**RE: Deferred examinations eligibility criteria**

Dear TD/Senator X,

I trust this finds you well. I am writing to you regarding the eligibility criteria for deferred sitting of the Leaving Cert examinations which was introduced this year.

I wish to highlight key issues which Epilepsy Ireland have brought to the attention of the Minister for Education regarding this. These are briefly outlined below:

* **Before VS During**

The current policy states that a student’s eligibility for a deferred sitting of an exam can be assessed if the medical emergency (such as a seizure) takes place ***before*** the examination. However, for students with epilepsy, this provision is inherently unfair. The consequences of a seizure occurring at 9:10 on the morning of the exam are likely to be the same as a seizure at 9:40 – yet the responses taken to these incidents would be very different. Under the current policy, one will potentially be eligible for a deferred sitting, and one will not.

This year, at least one exception to this rule was made to allow a student who became unwell during an exam to apply for a deferred sitting (due to appendicitis). This student was initially told they would not have access to the deferred sitting, as per the stated policy. After public outcry and political pressure, an exception was made on his individual case. This was clearly the correct decision in the circumstances; however, the same leeway was not subsequently offered in other comparable cases, including at least one student who had a tonic clonic seizure during an exam and who was unable to complete it.

Ahead of the 2023 exam sittings, the criteria must be reviewed to include students whose medical issue occurs ***during*** an exam, and this must be clearly communicated in a timely manner via revised guidelines to students, their families, and schools.

* **Requirement to begin application process on the day of the missed examination**

To have their eligibility for deferred examinations assessed, the student or their parent/guardian is required to complete a declaration on the day of the medical emergency. This does not take account of the circumstances where a medical emergency will prevent this form from being completed on the same day – for example, due to urgent hospitalisation. Greater flexibility on this is needed for such circumstances.

* **Requirement for Consultants letter**

To make an application for a deferred sitting on medical grounds, the criteria states that a consultant’s letter must be obtained and uploaded within 4 days of the initial application being created. This is simply an unreasonable demand to put on students, their families, and medical teams. It fails to recognise the pressures that are on understaffed, under-resourced medical services, the workload of consultants, or the possibility that the consultant may be unavailable at such short notice. Again, greater flexibility or alternative acceptable confirmation is needed.

* **Provision of timely information**

The initial announcement regarding deferred sittings on medical grounds was first made in September 2021. However, Epilepsy Ireland was only invited to contribute to the stakeholder process at the end of April 2022. The eligibility criteria for the exams was released just days before the first exam took place. Adequate time was not available for schools, students, and other stakeholders to become familiar with the detailed provisions or to address foreseeable problems, such as those outlined above, with the SEC. Students, particularly those living with long-term health conditions, need to know the criteria months in advance to understand their entitlements and to remove undue stress and anxiety.

As my local TD/Senator, I would appreciate if you could work with Epilepsy Ireland to have these outstanding matters addressed and reach out directly to Advocacy and Communications Manager, Paddy McGeoghegan, on pmcgeoghegan@epilepsy.ie to discuss these further.

It is vital that we do not see the same issues presenting for Leaving Cert students with long-term health conditions in 2023 and I hope you will work with Epilepsy Ireland on my behalf to have these addressed.

Thank you for your attention to this matter and I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Name

Address

Contact