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Qualifying conditions for our schemes change from time to time. Always check with your local Intreo Centre, your local Social Welfare Office or with Information Services to see if qualifying conditions have changed (see page 25 for contact details).

The information in this booklet is correct at the time of publication. This booklet is intended as a guide only, and is not a legal interpretation.

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Back to Education Programme

If you missed out on educational opportunities when you were younger or if you need to update your skills to compete more successfully for a job, the Department of Social Protection may be able to help.

We run a range of second chance education programmes to help unemployed people, lone parents and people with disabilities improve their skills and qualifications.

This publication outlines a number of ways that you can return to full-time or part-time education while continuing to get income support. The programmes range from basic foundation courses through to third level postgraduate courses.

If you wish to take a full-time second or third level course, you may qualify for a **Back to Education Allowance (BTEA)**. You may continue to get your current social welfare payment if you are thinking of participating in other part time courses of **education, training or development**, subject to prior approval by this Department.

The Back to Education Programme covers the following study options:

- Second level education courses
- Third level education courses
- Education, training and development courses
- Part-time education courses.

Also, the Department of Education and Skills runs the **Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS)** which is particularly suitable if you have been out of school for some time.

A - Back to Education Allowance (BTEA)

1. What is the Back to Education Allowance (BTEA)?

The Back to Education Allowance (BTEA) is a scheme for unemployed people, lone parents and people with disabilities who are getting certain payments from the Department of Social Protection.

The allowance can be paid to people who wish to pursue approved second or third level courses of education. BTEA is **not** an unemployment payment. The Allowance is paid instead of the Social Welfare Payment that entitled you to take part in the BTEA scheme.

If you are signing for unemployment credits or submitting medical certificates for illness credits, you may apply to take part in the scheme but you will not receive any payment from the Department of Social Protection. From 1 June 2014, new applications must be assessed by a Case Officer.

2. What are the study options?

There are two study options under the scheme:

- Second Level Option
- Third Level Option.

Second Level Option

You can attend a second level course of education at any community, comprehensive, secondary or vocational school.

The course must be:

- full-time day course, and
- lead to a qualification recognised by the Department of Education and Skills, or
- lead to a qualification approved by the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC).

Courses include the Junior Certificate, Leaving Certificate, Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) or a National Diploma (BTEC).

Also, full-time third level Foundation or Access courses of education are recognised under the Second Level Option of the BTEA scheme.

Third Level Option

You can take a third level course at any approved university, third level college or institution as long as it is:

- a full-time day course, and
- approved by the Department of Education and Skills for the Student Grant Scheme (under the Student Support Act 2011 and administered by SUSI,

or

- recognised by the Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC).

Note

The postgraduate option of the BTEA scheme is only for people who wish to take:

- a postgraduate course of study that leads to a Higher Diploma (H. Dip.) qualification in any discipline,
- or**
- a Professional Masters of Education (Primary or Secondary teaching).

Only postgraduate courses in Ireland are eligible for the BTEA scheme.

Other postgraduate qualifications including a Master's degree are not recognised for BTEA purposes.

You will not get the BTEA if you already hold a postgraduate qualification.

3. How do I qualify for BTEA?

The BTEA is for a wide range of people who might want to return to education, so people qualify in different ways, depending on their age and circumstances.

To qualify you must be:

- aged 18 and under 21 and out of formal education for two years,
- aged at least 21, **or**
- aged at least 24 if you want to pursue postgraduate study, **and**
- getting one of the following for at least,
 - **3 months (78 days of unemployment) for the Second Level Option**

- **9 months (234 days of unemployment) for the Third Level Option**
 - Jobseeker's Allowance or Benefit,
 - Farm Assist,
 - One-Parent Family Payment,
 - Jobseekers Transition Payment,
 - Deserted Wife's Allowance or Benefit,
 - Widow's, Widower's or Surviving Civil Partner's Contributory or Non-Contributory Pension,
 - Prisoner's Wife's Allowance, or
 - Carer's Allowance.

You can also apply for BTEA if you are:

- aged at least 18, **or**
- aged at least 24 if you want to do postgraduate study, **and**
- getting one of the following for at least,
 - **3 months (78 days of unemployment) for the Second Level Option**
 - **9 months (234 days of unemployment) for the Third Level Option**
 - **12 months (312 days) for the Professional Masters of Education**
 - Blind Pension,
 - Disability Allowance,
 - Invalidity Pension,
 - Incapacity Supplement (based on a life Disablement Pension), or
 - *Two years for Illness Benefit.

*Time spent on Illness Benefit can count towards the qualifying period, as long as at least 50% of the qualifying period was spent on the relevant social welfare payment that actually qualifies you to take part in the BTEA scheme. However, the 50% rule is relaxed for persons in receipt of Illness Benefit and who subsequently qualifies for another qualifying illness related payment.

Number of unemployment days which are paid or credited in accordance with jobseekers legislation.

Persons awarded Statutory Redundancy under Irish legislation may have immediate access to the BTEA scheme, (or within one year of the award of the Statutory Redundancy) provided an entitlement to a relevant Social Welfare payment is established immediately prior to commencing an approved course of study. However, persons who opt for a voluntary redundancy scheme cannot have immediate access to BTEA.

In general, the approved full-time course must lead to a higher qualification on the National Framework of Qualifications other than that already held. Existing graduates should not have an entitlement to BTEA to pursue a course at a similar qualification level. If a person holds a Fetaac level 4 qualification, they must be progressing to a level 5 qualification. A person who already holds a level 7 ordinary degree can only apply for the one year add-on honours degree course. They are not eligible to start a new four year level 8 degree course.

BTEA can be approved for a person who already holds a Level 5 or 6 qualification under the National Framework of Qualifications to undertake a course **at the same level**. This change in the progression rule **only** applies in certain limited circumstances to second level courses at level 5 and 6.

Note

- **Time spent on BTEA, VTOS, Full-time Solas Training course, Tús, National Internship Scheme, Work Placement Programme, Part-Time Job Incentive Scheme, Community Employment Schemes, Social Economy Programme, Rural Social Scheme, Back to Work Enterprise Scheme, Short Term Enterprise Scheme, Gateway or Job Assist may count towards the qualifying period.**

This provision applies only in cases where the applicant has established an entitlement to a qualifying social welfare payment immediately prior to commencement of their course. Periods spent on any qualifying payment and periods on other activation schemes which are not broken by more than 12 months (52 weeks) may be used in determining the qualifying period criteria.

Only in circumstances where a Case Officer is satisfied that a course of study represents a better activation option, should an applicant cease engagement on these programmes prior to completion.

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

- **Time spent on Youthreach can count towards the qualifying period for BTEA once an entitlement to a relevant social welfare payment is established before, or after completion of the Youthreach Programme.**

Note continued

- Time spent on Supplementary Welfare Allowance (SWA) or Direct Provision from the Health Service Executive can count towards the qualifying period for BTEA provided an entitlement to a relevant social welfare payment is established before starting the course of education.
- In the case where a person drops out of one of these schemes a case officer may recommend BTEA as a better intervention.
- Time spent in prison can be taken, or count towards the qualifying period for BTEA, provided an entitlement to a relevant social welfare payment is established prior to starting an approved course of education.
- If you qualify for 'credited contributions', prior to starting an approved course of study, you will continue to get 'credits' while you are on BTEA.
- You must be starting your course at year one.

However, you can apply * if you:

- a) Are exempt from part of your course because of a qualification you received in previous course. For example, you have a higher certificate in a course that you now wish to pursue to degree level.
- b) Completed the earlier year(s) of the course as a part-time student.
- c) Had completed the earlier year(s) on a full-time basis before becoming unemployed, or being made redundant and receiving statutory redundancy from their full-time employment, (jobseekers opting for voluntary redundancy are excluded from this provision).

* Subject to satisfying the other scheme conditions.

For current information on the schemes qualifying conditions, please contact your local Intreo Centre, your local Social Welfare Office or:

Back to Education Schemes

Department of Social Protection
Social Welfare Services
Government Buildings
Shannon Lodge
Carrick-on-Shannon
Co. Leitrim.
Tel: 071 96 72698

BTEA for Qualified Adults

Both partners can simultaneously qualify for a BTEA payment and can be supported to undertake courses of study.

The Qualified Adult Dependent of a person in receipt of one of the qualifying payments for BTEA purposes may be approved for BTEA provided they establish an entitlement to a BTEA qualifying payment in their own right and subject to satisfying all other BTEA conditions. Periods spent in receipt of a Qualified Adult Allowance on qualifying payments should be counted in addition to any periods in receipt of a qualifying payment in their own right provided the claims are not broken by more than 12 months. 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.

4. How do I apply?

You should contact your local second or third level school or college to get details of their courses. They will advise you on how to get a place on the course of your choice.

When you have been accepted on a course, notify us by filling in the form **BTE 1**.

Applications for BTEA should be made before the start of an approved course but late applications will be accepted if received within 30 days of the starting date of the course.

The social welfare payment you get indicates where you should send the completed form **BTE 1**. From 1 June 2014, new applications will be assessed by a Case Officer.

- If you are getting:
 - Deserted Wife's Benefit or Allowance,
 - Widow's, Widower's or Surviving Civil Partner's Contributory or Non-Contributory Pension,
 - Prisoner's Wife's Allowance,
 - or
 - Blind Pension

send the completed **BTE 1** form to:

Department of Social Protection
Social Welfare Services
College Road
Sligo.

- If you are getting:
 - Jobseeker's Allowance, Jobseeker's Benefit, Farm Assist or One-Parent Family Payment payable from your local Intreo Centre or your local Social Welfare Office

return the completed **BTE 1** to your local Intreo Centre or your local Social Welfare Office.

- If you are getting:
 - Disability Allowance,
 - Invalidity Pension,
 - Incapacity Supplement,
 - or
 - Carer's Allowance

send the completed **BTE 1** form to:

Department of Social Protection
Social Welfare Services
Ballinalee Road
Longford.

- If you are getting Illness Benefit for at least two years (see note on pages 7 and 8), send the completed **BTE 1** form to the:

Back to Education Schemes
Department of Social Protection
Illness Benefit Section
Áras Mhic Dhiarmada
Store Street
Dublin 1

5. Rate of payment?

If you are a new entrant on a social welfare payment, other than an age related jobseekers payment, who qualifies for the Back to Education Allowance, the weekly rate payable will replace your existing payment. Where applicable, you may also qualify for increases in respect of a qualified adult and each qualified child.

New entrants under 26 years of age on an age related jobseekers payment, will receive a personal maximum rate of €160. In cases where means exist, they will be assessed against the €160 rate.

From 2016/17 academic year, new BTEA participants, who take up part-time work within the academic year will be assessed in accordance with your primary payment. Where a change of circumstances based on means arises (i.e. where your spouse/partner commences or loses work, increased income) your BTEA payment rate must be revised using the rules applicable to means on your qualifying payment.

You can get Back to Education Allowance direct to your account in a financial institution. This account must be a current or deposit savings account not a **mortgage** account.

Note

- **If you were previously getting an unemployment payment, the allowance is paid during the academic year only. It is not paid for the summer period between academic years.**
- **BTEA participants who cannot find a job during the summer may claim an unemployment payment, but only if they satisfy the usual qualifying conditions.**

Note continued

- **If you are going on to the next year of your course or moving to a higher qualification, you will get your BTEA from the start of the new academic year if you satisfy the rules for the primary payment, for example satisfy the means test for Jobseekers Allowance.**
- **If you finish one course, but intend moving to a higher qualification in the following academic year, you must re-apply for BTEA.**
- **It is not possible to receive the BTEA and a Higher Education Student Maintenance Grant at the same time. However, you may be eligible for the student services charge and/or tuition fees under the student grant scheme. Please check www.education.ie for details.**

Secondary benefits

You may keep any secondary benefits you already have such as Fuel Allowance, Diet Supplement, Rent Supplement or Mortgage Interest Supplement (Any increase in income may affect your Rent or Mortgage Interest Supplement or if your spouse or partner is in receipt of a means tested payment such as Jobseekers Allowance or Disability Allowance), under the Supplementary Welfare Allowance Scheme.

From 2016/17 academic year, new BTEA participants, who take up part-time work within the academic year will be assessed in accordance with their primary payment. Any income which you or your spouse, civil partner or cohabitant get, **is** assessable for Rent or Mortgage Interest Supplement and may affect fuel allowance if payable.

Contact the local office administering Supplementary Welfare Allowance to see how your Rent or Mortgage Interest Supplement may be affected.

6. Do you monitor the Allowance?

Yes, you must submit a letter from registrars/student records office/admissions office confirming that you have registered as a full-time day student. You will have to supply this information before you can get any payment. During the academic year, you may have to give confirmation that you are still taking part in the course.

BTEA is not an unemployment payment and participants are not required to 'sign on'.

The prior approval of the Department must always be sought by Jobseeker's Allowance and Jobseeker's Benefit recipients for participating on any course of education. Failure to seek this approval may result in an overpayment and possible prosecution.

Please note that if you cease your course of education or take up employment you should notify the Department immediately. You may also be liable to repay BTEA monies paid. If you re-apply for any social welfare payment, you must fulfil the qualifying conditions for the scheme. These include disclosure of all earnings and other income.

7. Can I appeal against a decision?

The Back to Education Allowance is a non-statutory scheme and, as such, if you disagree with a decision on your application you do not have a right to appeal to the Social Welfare Appeals Office.

However, you can request (in writing) a review of your case within 21 days, by another officer of the relevant local Intreo Centre, local Social Welfare Office or section, enclosing any new evidence in support of your request for a review.

B - Education, training and development courses

1. What are education, training and development courses?

A broad range of courses such as personal development or basic education to general training or getting specific job skills may be covered under Education, Training and Development courses. You must satisfy the scheme conditions and it must be clear that the course will enhance your employment prospects.

Courses must first be approved by a Case Officer (formerly facilitator).

You can arrange an appointment with a Case Officer by contacting your local Intreo Centre or your local Social Welfare Office.

Note

Before you start, always check with your local Intreo Centre or Social Welfare Office to find out if you are entitled to payment. The education, training development option is not available for persons opting to pursue full time courses.

2. How do I qualify?

If you are aged 21 or over, registered as unemployed and wish to attend a course you must be getting one of the following payments or signing for 'credits' for at least six months (156 days):

- Jobseeker's Allowance, or
- Jobseeker's Benefit

If you are aged 18 and under 21 years and have been out of formal education for two years or more you can qualify if you are getting one of the following payments or signing for 'credits' for six months:

- Jobseeker's Allowance,
or
- Jobseeker's Benefit

You must meet these conditions before you start the course.

Note

Unlike the Back to Education Allowance, time spent on VTOS, SOLAS, Community Employment Schemes, Rural Social Scheme, Back to Work Allowance, SOLAS Job Initiative or Job Assist do not count towards the six month qualifying period.

3. How do I apply?

You should apply when you have secured a place with a school or college or an approved training body, by filling in form **BTE1**. Return the completed **BTE 1** form to your Case Officer in your local Intreo Centre or your local Social Welfare Office.

4. Will I still get my social welfare payment?

You will continue to get your social welfare payment in the usual way, provided an entitlement to Jobseeker's payment still exists.

5. Will I still 'sign on' in the same way?

Your local Intreo Centre or your local Social Welfare Office may make special 'signing-on' arrangements where necessary.

6. How do I look for training?

Solas (formerly known as FÁS) is the National Training and Employment Authority. If you are looking for work or training, you should register with your local Solas office.

You can also get information about courses from:

- a Case Officer (you may contact them through your local Intreo Centre or your local Social Welfare Office),
- your local Education and Training Board (ETB) formerly known as VEC or school, or
- other places such as a public library.

Note

a) If you are taking an approved course of education, training or development you cannot get a training allowance while you claim Jobseeker's Allowance or Jobseeker's Benefit.

b) All income that you or your spouse, civil partner or cohabitant get is assessable for Rent or Mortgage Interest Supplement purposes. This means that any increase in income, for example by a training allowance or maintenance grant, will affect your Rent or Mortgage Interest Supplement.

Contact your Community Welfare Officer to see how extra income may affect your Rent or Mortgage Interest Supplement.

C - Part-time education courses

1. What are part-time education courses?

If you don't want to study full-time, you may often be able to take a part-time education course without it affecting your unemployment payment. Before you start, check with your local Intreo Centre or your local Social Welfare Office.

To continue to get the same amount of unemployment payment you must be able to show that the course does not reduce your availability for work. The local Intreo Centre or local Social Welfare Office must be satisfied that you are still actively looking for and willing to take up work and that the course is likely to improve your chances of getting a job.

Participation on a course of study does not extend the period for which Jobseeker's Benefit is payable.

2. How do I apply?

You should contact your local ETB, school or college, public library or Citizens Information Centre (CIC) for details of the courses you can take and advice on how to get a place on the course of your choice or log on to **www.qualifax.ie**.

When you have got a place on a course, apply by completing a **Part Time** application form **PTEO 1** available from **www.welfare.ie**.

D - Adult Basic Education

1. What is Adult Basic Education?

Adult Basic Education is a free and confidential service that is available in over 100 literacy schemes throughout Ireland. This service is there to meet your individual needs, whatever your level of education.

You can get either one-to-one or group tuition in a relaxed, informal atmosphere. Tutors, who are specially trained to teach adults, offer support and encouragement as you work at improving your level of skill in reading, writing, spelling and basic maths.

You can get tuition on a part-time basis, during the day or in the evenings, up to two or three times a week. Courses can lead to qualifications such as City and Guilds Certificate and FETAC accreditation, and can also prepare you to sit Junior Certificate exams in some subjects. Crèche facilities are available with some Literacy Schemes.

2. How do I apply?

If you would like to use the Adult Basic Education service, contact any of the following:

- the Adult Education Organiser, or Literacy Organiser, in your local ETB,
- NALA, the National Adult Literacy Agency, LoCall 1800 20 20 65 (from the Republic of Ireland only) or +353 1 4127900 (from Northern Ireland or overseas).
- Aontas, the National Association of Adult Education; telephone (01) 406 8220 or 406 8221.

E - Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS)

1. What is the Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme?

The Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme, which is run by the **Department of Education and Skills**, is operated through the ETBs. Sometimes courses can take as long as two years. They can lead to qualifications such as Junior Certificate, Leaving Certificate and Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC) certificates.

The main objectives of the scheme are:

- a) to give unemployed people education and training opportunities that will help them find a job, and
- b) to prepare people to go to paid employment or to further educational opportunities leading to paid employment.

VTOS courses are free; some assistance with books and course materials may be provided.

Some ETBs run sample courses to help you decide on the most appropriate VTOS course to meet your needs. Contact your local ETB for more information.

2. How do I qualify?

You can qualify for VTOS if you are:

- aged at least 21
- getting Jobseeker's Allowance or Benefit or signing for credits for at least six months

You can also qualify if you are getting, for **at least six months**:

- One-Parent Family Payment,
- Disability Allowance,
- Illness Benefit,
- Invalidity Pension,
- Blind Pension,
- Deserted Wife's Allowance,
- Deserted Wife's Benefit,
- Widow's, Widowers or Surviving Civil Partner's Contributory or Non-Contributory Pension,
- Prisoners Wife's Allowance.

If you are getting one of these payments you must be able to show that you have not been engaged in paid employment for at least 6 months before you start the course.

Time spent on SOLAS training courses, Community Employment, Job Initiative or time in prison or Youthreach may count towards the six month qualifying period.

If you qualify for 'credited contributions', they will continue to be awarded while you are on the course. If you are signing for unemployment credits only, you may qualify to take part in the scheme but you will **not** get an allowance.

If you are getting an unemployment payment and you are getting an increase for your spouse, civil partner or cohabitant, they may also participate in VTOS. However, your spouse, civil partner or cohabitant will not qualify for a payment in their own right while on VTOS but they may get a small lunch and travel allowance (paid by the ETB), where appropriate.

Note

If you are getting Illness Benefit you must get permission from the Department before you start a VTOS course.

3. How do I apply?

Apply to your local ETB for a place on VTOS.

Note

You must be getting one of the relevant Social Welfare payments for at least 6 months before you start the course.

Note

As there may be some changes to the conditions for getting VTOS or the type of VTOS courses on offer, please contact your local ETB for the most up-to-date information.

4. How is VTOS paid?

If you are a new entrant on a social welfare payment, other than an age related jobseekers payment, who qualifies for VTOS, the weekly rate payable will be equal to your previous payment that actually qualified you for participation in the scheme. Where applicable, you may also qualify for increases in respect of a qualified adult and each qualified child.

If you are a new entrant under 26 years of age on an age related jobseekers payment, a new personal maximum rate of €160 applies. In cases where means exist, they will be assessed against the €160 rate.

Note

You should contact this Department's Community Welfare Service at your local Intreo Centre or your local Office to see how your Rent or Mortgage Interest Supplement may be affected.

For further information on the Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme VTOS, contact your local ETB.

5. Do I still 'sign on' in the same way?

If you are registered as unemployed, you will not have to 'sign on' at your local Intreo Centre or your local Social Welfare Office while on the course.

Where can I get more information?

For information booklets, application forms and more information on social welfare services:

- Log on to **www.welfare.ie**.
- Text to **51909** (see details on Page 26).
- Telephone: (071) 919 3302
LoCall: 1890 66 22 44

If you are calling from outside the Republic of Ireland please call + 353 71 91 93302.

- Drop in to your local Citizens Information Centre, your local Intreo Centre or your local Social Welfare Office.

Note

The rates charged for using 1890 (LoCall) numbers may vary among different service providers.

To request forms, text the form code followed by your name and address to 51909 (from the Republic of Ireland only). Standard text rates apply.

For example, if you wanted to request the Carer's Allowance form, text FORM CARA MARY MURPHY 1 NEW STREET, OLD TOWN, CO. DONEGAL.

Social welfare payment or scheme	Form code
Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance	FORM BTSCFA
Carer's Allowance	FORM CARA
Carer's Benefit	FORM CARB
Child Benefit (Form CB1)	FORM CHILD
Disability Allowance	FORM DA
Domiciliary Care Allowance	FORM DCA
Family Income Supplement	FORM FIS
Free Travel	FORM TRAVEL
Fuel Allowance	FORM FUEL
Household Benefits	FORM HHB
Invalidity Pension	FORM INV
Living Alone Increase	FORM LAA
Maternity Benefit	FORM MAT
One Parent Family Payment	FORM OPFP
Respite Care Grant	FORM RCG
State Pension (Non-Contributory)	FORM SPNC
State Pension (Contributory)	FORM SPC
Widow(er)'s/Surviving Civil Partner's Contributory Pension	FORM WCP
Widow(er)'s/Surviving Civil Partner's Non-Contributory Pension	FORM WNCP