

Back to Education Allowance - Frequently Asked Questions

The Back to Education Allowance scheme operational guidelines can be found at www.welfare.ie

Q1 - What is the Back to Education Allowance (BTEA)?

The Back to Education Allowance (BTEA) is an educational opportunities scheme for persons in receipt of certain social welfare payments wishing to pursue second or third level courses of education subject to meeting the qualifying conditions.

Q2 - How do I qualify for Back to Education Allowance (BTEA)?

In order to qualify for BTEA the applicant must be:

- A specific age (see Question 3);
- In receipt of a qualifying payment for a specified period of time (strict adherence to this condition must be applied in all cases); (see Question 4)
- In general, commencing the first year of a course of study (see Question 5);
- The course of study is full time day for the complete academic year;
- Leading to a recognised qualification in a recognised college;
- Jobseeker is progressing in the levels of education held and where required, the Case Officer has recommended the application be approved under BTEA.

Q3 - At what age can I apply for BTEA?

In general, an applicant must be at least 21 years of age before the start date of an approved course of study.

BTEA can be approved for a jobseeker aged at least 18 but under 21 years old provide that they have been out of formal education for at least two years prior to the commencement of the proposed course of study.

Disability related payments can access BTEA at 18 years of age.

An applicant must be at least 24 years of age for an approved postgraduate course.

Q4 - What are qualifying social welfare payments?

To qualify for BTEA you must be in receipt of one of the following social welfare payments for a minimum period; 3 months if pursuing a second level course, or 9 months if pursuing a third level course.

Jobseeker's Allowance or Jobseeker's Benefit	Farm Assist
One-Parent Family Payment	Deserted Wife's Benefit or Allowance
Widow's, Widower's or Surviving Civil Partner's (Contributory) Pension	Widow's, Widower's or Surviving Civil Partner's (Non-Contributory) Pension
Prisoner's Wife's Allowance	Carer's Allowance
Blind Pension	Disability Allowance
Invalidity Pension	Incapacity Supplement (based on a life Disablement Pension)
Illness Benefit (2 years) for both second and third level courses.	

Persons awarded Statutory Redundancy under Irish Legislation may have immediate access to the BTEA scheme, (or within one year of the award of Statutory Redundancy), provided an entitlement to a relevant Social Welfare payment is established immediately prior to commencement of an approved course of study. However, persons who opt for Voluntary Redundancy scheme cannot have immediate access to BTEA. QA's of persons that receive Statutory Redundancy cannot have immediate access.

Q5 - What type of course can I undertake?

Income support is available under BTEA to enable two study options to be pursued:

- Second Level Option (SLO)
- Third Level Option (TLO)

The Second Level Option enables study to be undertaken provided it leads to FETAC qualifications up to level 6. All courses must lead to a Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) accreditation (formerly FETAC or HETAC award) or equivalent and must be recognised by the Department of Education and Skills.

In general, You must also be progressing in educational qualifications. For example, if you already have a Level 4 qualification on the [National Framework of Qualifications](#), the course you are undertaking must be for at least a Level 5 qualification. A person holding a level 7 degree can only apply for a level 8 add-on year (honours degree) in the same discipline and is not eligible for new level 8 honours degree course in a different discipline. The only postgraduate courses recognised for BTEA are a Higher Diploma (H.Dip) in any discipline, or the Professional Masters in Education.

From June 2014 there has been a relaxation of the progression rule for level 5 and level 6 BTEA applicants in certain limited circumstances. Applicants who already hold a Level 5 or 6 qualification under the National Framework of Qualifications and who satisfy all the other scheme eligibility

criteria may be allowed undertake further courses at either of these levels. Such cases **must** be referred to a Case Officer for their recommendation. (See Q11)

Q6 - What are the rates paid for BTEA?

Applicants aged under 26 years in receipt of an age related qualifying payment (applies to BTEA applicants with a jobseekers qualifying payment only) approved for BTEA will receive €160 per week. If means apply to the qualifying jobseekers payment, the BTEA payment is reduced by the value of the means.

Where the BTEA participant is married or cohabitating (and the partner is not in receipt of BTEA), the BTEA participant is entitled to receive €160 per week, subject to the maximum of the basic jobseeker rate (i.e. non-age related payment) less any applicable means.

Table shows the appropriate rate with NIL means. Any means assessment should be applied as normal.

Age	Personal Rate	Rate of Qualified Adult	Total
18 – 24 JA	€102.70	€102.70	€205.40
18 – 24 BTEA	€160	€102.70	€262.70
Aged 25 JA	€147.80	€128.10	€275.90
Aged 25 BTEA	€160	€128.10	€288.10

In the scenario where both parties are subject to age related payments and are both engaged with BTEA the following will apply:

U26yrs and both on BTEA	€160	€160	Limited to €312.80
Aged 26yrs and over (on basis jobseekers payment i.e. non-age related payment)	€193.00	€128.10	€321.10

Q7 - Can I work part time and claim BTEA?

From 2016/17 academic year, BTEA participants who take up part time work within the academic year will be assessed in accordance with their primary payment.

Officers should note that part-time work may affect entitlements to secondary benefits such as Fuel Allowance, Rent Allowance/ Mortgage Interest Supplement.

Q8 - I have been on a Jobseeker's payment for less than 9 months. Do I have to sign off my Jobseeker's payment to start a third level course?

Yes. If you do not satisfy the conditions for BTEA, and you are pursuing a full-time course, you must sign off your Jobseeker's payment. You cannot receive a Jobseeker's payment while participating in a full-time course of study.

Q9 - Can I get the BTEA to repeat a year of my course?

BTEA should not be approved for repeat students registered as external students and/or examination only students. Neither should approval be given for repeat students to undertake a repeat year of study on a part-time basis. Should mitigating circumstances apply, such as long term illness or injury requiring prolonged absence from attendance at lectures, the serious illness of an immediate family member requiring the participant undertaking a caring responsibility, discontinuance of the course by the educational institution, force majeure, BTEA participants should be approved for payment to undertake a repeat year of study. Payment should only be approved where the participant is registered and attends as a full-time student for the repeat year. In such circumstances only one academic year may be repeated.

A BTEA participant who fails and repeats an exam, which results in a break of their previously awarded BTEA payment and who satisfies all other eligible criteria for BTEA may be approved for BTEA in order to progress to the next year of their course of study. If the break in payment is for a period longer than the academic year, they should be treated as new entrants to the scheme for payment purposes.

Q10 - I already hold FETAC Level 5 - can I do another FETAC Level 5 course under BTEA?

In general BTEA should only be approved where the course of study leads to a higher qualification on the National Framework of Qualifications other than that already held by the applicant. Applicants holding a qualification at tertiary education level (certificate, diploma, primary degree or post graduate qualification) should not be approved for BTEA to pursue a course at a similar qualification level.

In certain limited circumstances BTEA can be approved where the applicant proposes to undertake a course of study leading to a qualification at either FETAC levels 5 or 6 where the applicant already holds qualification at the same level or lesser level. In order for such an application to be recommended and subsequently approved, a Case Officer will consider their recommendation in terms of further professional/ career development and the applicant's overall job prospects and ensuring that the:

- Course of study at Level 5 or 6 is at second level;
- Previous educational award is deemed to be in an economic sector that is no longer growing;
- Proposed course of study is career orientated and consistent with future skill needs and/or local demand;
- Maximum course duration 24 months;
- Applicant worked for a period of at least three years and has paid PRSI contribution; and
- Previous educational award was made 3 or more years prior to the commencement date of the new proposed course.

Q11 - Can I pursue a course of study outside Ireland?

BTEA is only permitted for courses commencing in Ireland and Northern Ireland. However, BTEA can be approved to avail of a year abroad if it is deemed to be an integral/mandatory/compulsory part of the course of study (as verified by the Registrars/ Admission's Office).

Q12 - Can I get BTEA if I already have a third level qualification?

In general, BTEA should only be approved where the course of study leads to a higher qualification on the National Framework of Qualifications other than that already held by the applicant. Applicants holding a qualification at tertiary education level (certificate, diploma, primary degree or post graduate qualification) should not be approved for BTEA to pursue a course at a similar qualification level.

In certain limited circumstances BTEA can be approved where the applicant proposes to undertake a course of study leading to a qualification at either FETAC levels 5 or 6 where the applicant already holds a qualification at the same level or lesser level. In order for such an application to be recommended and subsequently approved, a Case Officer will consider their recommendation in terms of further professional/ career development and the applicant's overall job prospects and ensuring that the:

- Course of study at Level 5 or 6 is at second level;
- Previous educational award is deemed to be in an economic sector that is no longer growing;
- Proposed course of study is career orientated and consistent with future skill needs and/or local demand;
- Maximum course duration of the course of study is 24 months;
- Applicant worked for a period of at least three years and has paid PRSI contribution; and
- Previous educational award was made 3 or more years prior to the commencement date of the new proposed course.

A person holding a level 7 degree can only apply for a level 8 add-on year (honours degree) in the same discipline. The only postgraduate courses recognised for BTEA are a Higher Diploma (H.Dip) in any discipline or the Professional Diploma in Education.

An exception to this progression rule is outlined in Q10

Q13 - Can I study in a Private College?

Only if the course of study leads to a QQI, FETAC or HETAC qualification and you satisfy all the other BTEA eligibility criteria.

Q 14 - Can I pursue a post-graduate course of study under BTEA?

Only in limited circumstances can BTEA be approved for jobseekers undertaking postgraduate study. There are no circumstances where BTEA can be approved where the jobseekers already holds a postgraduate qualification. Study for postgraduate qualifications for which BTEA cannot be approved include Masters in all disciplines, other than indicated below, MA, MSc, M.Eng, M.Phil, MBA, Professional Graduate Diploma, any discipline.

BTEA can be approved where the jobseekers intend to undertake studies leading to:

- A Higher Diploma (H.Dip) in any discipline; or
- A Professional Masters in Education (PME) which replaced the Professional Diploma in Education (PDE) from September 2014; or
- A Master degree based solely on life experience where the applicant holds no other third level qualification. In such cases a Case Officer must ensure that the applicant provides solely on life experience and that the applicant is not the holder of any third level qualification.

Q 15 - I'm on JA; can my spouse (ADA) apply for BTEA?

The provision for a Qualified Adult is operational from 1st January 2015. An applicant in receipt of a Qualified Adult (QA) payment can only be approved for BTEA provided they establish an entitlement to a qualifying social welfare payment in their own right prior to commencement of the course. Time spent as a QA (or linked to previous jobseekers entitlement) can be counted in determining the qualifying period.

This provision does not extend to provide eligibility for the Qualified Adult Dependent of person made Statutory Redundant.

Eligibility to BTEA does not extend to Qualified Adults of participants of activation schemes.

Q 16 - Will BTEA pay my course fees?

No – You can apply to be assessed to have the student services charge and any tuition fees paid on your behalf by the Dept. of Education & Skills, subject to satisfying the terms and conditions pertaining to same. The decision on eligibility for student grant scheme is a matter for the central grant awarding authority SUSI (Student Universal Support Ireland). You cannot get both the Back to Education Allowance and a student maintenance grant.

Q 17 - Do I have to sign on if on BTEA?

No, signing is suspended for the duration of the Academic year.

If you are available for and actively seeking work you can make a repeat jobseekers claim for the summer period.

Q 18 - My Course isn't covered by either of the above, what can I do?

If the course is of short duration an applicant may qualify for the Education, Training and Development option of the Back to Education scheme. An applicant may continue to receive Jobseekers Allowance or Benefit subject to satisfying certain conditions and are deemed to be

available for employment for the duration of the course of Education, Training or Development. In the case of Jobseekers Benefit, participation on a course does not grant any extension to the normal period for which Jobseekers Benefit is paid. This option has to be recommended by the Case Officer.

Q 19 - My course is only part-time, what can I do?

Should an applicant be in receipt of a jobseekers payment and receive an offer of a place on a part-time course of study, prior to starting the course the applicant should attend their Social Welfare Office/ Intreo Centre to complete an application to retain their payment via the Part Time Education Option (PTEO).

Unlike the other educational opportunity schemes there are no specific eligibility criteria for availing of this option. You must continue to satisfy the conditions of being available for and genuinely seeking employment on an on-going basis. Part-time day/evening/early morning courses, distance education or part-time courses under the Back to Education Initiative (BTEI) may be approved under the PTEO. In the case of Jobseekers Benefit, participation on a course does not grant any extension to the normal period for which Jobseekers Benefit is paid.

Q 20 - Who will pay for my books?

There is no extra payment with BTEA. The Cost of Education Allowance was abolished in January 2013.

Q 21 - I am only recently unemployed -I don't satisfy the qualifying period but got statutory redundancy. Can I apply for BTEA?

Yes, provided the applicant is entitled to a qualifying Social Welfare payment before commencement of the course. The applicant must apply within 1 of receiving Statutory Redundancy and must satisfy the other scheme eligibility conditions. If the applicant has opted for a voluntary redundancy package immediate access to BTEA is not possible.

Q 22 - What is the qualifying duration for Momentum?

An applicant must be unemployed at the time of application, be actively job seeking and be in receipt of a Jobseekers Allowance/ Benefit payment or credited contributions for 12 months or longer (312 days) in the last 18 months.

Momentum generally covers level 5 or level 6 courses and the progression rule is waived for applications under the BTEA scheme. Some of the courses may not be aligned to the NFQ and may be industry recognised qualifications.

Q 23 - What is the qualifying duration for Springboard?

Nine months for fulltime course under BTEA and no qualifying period of part time courses under Part Time Education Option (PTEO).

Q 24 - I hold a level 7 qualification but I want to pursue a level 8 qualification?

If an applicant holds a level 7 degree they can only apply for a level 8 add-on year (honours degree) in the same discipline. They are not eligible for a new level 8 honours degree course in a different discipline.

Q 25 - Can I transfer directly from VTOS /CE Schemes etc. to BTEA?

Time spent on DSP Work programmes (CE, Tus, RSS, etc.) Work Placement programmes (JobBridge, Gateway Scheme etc.) Back to Work schemes, VTOS or Solas/FAS schemes can count towards the qualifying period for Back to Education Allowance. This applies only in circumstances where the person establishes an entitlement to a relevant Social Welfare payment immediately prior to commencing an approved course of study. If a person drops out of one of these schemes, they should contact a Case Officer in their Intreo Office/Social Welfare Local Office who **may** recommend BTEA as a better intervention.

Q 26 - Can I get BTEA to pursue a semester of a course which I deferred due to illness?

No. A single semester of a course is not covered under the Back to Education Allowance scheme. You must be fully registered and completing the full academic year of the course.

Q 27 - Can I get BTEA to complete some modules of a course in this academic year and pursue the remaining modules in the following academic year?

No. All modules must be completed in the same academic year.

Q 28 - Can I remain on OFP and pursue a course of study?

Persons in receipt of One Parent Family payments or illness related payments are permitted to attend a course of study in this country subject to continuing to satisfy the conditions of the scheme, without transferring to the Back to Education Allowance.

Under this provision, details of the proposed course of study should be forwarded to the relevant Social Welfare Office/ Intreo Centre. In such cases, you should also apply to SUSI to establish if you satisfy the eligibility criteria for the Student Support Grant. However, if you are in receipt of rent supplement and want to retain same while engaging in full-time education you should opt for the Back to Education Allowance or VTOS Allowance. (In order to receive rent allowance while pursuing a full-time course you must be in receipt of BTEA or VTOS).

Q 29 - I was not entitled to BTEA in the last academic year can I apply for BTEA for 2nd year?

If you pursued first year on a full-time basis in the last academic year, you cannot receive BTEA for this academic year (see exception for OFP customers).

The condition that applicants must be commencing the first year of an approved full-time course to access the BTEA was relaxed subject to fulfilling the other scheme conditions, to allow access after the first year of a course in the following circumstances only:

- Applicants who have been granted an exemption by the college/course provider based on a previous course or on life experience;
- Applicants who had completed the earlier year(s) of the course on a part-time basis;
- Applicants who are permitted by the college/course provider to proceed to the second or subsequent year of a course after having previously dropped out or deferred a year;
- Former One Family Parent customers affected by age related change to OFP in full-time education who did not opt for BTEA at the start of the course may be admitted to BTEA 'mid course' where OFP is being withdrawn due to the age of the youngest child.

Q30 – Am I eligible for Rent Allowance while on Back to Education Allowance?

Participants **may** continue to receive any secondary benefits to which they would otherwise have an entitlement under the provisions of the qualifying payment and legislative arrangements applying to the specific benefits. Secondary benefits may include Rent Allowance. Further enquiries about Rent Allowance can be made at your local Office responsible for Administering Supplementary Welfare Allowance.

Q31 - How will I be paid?

Payment of Back to Education Allowance is made by Electronic Funds Transfer (EFT) into your bank or building society account.

Q32 - How do I apply for BTEA?

All applications should be submitted on an official BTEA application form ([BTE1](https://www.welfare.ie/en/pdf/bte1.pdf)) available on the Department's website (<https://www.welfare.ie/en/pdf/bte1.pdf>) or in paper version at your Social Welfare Office/ Intreo Centre. Officers should facilitate customers to make applications at the earliest opportunity with final decisions on eligibility and payment rates reserved until immediately prior to commencement of the course of study when confirmation is available.

In all cases, applications should be made in advance and no later than 30 days of the commencement of the course of study to enable scheduling of assessment processes and interviews with applicants, if deemed necessary and the establishment of eligibility and provisional award of payment by the Determining Officer.

Ends