made aware of these in writing throughout the process.

Dispute Resolution Service (DRS)

If you reach a point where you cannot resolve the dispute with those coordinating the plan, then you can turn to the local authority DRS. This service is designed to help discussions with the aim of reaching an agreement. This service can be used at any time during the process. The local authority must let you know about this service and provide information about it in an accessible format for children and young people. Importantly, the local authority DRS must be free, and the staff must be impartial, have training in disagreement resolution and have a detailed understanding of the ALN system.

Learners and parents or carers can also appeal to the Education Tribunal for Wales against a decision. There are strict time frames for lodging an appeal. Families are encouraged to use the DRS, but it is not a legal requirement that you do so. You may lodge an appeal at the same time as contacting the DRS and then withdraw your appeal if you are happy that the issue has been resolved through dispute resolution.

Independent advocacy services

The local authority must also provide free independent advocacy services for learners, if they request it. The independent advocate can give expert advice and information and help learners to communicate their views and wishes to make sure they're involved.

Education Tribunal for Wales

The Education Tribunal for Wales is independent of government, local authorities, schools and colleges, and its decisions are legally binding. It hears and decides appeals about children and young people who have or may have ALN. You can start an appeal to the Tribunal at the same time as using the local authority DRS and this should not have any effect on the appeal to Tribunal.

The timeline for seeking an appeal to tribunal is set at 8 weeks after a decision has been made, though anybody involved in the appeal can ask for a delay. If you are also using the local authority DRS, the 8-week timescale is extended by another 8 weeks.

You can appeal to the Tribunal on various aspects of the IDP, including:

- a decision on whether a child or young person has ALN
- a decision on whether to provide an IDP
- aspects of the IDP, including the description of ALN, whether a specific school or college place is named, and the outlined ALP
- a local authority's decision not to revise an IDP when asked to reconsider
- a local authority's decision not to take over responsibility for an IDP at the request of a learner, their parents or carers, or the school
- a decision to end an IDP
- deciding not to make changes to an IDP because there is no change in needs or no new information that affects the decision

The Tribunal can make the following decisions:

- dismiss the appeal
- order that a person has or does not have the ALN determined by the IDP assessment
- order a school, college or local authority to prepare an IDP
- order a school, college or local authority to revise an IDP
- order a school, college or local authority to maintain an IDP (with or without revisions)
- order a local authority to take over responsibility for maintaining an IDP
- order a school, college or local authority to review an IDP
- order the education or local authority responsible for it to consider observations made by the Tribunal and decide if a different decision should be made

Complaints

There are other ways of challenging decisions made about ALP, including:

- the complaints procedure of the school, college or local authority
- the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales for procedural complaints against local authorities and NHS bodies. The ombudsman is only able to look at whether the process was followed correctly and not at the detail of the decisions
- free investigation and advice service provided by the Children's Commissioner for Wales
- the Welsh Language Commissioner if your Welsh language communication needs were not met during the process
- applying to the courts for a judicial review into the lawfulness of a decision or action

What parents and carers can do

- Ask for an IDP as soon as possible.
- Keep records and copies of reports, identifications, and assessments from NHS bodies or education settings.
- Prepare for meetings to discuss ALN, ALP and the preparing or reviewing of IDPs.
- Make sure the meeting organiser is aware of all communication needs.
- Get to know the ALNCo in the school or college.
- Talk with your child about what they would like to achieve and how best to achieve it.
- Be clear about what your child wants and how much support they need. Speak out if you disagree with support suggestions professionals are making and give your reasons for disagreeing.
- Remember, the One Page Profile on its own is not a legal document. A full IDP will also need to include Section 2 and the ALP.
- Make sure you ask for an IDP review if you think your child is not thriving with the support they are getting, or if changes to their deafness or circumstances affect their support needs.
- Remember that you have a right to challenge decisions you are unhappy with and that there is support available to help you do this. Contact our Helpline for advice and support at ndcs.org.uk/helpline.

Glossary

ALN Additional learning needs, formerly special educational needs SEN or Learning Disability.

ALNCo Additional Learning Needs Coordinator in schools and colleges. Formerly known as Special Educational Needs Coordinator SENCo).

ALP Additional learning provision. The learning support for the learner with ALN.

DECLO Designated Education Clinical Lead Officer. A professional in a Health Board who liaises with local authorities on ALN.

DRS Dispute (or Disagreement) Resolution Service. Services designed to help talk through any disagreements regarding IDPs. Each local authority must have one and publicise how to get in touch and use the service.

EYALNLO Early Years Additional Learning Needs Lead Officer. Each local authority has a duty to appoint one. They are a key contact for parents or carers of early years children who wish to have an IDP.

IDP Individual Development Plan. The plan that contains details of a learner's ALN and ALP, which is updated annually. (Formerly known as Statements or School Action or School Action Plus.)

One Page Profile is Section 1C of an IDP, this is a summary of the key information about a learner and provides space to record important information about a learner for professionals.

PCP Person-Centred Planning is putting the learner and parent or carer at the centre of discussion and decision making.