



(Via Email)

27th July 2022

Minister Norma Foley TD,
Minister for Education,
Department of Education,
Marlborough Street,
North City,
Dublin 1,
D01RC96.

RE: Eligibility criteria for deferred sittings of Leaving Cert Exams

Dear Minister,

I trust this finds you well. I am writing to you in my capacity as President of the Irish Epilepsy League, on the behalf of all our members regarding the above subject.

The Irish Epilepsy League is the Irish chapter of the International League Against Epilepsy - an international medical and scientific organisation involved in epilepsy related education, research, and advocacy.

As clinicians who are working with and supporting people with epilepsy daily, we felt compelled to write directly to you, to echo the points made by our colleagues in Epilepsy Ireland regarding the eligibility criteria for deferred Leaving Cert examinations. I have attached Epilepsy Ireland's correspondence for your information.

We are equally concerned about the current eligibility criteria for the deferred sittings and how they have been applied this year, as highlighted publicly in the examples of the student who experienced appendicitis during an exam and Rachel Langan who experienced a tonic-clonic seizure.

For the vast majority of our patients, completing an exam in the immediate aftermath of a seizure such as that described by Rachel will be impossible, even with the addition of a small amount of additional time, due to the range of temporary physical and cognitive impairments that can arise.

With deferred sittings now in place for medical emergencies that arise prior to the exam, and at least one example of a deferred sitting being offered when the medical issue arose during the exam, we fully support Epilepsy Ireland's calls to widen and clarify the qualifying criteria ahead of 2023. In our opinion, a student who experiences a seizure during their exam should be allowed to apply for access to the deferred sitting in the same way as a student who has appendicitis. This should be as a matter of course, rather than by exception.

We would also like to take this opportunity to highlight the application process for deferred sittings. Firstly, had Epilepsy Ireland not contacted clinicians about the new criteria that were introduced in early June, in particular the 4-day deadline for a consultant letter, we would not have been aware of these criteria.

ILAE's vision is a world in which no person's life is limited by epilepsy.

Irish Epilepsy League

249, Crumlin Road, Crumlin, Dublin 12, D12RW92



Had we been consulted, we would have highlighted – as Epilepsy Ireland did – that four days is not sufficient time to guarantee that the evidence requested can be provided in all cases. Our patients are our priority, and every effort will be made to accommodate requests in a timely manner. However, should this timeframe be maintained for future years, the reality is that our workload and the pressure neurological services are under will result in some patients not receiving their evidence in time.

Greater flexibility around this is required, either by extending the time period or by accepting medical evidence from a wider range of professionals including NCHDs, specialist nurses or GPs.

We are aware that a review of the eligibility criteria for deferred sittings will take place. We welcome and support your decision to introduce deferred sittings for students experiencing medical issues at exam time and we now urge you to ensure that the above issues are addressed as part of that review.

If you require any further information in relation to epilepsy, seizures or their impacts, our members would be more than willing to assist from a clinical perspective.

Thank you for your attention to this matter and we look forward to your reply.

Yours sincerely,

Dr. Peter Widdess-Walsh
Consultant Neurologist, Beaumont Hospital
President, Irish Epilepsy League