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**IER 78**

**Ymateb gan: Llwybr Teuluoedd  
Response from: Family Pathway**

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# Universal Provision in Practice: Building a Skilled, Confident Workforce for Inclusive Education in Wales

## 1. Introduction

This submission provides evidence from Family Pathway, a Welsh social enterprise that works alongside schools, local authorities, and families to strengthen inclusive practice and person-centred approaches within education. The evidence is based on direct engagement with educators, families, and multi-agency teams across multiple local authorities in Wales between 2022–2025.

Universal provision is intended to form the foundation of the Additional Learning Needs (ALN) system, ensuring that most learners' needs can be met within mainstream education through high-quality teaching, reasonable adjustments, and inclusive practice. However, professional evidence from our work indicates that universal provision remains inconsistently defined, unevenly implemented, and insufficiently supported by system-wide professional learning.

## 2. Context

The ALNET (Wales) Act 2018 and the ALN Code (2021) emphasise universal provision as the baseline entitlement for all learners. Paragraphs 6.9–6.13 of the Code clarify that this provision should enable early identification, support, and prevention of escalation.

While the legislative framework is clear, the operational reality in schools varies considerably. Estyn (2024) and StatsWales data on attendance and exclusions highlight increasing numbers of pupils with emotional-based school avoidance, part-time timetables, or placements in alternative provision. This suggests that early universal support is not yet functioning as an effective first layer of inclusion.

## 3. Evidence from Practice

### (a) Workforce Capability and Confidence

Teachers and support staff frequently report uncertainty about how to differentiate effectively for learners with neurodivergent profiles or emotional regulation difficulties. Initial teacher education programmes and continuing professional development (CPD) often prioritise curriculum delivery and behaviour management over inclusive pedagogy, sensory processing, and communication.

Where professional learning does occur, it is typically short-term and compliance-focused, addressing statutory duties rather than adaptive classroom practice. In contrast, longitudinal coaching and reflective supervision—such as Family Pathway's Person-Centred Coaching model—have demonstrated measurable improvements in staff confidence, learner engagement, and relational climate.

### (b) Inconsistent Understanding of “Universal Provision”

Across multiple local authorities, there is no shared operational framework for what constitutes universal provision. In some settings, it is interpreted as low-level wellbeing initiatives; in others, it is used to justify refusal of Individual Development Plans (IDPs). The lack of a national definition or quality benchmark creates inconsistency and inequity, particularly where leadership teams rely on self-defined or unverified standards.

### (c) Fragmented Professional Learning and Support Structures

Professional learning for inclusion is fragmented across consortia, local authorities, and school-based initiatives. Many programmes remain behaviourist in nature, focusing on compliance rather than understanding the interaction between environment, regulation, and engagement. This limits the development of neuroinclusive and trauma-informed practice, particularly for staff supporting learners with complex needs.

### (d) Partnership with Parents and Families

Both families and practitioners report that communication can become defensive or transactional rather than collaborative. Parents often describe feeling unheard or marginalised, while staff express anxiety about managing expectations. Where structured co-production and communication training have been embedded, both sides report improved trust and outcomes—but such practice remains isolated rather than systemic.

### (e) Consequences of Underdeveloped Universal Provision

Weaknesses in universal provision contribute to downstream pressures, including:  
Increased reliance on part-time timetables, exclusions, and EOTAS placements.

Escalation of mental health and attendance difficulties.

Staff burnout linked to perceived lack of efficacy and relational strain.

Rising demand for statutory IDPs and tribunal appeals.

This reflects a reactive rather than preventative system, with significant long-term financial and human costs across education, health, and social care.

## • 4. Analysis

The evidence suggests that while the principles of the ALNET Act are sound, implementation of universal provision remains aspirational. Barriers include:

### Structural:

Fragmented professional learning infrastructure.

Absence of national quality standards or accountability mechanisms for universal provision.

Insufficient protected time for reflection and collaborative planning.

### Cultural:

Continuing perception that inclusion is an additional responsibility rather than a core teaching skill.

Overreliance on behaviourist strategies that interpret distress as defiance.

Limited confidence in engaging families as equal partners.

### Opportunity:

Universal provision could be strengthened through a coordinated framework that links pedagogy, workforce wellbeing, and co-production. Embedding inclusion within whole-school improvement planning would align practice with the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act and the Curriculum for Wales.

## • 5. Recommendations

### a) Define a National Framework for Universal Provision

Develop measurable standards, co-produced with educators and families, outlining expectations for inclusive pedagogy, environmental adaptation, and communication.

### b) Invest in Accredited Professional Learning

Introduce a national qualification pathway in person-centred, neuroinclusive practice for all education staff, ensuring consistency and confidence across settings.

### c) Embed Reflective Coaching Models

Provide sustained, funded inclusion coaching across school clusters to support reflective practice and prevent staff burnout.

### d) Prioritise Parent Partnership Training

Require parent-partnership and communication training within leadership and ALNCO development frameworks.

### e) Link Local Authority Accountability to Universal Provision Evidence

Before declining or ceasing IDPs, LAs should demonstrate that universal provision standards have been met and evidenced.

### f) Integrate Universal Provision into Estyn Inspection Criteria

Assess the quality and impact of universal provision, including learner and parent feedback, as part of inspection outcomes.

### g) Recognise Inclusion as a Workforce Wellbeing Measure

Acknowledge that inclusive pedagogy reduces stress and improves retention, positioning inclusion as both an educational and wellbeing priority.

## 6. Conclusion

Universal provision is the foundation on which Wales's inclusive education system depends. Currently, variability in understanding, training, and accountability means that many learners do not experience equitable access to high-quality, needs-led teaching.

Practice-based evidence from Family Pathway's work suggests that when staff receive reflective coaching and training grounded in person-centred approaches, inclusion becomes embedded and sustainable. Strengthening universal provision through national clarity, investment, and co-production would ensure that early intervention and inclusive pedagogy are not aspirations, but everyday realities across Wales's schools.

# The Application of the Definition of ALN: Evidence from Family Pathway

## 1. Introduction

Family Pathway is a Welsh social enterprise specialising in advocacy, person-centred practice, and workforce development to improve outcomes for children, young people, and adults with Additional Learning Needs (ALN). Through direct work with families, schools, and local authorities, we observe how the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018 and the ALN Code (2021) are being implemented on the ground.

This submission focuses on the application of the definition of ALN and how it is being interpreted inconsistently across Wales. Rather than widening access to support, as intended by the legislation, the definition is often being applied restrictively. This is resulting in a de facto “raising of the bar”, excluding learners who would previously have received support under the former Special Educational Needs (SEN) system.

Our evidence draws on anonymised casework from multiple local authorities, feedback from school staff and parents, and professional observations from Family Pathway’s person-centred coaching and advocacy programmes. It represents recurring patterns, not isolated cases.

## 2. Context

The ALNET Act introduced a single, clear definition of ALN to replace the previous system of multiple categories and thresholds. The Act defines a child or young person as having a learning difficulty or disability that calls for additional learning provision (ALP) beyond that normally available in mainstream education.

This change was designed to promote inclusivity, reduce bureaucracy, and ensure that decisions are based on need rather than diagnosis. However, in practice, Family Pathway has observed that the new definition is being interpreted narrowly, particularly around what constitutes ALP and what is considered “reasonable for the governing body to secure.”

The result is a regression from the principles of the Act, with some local authorities using the new definition as a mechanism for rationing support rather than enabling it.

## 3. Evidence from Practice

### (a) Gatekeeping through Misuse of “Universal Provision”

Across Wales, many schools and local authorities are using the term “universal provision” to justify refusal of IDPs, even when learners’ needs clearly exceed what is ordinarily available in class.

In some cases, families are told that a child does not have ALN because their needs can be met through “quality teaching” or generic wellbeing support. In reality, this often masks the absence of any meaningful, structured intervention.

#### Case Learner1 (anonymised):

Learner1, a 14-year-old autistic learner with severe anxiety, had a statement under the previous SEN system. During transition, the local authority decided he no longer met the definition of ALN because his needs could “in principle” be met through differentiated teaching. However, the school lacked any specialist capacity to implement this, and Learner1 has since received no consistent provision. This is not a question of capability, but of an arbitrary reclassification driven by local interpretation of “universal provision”.

#### Requirement of Diagnosis Contrary to Legislative Intent

The ALNET Act deliberately removed the need for a clinical diagnosis as a gateway to support. Yet Family Pathway continues to encounter cases where schools and LAs insist on diagnostic confirmation before recognising a learner as having ALN.

#### Case Learner2 (anonymised):

Learner2, aged 11, has significant social communication difficulties and sensory regulation challenges, but no formal diagnosis. Despite clear evidence of need and a multi-professional report outlining the impact on her learning, the school refused to open an IDP, stating that she was awaiting autism assessment and therefore did not yet qualify.

This approach is inconsistent with both the letter and spirit of the Act, which focuses on impact on learning, not diagnostic labelling.

#### Case Learner3 (anonymised):

Learner3, aged 18, has ADHD, moderate learning difficulties, and remains unable to read or write fluently. His IDP was ceased when he turned 18, with the LA arguing that he was now “mature” and his difficulties were “permanent” rather than additional. This interpretation is fundamentally flawed. The ALNET Act provides that ALP continues where the need remains. Learner3’s removal from the system reflects a misreading of the legislation and an implicit raising of the bar for post-16 learners.

#### Postcode Inconsistency and Local Policy Drift

Family Pathway’s work across South Wales highlights vast inconsistencies between local authorities. The same learner profile may qualify for an LA IDP in one area and be refused in another. Internal decision-making frameworks vary widely, and there is no national moderation process to secure equity.

For example, a learner with dyslexia and ADHD may receive targeted 1:1 literacy intervention in one LA under an IDP, while in another, identical needs are classed as universal. This results in postcode-based inequality, undermining the rights-based intent of the reforms.

#### (e) Pressure on Schools to Contain IDP Numbers

Staff in several schools have told Family Pathway informally that they are under pressure to reduce IDP numbers in order to demonstrate system efficiency. This incentivises restrictive interpretation of ALN definitions, leading to decisions driven by budget, not learner need.

Such pressures perpetuate a defensive culture, where schools feel they must “prove” that they can manage without additional funding. It also fosters mistrust between parents and professionals.

#### Impact on Families

Families report feeling marginalised, dismissed, and overwhelmed by the constant need to justify their child’s needs. Parents describe adversarial experiences, being portrayed as over-anxious or obstructive when challenging misinterpretations.

This dynamic reflects an imbalance of power within decision-making structures and has severe repercussions for mental health, employment, and family wellbeing. Parents are forced to give up work, fund private assessments, and navigate complex complaints processes simply to access basic educational rights.

### 4. Analysis

The evidence above indicates that, in many areas, the ALN definition is being implemented contrary to legislative intent. Rather than widening access and simplifying systems, the reforms have created ambiguity that allows local authorities to narrow eligibility in practice.

#### (a) Policy Drift and Local Autonomy

Without a national mechanism for moderation or oversight, local interpretation has drifted from statutory intent. Each LA has developed its own “threshold language” and internal guidance, resulting in inconsistent application across Wales.

#### (b) From Need-Led to Resource-Led Decision-Making

Budgetary pressures have shifted the culture from a needs-based to a resource-based system. Decisions are increasingly shaped by what funding and staffing are available, rather than by learners’ educational entitlement. This is directly opposed to the equity principles underpinning the ALNET Act.

#### (c) Professional Uncertainty

Practitioners report limited clarity and confidence in interpreting the ALN definition, especially around what constitutes “additional” provision. The lack of sustained, reflective professional learning has left many ALNCOs and senior leaders uncertain about how to apply the Code consistently.

#### (d) Accountability and Oversight Gaps

There is currently no central mechanism to monitor how ALN definitions are applied, nor any requirement for transparency on local eligibility data. This lack of oversight enables systemic variation and weakens accountability to learners and families.

#### (e) Cultural Impact

The defensive and target-driven culture described above has eroded trust. Instead of fostering collaboration, some settings prioritise institutional protection over inclusion, which alienates families and discourages open communication. The reform’s potential for empowerment and co-production is therefore being undermined by procedural defensiveness.

#### (f) Strategic Planning and Accountability Deficits

There is currently no national standard or reporting structure requiring local authorities to evaluate the quality, timeliness, or equity of ALN decision-making. This absence of accountability data means Welsh Government cannot identify systemic risk or regional inequity.

To embed continuous improvement, each LA should be required to produce an annual ALN performance report, detailing IDP data, tribunal outcomes, workforce development actions, and next-step planning linked to Welsh Government priorities. Estyn and Audit Wales could then review these reports to ensure transparency and alignment with the ALNET Act’s objectives.

### 5. Consequences

1. Learners excluded from support: Children and young people with clear functional barriers to learning are being denied ALP, resulting in disengagement, school refusal, and regression.
2. Inequity across Wales: The postcode lottery undermines public confidence in the ALN system.
3. Erosion of trust: Parents and carers lose faith in education and statutory systems, while professionals experience moral distress.
4. Escalation to crisis: Early intervention opportunities are lost, leading to increased reliance on EOTAS, CAMHS, and tribunal processes — all more costly and less effective.

## 6. Recommendations

### 1. National Statutory Guidance on Definition Application

Welsh Government should issue detailed guidance clarifying the interpretation of the ALN definition and ALP criteria to prevent restrictive or inconsistent practice.

### 2. Regional Moderation Panels

Establish cross-authority panels to review sample cases and ensure equitable application of the definition across Wales.

### 3. Transparency and Data Publication

Require LAs to publish annual data on IDP decisions, including refused applications and reasons, to promote transparency and accountability.

### 4. Professional Learning for Decision-Makers

Mandate accredited training for ALNCOs, senior leaders, and local authority officers on interpreting and applying the ALN definition accurately and consistently.

### 5. Presumption in Favour of Support

Reinstate a presumption of inclusion: where there is reasonable doubt, an IDP should be issued and reviewed rather than refused.

### 6. Inspection and Oversight

Embed monitoring of ALN definition application within Estyn's inspection framework to assess consistency, fairness, and compliance.

### 7. Co-Production with Families

Require that every IDP decision process includes documented family voice and co-production evidence to ensure transparency and prevent arbitrary refusals.

### 8. Strategic Accountability and Reporting

Require each local authority to produce an annual ALN Strategic Plan setting out performance data, tribunal learning, workforce development, and improvement actions, reviewed by Estyn and Audit Wales to ensure a culture of continuous learning and improvement.

## 7. Conclusion

The inconsistent and restrictive application of the ALN definition represents a significant threat to the success of the Welsh ALN reforms. While the legislation sought to simplify and strengthen inclusion, the current reality on the ground is one of uneven access, procedural defensiveness, and inequitable outcomes.

Family Pathway's evidence demonstrates that urgent national clarification, training, and oversight are needed to restore alignment between the law's intentions and its implementation.

The ALN system will only succeed when definitions are applied consistently, transparently, and compassionately, ensuring that every learner who needs additional learning provision receives it without unnecessary gatekeeping or delay.

Family Pathway remains committed to working collaboratively with Welsh Government, local authorities, and schools to build a fair and person-centred system where need, not policy interpretation, determines support.

Welsh Government Post-16,

1. I'm writing on behalf of Family Pathway to raise an urgent and ongoing concern regarding the lack of equitable post-16 progression routes for learners in alternative provisions across Wales.

Many of the learners we support at post 16 are among the most vulnerable and disadvantaged — including those who are neurodivergent, care-experienced, or living with significant mental-health challenges. These young people have often been excluded or marginalised from mainstream education, and have finally found a space where they feel safe, engaged, (in post 16 alternative provisions) and able to rebuild confidence through person-centred support and qualifications aligned to their strengths and interests.

However, a serious systemic barrier is compromising their futures.

While these learners successfully complete Level 1 and Level 2 vocational courses — often alongside Essential Skills Wales (ESW) Level 2 qualifications — they are routinely denied entry into further-education colleges, on the basis that their qualifications are “not equivalent” to GCSEs. This is despite clear guidance that Level 2 Essential Skills should hold parity with GCSEs for progression purposes.

The lived experience tells a different story:

Learners are being retraumatised by rejection from post-16 settings after finally achieving qualifications.

Alternative-provision staff are powerless to advocate, despite working within frameworks endorsed by Qualifications Wales and Welsh Government policy.

The message these young people receive is that their achievements are not valid, reinforcing a sense of failure that many have spent years trying to overcome.

We know from the EOTAS in Wales Overview 2023–24 that over 2,000 young people are now mainly educated outside mainstream schools. Many of these learners face compounding barriers — mental health, poverty, exclusion histories — and have already been failed once by the system. When colleges reject Level 2 ESW qualifications from alternative-provision learners, it represents a further structural inequality.

## 2. Quality and Validity of Essential Skills Delivery

While many learners in alternative provision settings achieve Level 1 and Level 2 Essential Skills qualifications, the delivery model itself often lacks the rigour and specialist oversight needed to secure transferable outcomes.

Learners typically complete their ESW work under heavily scaffolded conditions, receiving significant one-to-one support from staff who are highly committed but not always experienced in literacy and numeracy pedagogy. Consequently, many learners are guided through assessments rather than independently mastering the underlying competencies.

This creates a dangerous illusion of parity: learners hold a certificate equivalent to GCSEs in name, but have not had access to the specialist teaching required for those skills to be genuinely transferable. When they progress to college, they are often underprepared for programmes that assume a higher level of independence and academic readiness.

Currently, there are no consistent checks and balances to ensure that alternative provisions are appropriately equipped, quality-assured, or externally moderated in their delivery of ESW. This undermines both the credibility of the qualification and the learners' confidence when they transition to FE.

Family Pathway urges Welsh Government, Estyn, and Qualifications Wales to review moderation processes and professional-learning requirements for ESW delivery in alternative provision, ensuring that:

Staff receive targeted CPD in literacy, numeracy, and assessment pedagogy.

Providers are externally moderated to consistent standards.

Learners' ESW achievements genuinely reflect their functional competence and readiness for post-16 pathways.

## Recommendations

We urgently request that the Welsh Government:

Investigates the inconsistency in how FE colleges are accepting (or refusing) Level 2 Essential Skills qualifications, particularly from learners in EOTAS or AP settings.

Clarifies and reaffirms the parity between Level 2 ESW and GCSE qualifications in terms of access to Level 3 pathways, with specific guidance issued to FE providers.

Reviews the quality assurance framework for ESW delivery in alternative provisions, including staff qualification requirements and external moderation systems.

Commits to a review of post-16 progression policy to ensure that young people in alternative provisions have fair and viable routes into FE, apprenticeships, or employment.

We would be very happy to contribute lived examples and anonymised case studies from the learners we support. These stories show clearly how systemic barriers continue to undermine national commitments to equity, inclusion, and the wellbeing of future generations.

We look forward to your response and to working together on a solution that ensures no young person is left behind.

# Implementation of the Additional Learning Needs (ALN) System: Evidence from Family Pathway

## 1. Introduction

Family Pathway is a Welsh social enterprise specialising in advocacy, person-centred practice, and system navigation for children, young people, and adults with additional learning needs (ALN). We work directly with families, schools, local authorities, and multi-agency teams to ensure that statutory duties under the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018 are met in both spirit and practice.

This submission draws on Family Pathway's professional casework across multiple local authorities in Wales. It provides evidence-based insights into the implementation of the new ALN system, particularly the transfer of learners from the former SEN system and the functioning of statutory duties during this transition.

Our evidence is derived from real casework with families (anonymised for confidentiality) and triangulated with professional dialogue, tribunal documentation, and practitioner feedback. It represents recurring systemic issues rather than isolated cases.

## 2. Context and Scope

The ALNET (Wales) Act 2018 and the ALN Code (2021) were designed to embed inclusive, person-centred, and legally coherent processes. The reforms aimed to simplify systems, strengthen learner voice, and ensure a single unified plan (IDP) replaces the previous fragmented SEN framework.

However, in practice, Family Pathway observes widespread inconsistency, misunderstanding, and inertia in the implementation phase. The intended cultural and procedural shift is being diluted by inconsistent application, variable training, and a continuing focus on administrative compliance over learner outcomes.

Our evidence focuses on three interrelated areas:

### 1. Failures in the transfer process from SEN to ALN

#### 2. Misinterpretation of the "reasonable for the governing body to secure" test

#### 3. Systemic reluctance to adopt genuinely person-centred and multi-agency approaches

## 3. Observed Systemic Issues

### (a) Delays and Inconsistency in Transfer from SEN to ALN

Across several local authorities, we have observed extensive delays in completing transfers from statements or IEPs to Individual Development Plans (IDPs).

In many cases, statutory timeframes outlined in Chapter 10 of the ALN Code are not being met. Families are frequently told that transfer reviews are "on hold" or that resource pressures prevent timely conversion.

#### Case Learner1 (anonymised)

Learner1 a 14-year-old with autism and complex anxiety, remained under an SEN statement for more than 18 months after the scheduled transfer date. Despite repeated parental requests, the local authority failed to assume responsibility for his IDP, citing ongoing "capacity issues." During this period, Learner1 received minimal education. His parents ultimately self-funded tutoring to maintain engagement. The delay represents not an individual oversight but a systemic breach of the statutory duty to determine responsibility and issue a compliant IDP.

This case typifies a pattern across our caseload:

- Statutory deadlines are treated as flexible
- Responsibility is deflected between schools and local authorities
- Families are left in procedural limbo, often resorting to complaint or appeal

### (b) Fragmentation Between Education and Social Care

Family Pathway's advocacy experience shows persistent siloing between education, health, and social care in IDP development and review. Despite the Code's emphasis on collaboration, agencies continue to operate independently, each citing limited remit or funding.

#### Case Learner2 (anonymised)

Learner2 is a 9-year-old autistic girl with significant sensory processing needs and high anxiety. Her IDP was developed without social care or health input, despite clear recommendations from paediatric and OT assessments. The local authority deemed these "beyond educational remit." The resulting plan lacked therapeutic strategies and additional risk. ~~Written transitions are a~~ This demonstrates the systemic misinterpretation of ALP (Additional Learning Provision) as limited to classroom support rather than holistic provision across settings.

The consequence is that children with intertwined health, social, and educational needs are forced into fragmented, inadequate provision — contrary to the integrated intention of the ALNET Act.

### (c) Post-16 Transition Failures

The post-16 transfer process remains one of the weakest elements of the new system. Young people leaving compulsory education are frequently unsupported during transition to further education, training, or EOTAS (Education Otherwise Than At School).

#### Case Learner 3 (anonymised)

Learner3, aged 18, has moderate learning difficulties, ADHD, and communication challenges. Despite years of educational disengagement, he was removed from his IDP when he left school, without assessment of continuing education needs. He cannot read or write functionally and relies on his mother for all daily living tasks. The local authority determined that he "no longer required an IDP," contrary to clear statutory criteria under section 14(1)(c) of

#### (d) Inconsistent Interpretation of “Reasonable for the Governing Body to Secure”

The test of whether it is “reasonable for the governing body to secure” ALP has become a mechanism for gatekeeping. In practice, schools frequently cite resource constraints to avoid assuming responsibility, while local authorities interpret “reasonableness” inconsistently.

Our evidence shows:

- Some LAs apply the test strictly, assuming IDPs for complex learners
- Others interpret it narrowly, leaving schools responsible even where provision clearly exceeds universal capacity
- Families experience postcode-based inequality — where the same profile of needs results in an LA IDP in one county and a school-based IDP in another.

This inconsistency undermines both the equity and legal clarity intended by the Act.

#### (e) Proceduralisation and Loss of Person-Centred Practice

Many IDPs are written as administrative documents rather than as living, learner-focused plans. In reviews, we see minimal evidence of learner voice or family participation, contrary to Chapter 5 of the Code.

Professionals often report that they are “undertrained” or “overwhelmed” by paperwork. Some schools continue to use legacy IEP templates, rebranded as IDPs, with little substantive change in approach.

This proceduralisation has shifted focus from relational practice to compliance culture, where ticking boxes replaces genuine collaboration.

### 4. Analysis

The evidence from Family Pathway’s work points to a system under strain, struggling to balance legislative ambition with operational capacity.

#### 1. Cultural Change Lagging Behind Legal Change

The ALNET Act represents a paradigm shift — from a deficit-based SEN model to a holistic, person-centred system. Yet, many practitioners and leaders continue to operate within old paradigms, prioritising diagnostic thresholds over functional need.

#### 2. Local Authority Variability

Wales’ 22 local authorities have interpreted both the Code and statutory duties inconsistently. Some have invested in ALN transformation leads and multi-agency training; others have scaled back services and absorbed ALN responsibilities into general inclusion teams, diluting expertise.

#### 3. Accountability Gap

There is limited national oversight or enforcement mechanism to ensure compliance with statutory timelines or the quality of IDPs. Families are often forced to appeal or complain to achieve basic compliance, creating adversarial dynamics between parents and professionals.

#### 4. Inequality of Access

Learners from low-income or non-diagnosed backgrounds are disproportionately excluded from IDP support. The “raising of the bar” in applying ALN definitions is leading to a new form of hidden exclusion.

#### 5. Emotional, Social, and Financial Impact on Families

Families supported by Family Pathway consistently describe experiences of power imbalance and systemic targeting when attempting to advocate for their child’s rights under the ALNET Act. Instead of collaborative, person-centred dialogue, many report feeling scrutinised, disbelieved, or blamed when they raise legitimate concerns about unmet needs or statutory failures.

Professionals within overstretched systems are often under pressure to meet internal metrics — such as reduced numbers of LA IDPs or lower tribunal referrals — which in turn creates a culture of defensiveness and gatekeeping. This power dynamic frequently manifests as coercive communication, emotional invalidation, or procedural obstruction that leaves parents feeling isolated and powerless.

The implications are significant:

- o Parents (most often mothers) are forced to give up work to supervise education, provide home tutoring, or attend constant multi-agency meetings.
- o Families experience financial hardship, compounded by the costs of legal advice, transport, and private assessments
- o There is a clear mental health impact, including clinical anxiety, burnout, and trauma responses linked to prolonged conflict with statutory bodies.
- o Relationships between families and professionals become adversarial, undermining the trust and collaboration on which person-centred practice depends.

This dynamic represents an abuse of structural power, where institutional processes are used to protect organisational reputation rather than the child’s rights and well-being. Until this imbalance is acknowledged and addressed through

## 5. Recommendations

Family Pathway proposes the following measures to strengthen implementation and restore confidence in the ALN system:

### 1. National Oversight of IDP Timeline

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Establish a central ALN monitoring function within Welsh Government or Estyn to track LA compliance with statutory deadlines for IDP decisions and transfers.

### 2. Clarify the “Reasonable for Governing Body to Secure” Test

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Issue supplementary guidance to standardise interpretation across Wales. Provide a checklist or decision-making framework to ensure consistency and reduce local variation.

### 3. Mandatory Person-Centred Training

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Require all schools and local authorities to undertake accredited professional learning in person-centred planning, trauma-informed practice, and co-production with families.

### 4. Reinforce Multi-Agency Accountability

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Require clear evidence of social care and health contributions within IDPs where relevant, with joint sign-off at review stage.

### 5. Independent Advocacy Access

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Fund independent advocacy services at regional level to support families and young people through the IDP process, preventing escalation to tribunal.

### 6. Transition Planning Framework for 16–25 Learners

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Introduce statutory guidance for post-16 ALN transition to ensure education continuity, with clear accountability under s.14(1)(c).

### 7. Learning from Good Practice

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Establish a national database of anonymised exemplar IDPs and LA models demonstrating good practice, accessible to all settings.

## 6. Conclusion

The ALN reforms represent a bold and necessary step toward equity in Welsh education. However, the implementation process has exposed a widening gap between policy ambition and lived experience.

Family Pathway’s evidence shows that without stronger national oversight, clearer guidance, and sustained professional learning, the ALN system risks reproducing the very inequalities it was designed to eliminate.

The reforms will only succeed if person-centred practice becomes the norm, not the exception, and if families no longer have to fight for the rights the law already guarantees.

Family Pathway remains committed to supporting Welsh Government and local authorities to realise the intent of the ALNET Act through collaborative, evidence-based improvement.