

Cyflwynwyd yr ymateb hwn i ymchwiliad y [Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg i weithredu diwygiadau addysg](#)

This response was submitted to the [Children, Young People and Education Committee](#) inquiry into [Implementation of education reforms](#)

IER 04

Ymateb gan: Coleg Brenhinol y Therapyddion Lleferydd ac Iaith yng Nghymru a Fforwm Ymgynghorol Therapi Lleferydd ac Iaith Cymru

Response from: Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists in Wales and Wales Speech and Language Therapy Advisory Forum

Nodwch eich barn mewn perthynas â chylch gorchwyl yr ymchwiliad. | Record your views against the inquiry's terms of reference.

- Implementation of the Curriculum for Wales in early years settings, primary schools and secondary schools.

In the implementation of Curriculum for Wales, it will be essential that a strong focus is given to the cross-curricular skills of listening and speaking and for these to be truly embedded across the 4 purposes. It will be important for all schools to fully understand what this means and how important these skills are as pre-requisite to all learning and other skills.

The level of awareness raising on Curriculum for Wales outside of the world of Education has been limited. Speech and Language Therapy services have largely developed their understanding of the new curriculum through information which they have accessed through the public domain. This is despite there being a recognition and expectation in the ALNET Act that Health services have a duty to provide a service or treatment which will address an individual's additional learning need. Without knowing what the curriculum is, how will Speech and Language Therapists know what the learning need may be?

- The level of consistency and equity of learning opportunities for pupils across Wales, given the flexibility for schools to develop their own curricula within a national framework.

The new curriculum brings positives for teachers to fully engage children and take them on a learning journey without the confines of a content-based curriculum that



may be restrictive. It has the potential to be meaningful, functional and purposeful for learners. Whilst the concept of flexibility is both exciting and refreshing, there are concerns in relation to variability of learner experiences. The new curriculum has a low level of prescriptiveness around speaking, listening and communication targets and delivery. In areas of good practice this would allow a school to build, but this may not support schools which are struggling with delivering a curriculum around communication development.

How will assurances be given that differing experiences and curriculums will ensure an equal level of competency for children at the same stages across different settings? Will the schools have adequate time to prepare their curriculums in a meaningful way? How will the cross curricular skills of speaking and listening be robustly embedded to ensure these key skills are developed in a robust and consistent manner?

- Implementation of the new Additional Learning Needs (ALN) system and the effective transfer of learners from the existing Special Educational Needs (SEN) system.

Speech and Language Therapy welcomes the ethos of the ALN Act. However, it is our experience in practice that elements of the ALN Act have created barriers to integrated working between Speech and Language therapy services and Education. In some areas where there was previously very effective joint working and communication between Speech and Language Therapy, schools and Local Authorities (LA), the processes of ALN has reduced the efficiencies of communication. The ALN Act has required the development of new processes and systems in Speech and Language Therapy even in services where there were existing, effective cross agency process and practice.

ALN has created increased demands on Speech and Language Therapy services. In order to deliver against the ALN Act, there has been a considerable demand on capacity to train staff, administer the system, deliver our responsibilities and governance. All Speech and Language Therapy services across Wales have reported that they have had to respond to large numbers of requests under ALN. These include, requests to provide information to schools and LAs for the identification of ALN and invitations to attend Person centred planning (PCP) meetings to develop/ review individual development plans (IDPs). Requests to Speech and Language Therapy services, in some areas, are double that of any other service within the Health Board. These requests are often at short notice and are all in addition to the clinical activity which Speech and Language Therapists would typically be providing



and are a significant and new demand to their workload. Whilst implementation of the Act was intended to be resource neutral, Speech and Language Therapy services are identifying that this is not the case.

There have been some grey areas in the ALN Act, leading to different interpretations across Wales. Some Speech and Language Therapy services have identified variance across the LA's within their Health Board boundaries which has led to confusion for Speech and Language Therapy staff. The lack of clarity on the interpretation of the legislation is a cause for concern.

- The application of the definition of ALN, compared to presently for SEN, and whether there is any 'raising of the bar' on the ground for determining eligibility for provision.

At this early stage in the implementation of the ALN Act it is difficult to determine if there has been a 'raising of the bar'.

Some Speech and Language Therapy services have identified an increase of awareness of communication development from schools, Early Years teams and LAs, which has led to increased engagement with Speech and Language Therapy services. Whilst this was recognised as a positive, it was felt that it had contributed to the increased demand on Speech and Language Therapy services.

- The professional learning and other support settings are receiving to ensure effective implementation of the Curriculum for Wales and the ALN system.

There has been a variable amount of training which has been made available to Speech and Language Therapy services, with some reporting that there had been training on ALN at the start of the implementation with others reporting that the only training they had received was through the Designated Educational Clinical Liaison Office (DECLO) in their Health Boards.

In some areas, training and support on ALN had been provided through the DECLO team, specifically the Clinical Transformation Leads for the Health Boards. It was felt that these roles had been fundamental in providing Health services with an understanding of the ALNET system and the impact on Health services. These roles also established process and practice for the implementation of ALN, ensuring Speech and Language Therapy services' readiness for the statutory changes. Now that the funding for the Health Clinical Transformation Lead posts has ended the



responsibility for training and developing process for the whole Health Board sits with the DECLO, which was felt to be unsustainable for that role.

- Other factors potentially affecting implementation of the Curriculum for Wales and the ALN system, for example levels of funding and fall out from the pandemic.

The impact of the pandemic has been significant for Speech and Language Therapy services with the effect being evident through late referrals, reduced staff capacity to deliver services and restricted service delivery during lockdowns and subsequent restrictions. This has resulted in increased referrals, increased waiting times for intervention and high caseloads. The conflicting demands of the implementation of the ALN act requests whilst also managing Covid- 19 recovery planning has been very difficult for Speech and Language Therapy services.

Evidence tells us that COVID-19 and the subsequent lockdowns has had a significant impact on children's speech, language and communication development and led to increased complexity of difficulties with which children are presenting. Good links between health and education ensures that effective universal and targeted provision is delivered in education settings.

It is necessary to ensure education setting staff, particularly teachers have formal training on speech, language and communication development and difficulties as part of the initial teacher training. This will ensure that they are able to implement strategies to support children's speech, language and communication as part of their everyday teaching.

The particular challenges and opportunities facing different types of schools in varying circumstances (e.g. language medium, demographics and locality) in terms of implementing curriculum and ALN reform.

Some Speech and Language Therapy services have identified that in areas of high deprivation, rates of ALN are higher, resulting in higher demands on Speech and Language Therapy services. Deprivation has a recognised correlation with speech, language and communication needs and has been identified as a higher risk factor for a negative impact as a result of the pandemic.

