

What should constitute 'Generally Available' Provision in schools in Wales?

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About the research

Wales is currently transitioning to a the 'Additional Learning Needs' (ALN) system, replacing the former 'Special Educational Needs' (SEN) system. Recent reviews on the implementation of the new system have highlighted issues around the clarity of terminology (Estyn, 2023; Senedd Cymru, 2024). In particular, they call for a clearer understanding of the distinction between 'generally available provision' and 'additional learning provision'.

Most learners' needs should be met in mainstream settings with high quality teaching and practice through 'generally available' resources and support. Under the ALN system, learners who are identified as having ALN require an Individual Development Plan (IDP). This is a statutory plan outlining the 'additional learning provision' (ALP) they need to achieve their educational and developmental goals. The contents of this document are legally binding.

Research Aims

Working with the Additional Learning Needs team in the Welsh Government as a partner, we conducted round table discussions with key education stakeholders in order to find out:

- What do education stakeholders believe is 'generally available' to all learners in Wales?
- What do education stakeholders believe distinguishes practice as 'additional learning provision'?

Methods

Focus group discussions were conducted online and in person. Stakeholders were asked to register their interest for the focus groups in response to a recruitment email from the Welsh Government ALN mailing list. Interested participants were placed in groups based on their role. 10 focus

groups were conducted in Welsh and English with:

- Primary ALN Coordinators (ALNCoS); Secondary ALNCoS; Class teachers and Further Education (FE) lecturers; Senior leaders; Learning support assistants; Local Authority (LA) officers (across 6 LAs); Year 11 students.

The focus groups were audio recorded and transcribed. Content analysis was carried out by the research team to address the identified research questions.



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Key findings

Education stakeholders in Wales operate their response to learning needs across three types of provision. What stakeholders consider as 'generally available' is made up of 1. generally available and 2. targeted provision:

1. **Generally available provision:** This is the provision available to all learners. The term 'universal provision' is also used.
2. **Targeted provision:** This is the provision available for some learners who are deemed to require extra consideration, but who do not meet the criteria for needing ALP in the ALN Code.
3. **Additional learning provision:** Additional provision for those who meet the criteria for ALN in the ALN Code and so have an IDP.

The participants we spoke to suggested that this graduated response system is in place for all learners in schools. They suggested that learners who require an IDP, and therefore have a recognised ALN, are children and young people whose needs cannot be met through 1) generally available and 2) targeted provision. FE settings reported less reliance on the graduated approach.

Some examples of the practice participants considered as '**generally available**' included

- High quality teaching techniques (including practices such as scaffolding, effective questioning and feedback, and chunking).
- Reflective practice
- Favourable staffing ratio
- Positive teacher mindset and relationships with students
- School spaces which allow for breakout such as quiet areas and clubs
- Basic equipment and organisation e.g. Visual timetables, time out cards, wobble chairs, noise-cancelling headphones.

Some examples of the practice participants considered as '**targeted provision**' included:

- Withdrawal and catch-up sessions (often referred to as interventions) for aspects such as literacy, numeracy and emotional support.
- Expanded services such as youth services and a school counsellor.
- In-class support that is more specialised e.g. sensory circuits.

Some examples of the practice participants considered as '**additional learning provision**' included:

- Provision that is provided when no progress has been made after two terms of intervention.
- Support sessions at a higher frequency and intensity to those offered as a 'graduated response'.
- Provision that is required when teaching cannot be provided through scaffolding or adjusting the general curriculum.

Interpretation

What is going well?

Our discussions with stakeholders clearly highlighted that schools are delivering high-quality provisions under the framework of 'generally available' support. These practices exemplify inclusive education, as they are intentionally designed to benefit all learners and proactively address environmental barriers to learning.

Stakeholders recognised that their generally available approaches will support all learners "you are delivering for a learner with an additional need, it's going to be effective for the whole class."

They described a wide range of practices that focused on in-class support and reasonable adjustments, but also whole school approaches, professional development, community engagement and cultural change. A 'can do' attitude, which maintained high expectations of learners and supported positive learning relationships, was highlighted as important within

a flexible approach that was 'less regimented' and more empathetic.

FE settings tend to rely less on a graduated response approach. Consequently, FE settings often adopt more inclusive, whole-setting approaches to meet the needs of their learners. This may stem from the absence of the tiered approach that was used in schools during the former SEN system.

Important considerations and what need to improve

From these findings we suggest that there is a continuum of support being offered in schools. This continuum, particularly the 'targeted provision' level, is not referenced in current policy on ALN in Wales **for those without an identified ALN**. This appears to be a legacy of the former SEN system which separated provision into 'school action' 'school action plus' and 'statement'.

It was also clear from speaking to stakeholders that the provision provided in different settings varies greatly both between settings and local authorities with stakeholders saying that it "varies massively from one school to the next". Therefore, what is considered as generally available provision in one school may be additional learning provision in another. The differences in

provision appeared to be based on the needs of the setting (e.g. space, resource, staffing) rather than the need of the learner.

In identifying these types of provision, we note that while the graduated response approach supports learners, it also supports teachers who might otherwise be overburdened. Across the focus groups, practitioners highlighted the significant pressures they face, particularly regarding workload, time constraints, limited resources, and insufficient training.. The strain on ALNCoS and the sector was a key theme to arise from the discussions.

Furthermore, some of the approaches taken as targeted provision have desired outcomes which are not clearly linked to effective progress in the 'general curriculum'. This, therefore pushed learners towards 'special education' provision. As a result, there was a tendency to prioritise specialist interventions for certain learners over adopting more inclusive principles.

We also noted that little consideration was given to the underpinning evidence base for the interventions being delivered and to the values promoted, for example, for neurodivergent learners, whether an intervention valued diversity or sought to 'normalise' or mask it.



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Considerations for Government:

- To ensure that The Curriculum for Wales is being used as an opportunity to consider how high quality provision can be embedded in everyday teaching practices.
- Across Wales, a clear vision is needed for what inclusive practice should look like. This includes consideration of the necessity of the graduated response in a truly inclusive setting.
- There was a high-level of agreement amongst stakeholders about important 'generally available' practices which centred around high-quality teaching. Therefore, national guidelines on what's generally available would add clarity to this term.
- Schools should have the flexibility and autonomy to define the detailed provision 'generally available' within their settings.
- Consideration should be given to the impact of a graduated response approach on Welsh medium provision. Strategies used, particularly at the targeted provision level, are scarce in the Welsh language. Therefore, resource is needed to be able to replicate this approach in Welsh schools.

Considerations for Local Authorities:

- A developed understanding is needed that high quality teaching addresses the needs of a large majority of learners. Workforce

development is needed to support a shift in focus from special education to inclusive education. This could be done through more sharing of good practice and dissemination of recommended strategies.

- To review the provision across settings, ensuring the delivery of high quality, inclusive teaching. Where the graduated response is utilised, LAs should support settings to consider the evidence base for practices used.

Considerations for Schools and Colleges

- Settings should value and recognise the practices which are available to all learners in their settings.
- A staff member within the setting should have the responsibility for inclusive practice, teaching and learning. This role would involve ensuring that high quality practice is happening across the setting for all learners. However, given the burden on ALNCoS in the new system, this may, or may not, be the ALNCo.
- There should be less reliance on baseline tests and standardised testing tools to assume ability.
- Settings should evaluate the effectiveness of the provision they provide, considering the evidence base and being curious about benefits both to the learner and their setting.

Further information

This research was conducted as part of an ESRC Impact Acceleration Account (IAA) Fellowship in partnership with the Welsh Government, University of South Wales and Cardiff Metropolitan University. It builds upon previous research exploring Additional Learning Needs in Wales ([Conn et al; 2023](#); [Knight & Crick, 2022](#); [Knight et al., 2022](#); [Knight, Conn, Crick & Brooks, 2023](#); [Knight et al., 2024](#)).

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