

Dear ETB Learner,

I would like to reach out to you on behalf of the Education and Training Boards Sector at this extraordinary time. Your health and safety and that of our wider community is our primary concern, which is why ETBs are implementing different approaches to teaching, learning and assessment methods over the coming weeks.

I want you to know that while you are one learner, you are also part of the half a million ETB learners throughout villages, towns and cities in Ireland. You can make a difference by what you do in the coming weeks. As the HSE has advised, please follow the COVID-19 guidelines around social distancing, maintaining a distance of at least two metres between yourself and other people. I would also particularly ask that you stay away from crowded places in the weeks ahead and limit your own social interactions, however it is really important for your mental wellbeing to keep in contact with friends and family; just please maintain social distancing by completely foregoing meeting in groups, especially social gatherings or party environments.

There is also opportunity to check in with other learners who might be lonely or isolated by phoning them, or Facetime, Skype, Zoom, or whatever system you use. You could also offer your services to volunteer organisations to collect shopping or prescriptions for elderly neighbours or walk their dogs if your circumstances permit.

The other reality that may be true for you is one I know only too well and have personal experience of. The joy of wearing many different hats all at the one time sometimes can bring its own challenge being a parent, a learner, and a son/daughter whilst trying to maintain your learning and indeed the production of assignments, material for assessment and getting used to a new way of working can be really difficult. Trying to plan and allocate specific time each day which provides you with the opportunity to make progress may be one practical way that can help, the opportunity to get out to walk and have some fresh air is also of paramount importance if safe to do so. This also has to work in finding the balance with your personal requirements which may mean that the best time for you to get course work done may be when your children are in bed in the evening or early in the morning.

It is important to remember that if you do contract the virus, your health could be severely affected, and you pose a great danger to the older members of society and those with compromised immune systems, people you and I care about. You could even be unwittingly responsible for putting others at increased risk so please be mindful of the part you play and the behaviour changes required by us all to adhere to the HSE guidelines.

Scientific and public health advice tells us that it will take some time before COVID-19 can be contained. You can play your part as an individual by keeping yourself healthy so that the healthcare system can continue to function. As a learner, you are in a unique position. You can learn online in many cases and do not have to come into work as many others have to do. All these precautions mean little if you do not stay away from crowds.

Reputable information that is constantly updated is available from <https://www2.hse.ie/coronavirus/> or from the HSE (@HSELive 1850 24 1850) and Department of Health (@roinnsIainTe) Twitter feeds and indeed the Department of Education on www.education.ie

Be kind to and take care of yourself and each other during this challenging time. I am convinced of the goodness at the heart of us all so let's not be afraid to show it: from at least two metres away.



Yours sincerely,

Nessa White

General Secretary, ETBI