

EB 18

National Assembly for Wales

Children and Young People Committee

Education (Wales) Bill : Stage 1

Response from : Afasic Cymru

About Afasic Cymru

Afasic is the UK charity representing children and young people with speech, language and communication needs, working for their inclusion in society and supporting their parents and carers.

Afasic is a member organisation celebrating its 45th anniversary this year. Our members include parents, young people with speech and language and communication needs, professionals and others who support us. Afasic Cymru was launched in response to devolution and celebrated its tenth anniversary last year.

Our vision is of a society which embraces 'communication' as a basic human right, and where all children and young people up to the age of 25, with speech, language and communication needs, get the support they require to enable them to reach their potential and participate fully within it.

Information about speech, language and communication needs (SLCN)

Speech, language and communication are fundamental life skills. Speech, language and communication skills underpin literacy, learning in school and college, socialising and making friends, and are crucial for employment prospects and understanding and regulating emotions or feelings.

Many children and young people struggle to communicate. Some of their communication needs are temporary and others have more persisting needs. UK wide studies have shown that approximately 10% of all children have persisting speech, language and communication needs which may present as a child's main difficulty or it may be associated with other conditions such as autism.

A child or young person with SLCN:

- may have difficulty understanding language
- may have difficulty learning and remembering words, and putting words together to make sentences
- may have difficulty articulating speech clearly
- may have difficulty using language appropriately in context

Children or young people with speech, language and communication needs may have some or all of the above difficulties; each person is different.

Speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) may be difficult to spot. This means that instead of communication difficulties people may see children or young people struggling to read, showing poor behaviour, or having difficulties learning or socialising with others. Some children and young people may become withdrawn or isolated.

SLCN may only come to light in secondary school due to increasing social and academic demands. In some young people, their difficulties appear to resolve during primary school only to re-emerge during secondary school.

Context to this response

Afasic Cymru is responding to the general principles of the Education (Wales) Bill and the need for legislation in Post-16 assessment of educational and training needs and specialist Further Education, including the barriers to implementation. This response is based on our experience of working with young people and their families and knowledge of the research into speech, language and communication needs.

Mandatory and discretionary assessments of post-16 educational and training needs

Afasic Cymru recognises how in principle, the transfer of this responsibility to local authorities may improve the identification and assessment of SLCN as well as the current transition arrangements.

In our experience of working with families and delivering training to teachers working at all key stages including post-16 provisions, it can be difficult to recognise that a young person has underlying language and communication needs because these needs can look like a number of other difficulties eg: behaviour or literacy.

A study into young people not in education, employment or training (NEET), showed that over half (54%) of the individuals who completed the speech and language therapy assessments had a severe communication disability. Only 21% had previously been referred for speech and language therapy (Lanz, 2009). As part of her oral evidence to the All Party Parliamentary Group, Professor Karen Bryan highlighted that research has consistently shown that at least 60% of young offenders have SLCN but in only 5% of cases were they identified before the offending began (Bryan, 2004).

Afasic Cymru recommends that local authorities and educational establishments receive training to support their awareness and ability to identify speech, language and communication needs right across the age range. There is definitely a need for SLCN to become a mandatory part of initial teacher training and continuing professional development. Research by The Communication Trust in their *Talk of the Town* programme found that despite being taught by committed and experienced staff, 48% of children with SLCN in Key Stage 3 were not identified.

Once speech, language and communication needs are recognised and identified, families and post-16 professionals tell us that it is difficult to access appropriate assessment. If SLCN are not properly assessed, the young person is unlikely to receive the appropriately targeted support that is needed to participate fully and

benefit from education and training. This is important because of the impact of SLCN in terms of literacy, attainments, mental health, youth offending and employment.

Afasic Cymru recommends that given the prevalence and impact of SLCN, local authority assessments need to include information to enable effective screening for speech, language and communication needs.

Staff training to enable appropriate identification, assessment and provision

To quote an example from our experience of delivering training to staff working at a large further education establishment in Wales. The staff had never received training in SLCN and follow-up evaluations a year later revealed that it had changed their practice in terms of identification, assessment and teaching with reported tangible benefits for the young people involved. Examples of follow-up evaluations to SLCN training include:

“The students seem to be more engaged and involved in sessions”.

“More interaction”

“They seem more able to get on with work which requires a greater level of independent work”.

Funding

We are concerned that the proposal for the local authority to be responsible for the assessment of need *and* provision of services may represent a conflict of interest. Further, to ensure the best possible and appropriately resourced assessment and provision it seems fundamental that the funding should be ring fenced.

Parents have told us of their concerns that timely access to specialist provisions will be prevented because of the proposals not to ring fence funding and the responsibility of the local authority for assessment and identification of provision.

Afasic Cymru is disappointed and concerned that transport to or from a place where education or training is provided is not to be treated as relating to the provision of that education or training. There is a well-documented link between poverty and speech and language and communication needs. We believe that this may penalise the families and young people who need the most support, and particularly those living in rural areas.

Right of Appeal

Afasic Cymru is pleased to see that the Bill includes the right of appeal to SENTW with regards to a decision by a local authority not to secure a post-16 ETN assessment, the description of that assessment and identified provision. We believe that this will give families the added confidence that they will be offered the best possible person centred, needs led support.

We would wish to see that the needs of young people with SLCN would be included in any broad definitions of learning difficulties to support and safeguard their successful transition into independence, maximising their access to education, employment and other services such as housing.

References

A Generation Adrift (January 2013) The Communication Trust.

<https://www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk/resources/resources/resources-for-practitioners/a-generation-adrift.aspx>

Bryan, K. (2004) Prevalence of the speech and language difficulties in young offenders. International Journal of Language and Communication Disorders, 39, 391-400.

Lanz, R. (2009) Speech and Language Therapy with the Milton Keynes Youth Offending Team, a four month project.

Lee, W. (2013) Talk of the Town evaluation report. The Communication Trust.