



**An Roinn Coimirce Sóisialaí
Department of Social Protection**

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**Ó Cuív: €169 million available for more flexible Back to Education
Allowance Scheme for 2010/11 academic year**

Minister for Social Protection, Éamon Ó Cuív TD has announced today (Sunday, 18 July 2010) that over €169 million is being provided by Government for his Department's Back to Education Allowance scheme (BTEA) for the 2010/11 academic year and he is "encouraging people who are on a social welfare payment who are considering returning to education to apply in good time." The Back to Education Allowance replaces an applicant's existing social welfare income and, in addition, an annual €500 cost of education allowance is payable. Minister Ó Cuív also said that his Department has introduced: "more flexibility in terms of qualifying for this second-chance educational opportunities scheme, with some practical changes to its qualifying conditions coming into effect from tomorrow Monday 19 July 2010."

Speaking today, Minister Ó Cuív said: "Since its introduction, the underlying objective of the Back to Education Allowance scheme has been to equip people on social welfare payments with qualifications that will enhance their employment prospects. This scheme enables people on welfare payments to participate in full-time education, who perhaps might otherwise not be able to do so."

In the 2009/2010 academic year over 20,800 people participated in the Back to Education Allowance scheme – an increase of over 79% on the number of participants in the previous academic year. "Over €169 million is being provided for the scheme for the 2010/11 academic year and we estimate that over 25,000 people will qualify within this year," said the Minister.



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One of the changes to the Back to Education Allowance coming into effect from tomorrow, includes altering the qualifying period to access the allowance from 12 months down to 9 months for those on a social welfare payment and who want to do a 3rd level course. Previously, a person who wished to take up a 3rd level course of education could do so after getting a relevant social welfare payment for 12 months, or 9 months, only if approved by a facilitator of the Department. From tomorrow, this period will be set at 9 months for all applicants who are attending 3rd level education. (A 2 year qualifying period continues to apply to participants coming from Illness Benefit).

As has been the practice, people awarded statutory redundancy may access the scheme immediately, provided an entitlement to a relevant social welfare payment is established prior to commencing an approved course of study.

The new changes to the scheme are as follows:

- Previously, (as stated above) a person who wished to take up a 3rd level course of education could do so after getting a relevant social welfare payment for 12 months, or 9 months, only if approved by a facilitator of the Department. From tomorrow, this period will be set at 9 months for all applicants who are attending 3rd level education (a 2 year qualifying period continues to apply to participants coming from Illness Benefit).
- Until now, a person could apply for BTEA in respect of a 3rd level course, providing they were commencing their course at year one. From tomorrow, this condition is being relaxed as follows:



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- A person will now be able to avail of BTEA where they previously did not complete their course (they may have 'dropped out') and are returning to the second or subsequent year of their 3rd level course.
- This also applies to people who are granted an exemption from a period of their 3rd level course because, for example, of their participation in a previous course. An example of this is where a person may previously have pursued a 3rd level course of education to higher certificate level. If they are planning to return to education to pursue their course to, say, degree level, they may avail of the BTEA for this.
- Where a person completed earlier year(s) of their 3rd level course on a part-time basis but is now getting a Jobseeker's payment, they may apply for BTEA to continue their course on a full-time basis.

The Back to Education Allowance replaces the applicant's existing social welfare income and, in addition, an annual €500 cost of education allowance is payable. Increases for qualified adult and child dependants are also payable, where appropriate. In addition, participants may continue to receive any secondary benefits to which they have been entitled. Jobseekers which avail of the scheme are exempt from the requirement to be available for work while participating in an approved course.

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Note for editors:

There are two education options available under the Back to Education Allowance scheme: 2nd level and 3rd level.



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To qualify for participation in the scheme, an applicant must be in receipt of a relevant social welfare payment and be at least 21 years of age prior to commencing an approved course of study. However, lone parents and recipients of jobseekers' payments can qualify at 18 years of age provided they are out of formal education for at least 2 years. People in receipt of certain illness payments can qualify at 18 years.

An applicant must be in receipt of a relevant social welfare payment for 3 months if pursuing a 2nd level course or (from Monday 19 July) 9 months if pursuing a 3rd level course. A 2 year qualifying period applies to participants coming from Illness Benefit.

How to apply:

Contact your local 2nd or 3rd level school or college to get details of the courses available. Schools or colleges will also advise you on how to obtain a place on the course of your choice.

When you are accepted on a course, you should notify the Department of Social Protection by downloading and completing the Back to Education Allowance application form which is available online at www.welfare.ie and from your Social Welfare Local Office. Further information is available at www.welfare.ie or www.citizensinformation.ie.

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