



Minister Norma Foley TD,
Department of Education,
Marlborough Street,
Dublin 1 ,
D01 RC96

8th October 2021

Re: Alternate Leaving Certificate 2022 examination proposals

Dear Minister Foley,

I trust this finds you safe and well.

I am writing to you regarding an announcement recently made by you and the Advisory Group on Planning for State Examinations regarding an alternate sitting of the Leaving Certificate in 2022 for students who *"are unable to sit the main set of examinations due to close family bereavement, COVID-19 illness and certain other categories of serious illness to be determined."*

Accessing appropriate Reasonable Accommodations during the Leaving Certificate and other state exams has been an issue of great importance to students with epilepsy and their families for many years.

Epileptic seizures are typically sudden and unexpected and followed by a period of exhaustion, confusion, memory issues and other temporary effects requiring a period of recovery. For some individuals, seizures can be triggered by factors such as a lack of sleep, changes to routine and stress, all of which are associated with examination time.

As it stands, if a student with epilepsy experiences a seizure just before or during a Leaving Cert exam – which renders them unable to complete that exam - they have no option but to wait a year and re-sit their exams in full. This has obvious repercussions, including on students' plans to attend third level education. While some accommodations are already in place to deal with such a scenario, none are fully satisfactory, and we have long advocated for the more appropriate accommodation of an alternate exam within the same cycle.

Working to achieve a society where no person's life is limited by epilepsy.

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The alternate exam proposal would be a very welcome development for students who are placed in circumstances outside of their control, and we believe it is imperative that epileptic seizures are included under the definition of "other categories of serious illness" in determining eligibility for the alternate sitting.

The current system has already unfairly affected far too many young people with epilepsy. Thankfully, there is now an opportunity to finally provide a more appropriate and flexible accommodation to those students who have a debilitating seizure at the most inappropriate of moments.

With the academic year now underway, our services team are currently engaging with parents of students with epilepsy around the country. One of their most common questions, and biggest stressors is "What happens if I have a seizure during my exams?"

The Leaving Cert is already stressful enough on our young people and young people with epilepsy have this additional stress. It is time to remove it now and ensure that students with epilepsy have access to the alternate sitting in 2022.

We ask for your support in ensuring that this issue is finally addressed as part of the planning for next year's Leaving Cert. We also note that that a stakeholder consultation process is to begin regarding the proposed new arrangements, and we would very much appreciate the opportunity to be involved in this process.

Thank you for your consideration, and we look forward to hearing from you in due course.

Yours sincerely,

Peter Murphy
CEO, Epilepsy Ireland