IBM and Cisco partner to support the Department of Education and Skills with remote teaching across Ireland

Free Cisco Webex tool offered with free training from IBM so that schools can continue their essential work during the global pandemic

Ireland, 9th April 2020 - IBM and Cisco have joined forces to offer teachers in schools across Ireland free access to video conferencing through use of the Cisco Webex web conferencing tool. The technology offers simple and intuitive features for online collaboration in response to the challenges of the COVID-19 outbreak. To support new users in getting started, IBM and Cisco employees are volunteering their time to help install the video-conferencing technology and provide ongoing guidance to maximise the tools.

The pandemic and resulting lockdown pose huge challenges for schools as they strive to provide education to pupils across the country. Cisco Webex allows students to continue attending classes in today's exceptional circumstances by holding lessons in a virtual classroom and embark on distance learning. Students can easily participate in lessons in guest mode, without the need for a user account. Everything is managed by the teacher, who "invites" the students to the classroom. Features such as host audio control and document, image and screen sharing capabilities will replicate the structured classroom environment. Lessons can also be recorded and sent to students who were unable to attend.

Minister for Education and Skills Joe McHugh TD said: "Young people, families, teachers and school leaders are all facing serious challenges as they adapt to online and remote learning and work to keep education going in the midst of the Covid-19 crisis. The rapid response of Cisco and IBM is helping to answer some of that need. Everyone involved deserves huge credit for the work and effort that is being done to build platforms to ensure the continuation of learning."

The Cisco and IBM collaboration was initially targeted at supporting schools in Ireland with limited or no learning platform and has now been extended to additional schools nationwide. The initiative began in Italy in response to the government's call for companies to support schools as they closed and has now expanded to over 18 countries in Europe, including Ireland. There are already 3,000 IBMers volunteering to make this a reality across Europe, supporting over 100,000 students in 2,000 schools and continues to increase each week.

Cisco Country Manager, Paul Kavanagh, said: "These weeks have been challenging for all of us, and the need for us all to stay connected has never been more important. We're firm believers that we need to create a digital society for everyone, and that remains true in critical times like these, when the spirit of collaboration really comes to the fore. We're proud to be able to offer a tool that will hopefully help ensure students can continue learning, and charities continue their vital work. And I'm hugely proud of the skilled Irish volunteers who are helping teachers and their students stay connected during these exceptional times."

"The need for us all to stay connected has never been more important. Our goal is to develop innovations that help society progress and improve – this has never been more relevant today as we face an unprecedented global crisis. It is a privilege to contribute the skills and expertise of IBMers in Ireland as we seek to reduce the impact of COVID-19 on our society" said Paul Farrell, General Manager, IBM Ireland.

The Cisco Webex platform has more than 130 million monthly users worldwide, and processes more than 6 billion minutes of meetings every month. Always accessible through an internet connection, it guarantees the privacy and security of the data and content exchanged in the sessions using advanced security and encryption tools.

The Department of Education and Skills has communicated this support offer with school management bodies and school leaders will be communicated within the coming days.

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