

Communication on the availability of electronic communications networks for remote evaluations by Belgian educational establishments

The National Security Council decided that as of Monday 18 May 2020 schools were allowed again to give lessons under certain restrictions. This was already the case for the universities. For both education in Belgium and pupils this is an important step.

Schools and universities will evaluate their pupils and students in order to verify whether the subject matter of the past school year has been absorbed and whether pupils and students are ready to start the next school year.

Considering the measures still in effect to counter the spread of the Covid-19 virus and to strengthen the supporting barrier gestures (social distancing, hand sanitising measures, wearing masks, ...), many schools and universities will evaluate their pupils and students from a distance. The electronic communications networks are of crucial importance in this matter.

These remote evaluations will be taking place from 11 May up to and including 11 July 2020, from Monday up to and including Saturday, during the daytime, each time from 8 AM to 9 PM. (08:00 -> 21:00)

It is possible that up to 20,000 exams spread over the Belgian educational establishments will take place simultaneously.

The peak of the evaluations is expected to occur in the first and second week of June.

For the remote evaluations mostly commercially available applications, often through remote IT platforms, will be used, such as Blackboard, Microsoft Teams, Skype, Canvas, Google Meet, Moodle, to name a few.

This will very probably generate a rise in traffic from and to BNIX managed by Belnet or the educational establishments or the remote IT platforms used for the evaluation or a combination thereof.

Belnet, the Belgian network for colleges, universities and public bodies uses BNIX to optimise the exchange of data traffic between the various Internet providers in Belgium.

The traffic between electronic communications networks through which this traffic will be transported, is expected to rise.

Therefore, the BIPT asks all operators to do the following regarding their own electronic communications networks:

1. check the possible impact concerning the currently existing bandwidth and that which will possibly be needed; if necessary, take appropriate measures to absorb the expected traffic;
2. as for interventions:
 - a) avoid or at least limit during this period those interventions in the core network which may impact, even temporarily, the capacity and availability of the network;
 - b) avoid or at least limit during this period those interventions that simultaneously have an impact on the capacity and availability of both the fixed and mobile access network of households;
3. check and where necessary adapt the measures laid down in the continuity plan;
4. test the links to the connected educational establishments.