

TOP MARKS ON ‘LAPTOPS FOR LOAN’ SCHEME IN MEATH!

Meath County Council's Library Service has set up a partnership agreement with Facebook, under a new 'Laptops for Loan' initiative, in which up to 900 laptops will be made available to fifth year and Leaving Cert Applied students in Meath, to enable them to stay connected and continue their education from home during these challenging times. Report by Grace Heneghan.



The initiative aims to address the digital divide compounded by the coronavirus outbreak, which has caused disproportionate hardship on those students who are disadvantaged or marginalised.

And when the Covid-19 social distancing restrictions are lifted in the future, the laptops will also be made available to the wider community.

The first set of laptops have been loaned to fifth year and Leaving Cert Applied students at Beaufort College in Navan, as part of the Meath County Council's Library

Service 'Laptops for Loan' initiative funded by Facebook,

The €809,100 donation by Facebook, whose data centre is based in Clonee, Co. Meath, will enable Meath Library Service to purchase nearly 900 laptops and WiFi dongles, which will support 50% of fifth year and Leaving Certificate Applied students who do not have access to digital devices.

REMOTE LEARNING SUPPORTED

Jackie Maguire, Chief Executive of Meath County Council, said: "For students to

actively engage in remote learning they need access to a suitable device, such as a laptop, and good quality internet access in their homes.

"We're delighted that Beaufort College students in Navan are the first recipients of the laptop loan scheme, with other schools receiving laptops soon after."

Beaufort College Principal Angela Crowcock added: "Our fifth year and Leaving Certificate Applied 1 Groups are the priority. They are ending year one of their two-year senior cycle and have missed a lot of course work. There are 100 students in



Pictured at Beaufort College in early June were (l-r): Meath County Council's Chief Executive Jackie Maguire; Senior Executive Librarian Maedhbh Rogan-McGann; Beaufort College Navan Principal Angela Crowcock; Community Engagement Development Manager at Facebook's Clonee Data Centre Aoife Flynn; Meath Cathaoirleach Cllr Wayne Harding, and County Librarian Ciaran Mangan.

total and we are most grateful to be considered for this initiative."

Aoife Flynn, Community Engagement Development Manager at Facebook's Clonee Data Centre added, "Due to the presence of our Data Centre in Clonee, we consider Meath our home and are committed to supporting the community there. The funding formed part of our global efforts to support our data centre communities during the Covid-19 crisis."

She said that Facebook wants to support people, especially young people, in their education. "We know this period of school closures has been enormously difficult for all school students, but particularly for those who do not have access to a suitable device at home for remote learning."

TWO PHASES TO LOAN SCHEME

The 'Laptop for Loan' initiative has two phases. The first phase is aimed at students in Meath's post-primary schools with fifth year students to be treated as a first priority, while the second phase will see a laptop loan scheme rolled out to partner organisations, through the library service and to community groups for training purposes.

Meath County Council Library Service will provide the logistical support, procuring the laptops and delivering them directly to schools who will then distribute them to those most affected by social and educational disadvantage.

The laptops will be loaned to students who need them for the duration of the crisis. Students with no access to broadband in their home will be able to borrow a WiFi dongle. On return, the hard drives will be securely wiped and reset.

SIGN OF THE TIMES SURVEY

According to Senior Executive Librarian Maedhbh Rogan-McGann, "Meath County Council Library Service has partnered with Facebook on previous community initiatives, and we are delighted to work with them again on this new initiative."

Although the 'Sign of the Times' survey (published in The Irish Times; dated 11 April 2020) suggests that Ireland is prepared for the working revolution and with laptop ownership in Ireland high at 70%, students are nonetheless competing for access with other siblings and parents working from home. A number of post-primary schools in Meath have indicated that student ownership of laptops may be as low as 20%.

For longer assignments, projects and essays, students need to use a laptop/desktop computer as typing on a mobile phone keyboard is awkward and slow, while downloading PDFs and Word documents can also be problematic due to space issues on phones.

"The Meath Library Service proposal was extremely impressive, and the scale of the need in the Leaving Cert cycle is evident. We hope this will have a positive impact for students and the wider community in Meath," Flynn noted.



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