



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

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**Almost €200 million available for Back to Education  
Allowance Scheme for 2011/12 academic year - Burton**

The Minister for Social Protection, Joan Burton TD announced today (10<sup>th</sup> August 2011) that over €198 million is being provided for her Department's Back to Education Allowance scheme (BTEA) for the 2011/12 academic year.

The Back to Education Allowance is a scheme which encourages and facilitates people on certain social welfare payments, such as jobseekers, lone parents and disability, to improve their skills and qualifications and, therefore, their prospects of returning to the active work force.

Participants in the BTEA scheme are paid a weekly allowance equivalent to the maximum standard rate of the social welfare payment they were receiving prior to starting an approved course of study. The course of study pursued must be a second or third level course of study in a recognised institution on a full time basis. In addition to the weekly payment, participants are entitled to an annual cost of education allowance of €500.

Minister Burton said: "Where it applies, people on the Back to Education Allowance scheme may also get an increase in respect of a qualified adult and each qualified child. An annual Cost of Education Allowance of €500.00 is also paid at the start of each academic year."

In the 2010/2011 academic year, just over 25,000 people participated in the Back to Education Allowance scheme which represented an increase in the region of 20% on the previous academic year. Almost €200 million is being provided for the scheme for the 2011/12 academic year and it is expected that the number of participants will increase again for the forthcoming academic year.

While a qualifying period on a social welfare payment of 3 months applies for those pursuing a second level course and 9 months for a person pursuing a third level course, a person who has received statutory redundancy may apply immediately provided an underlying entitlement to a social welfare payment exists.

Improvement in accessibility to the scheme introduced in July 2010 means that in certain circumstances a person may avail of BTEA to resume studies in a second or subsequent year of a third level course. This also applies to people who are granted an exemption from a period of their third level course. A person who completed earlier year(s) of his/her third level course on a part-



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time basis and now satisfies the scheme conditions, may apply for BTEA to continue the course on a full-time basis.

Minister Burton concluded: "The road to quality employment starts with self-improvement and development. The Back to Education Allowance is one of a range of supports from my Department to assist people getting social welfare payments to access work experience, education and training. These supports include the Back to Work Enterprise Allowance (which encourages people getting certain social welfare payments to become self-employed), Tús (the Community Work Placement Initiative) and JobBridge (the National Internship Scheme). The Back to Education Allowance scheme will help people on welfare payments to participate in full-time education and this will enhance their employment prospects."

**ENDS**

**Note for editors:**

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

To qualify for participation in the scheme, an applicant must be in receipt of a relevant social welfare payment (for example, Jobseeker's Benefit, Jobseeker's Allowance or One Parent Family Payment) and be at least 21 years of age prior to commencing an approved course of study. However, people getting an illness or disability-related payment or a person who is out of formal education for 2 years may qualify at 18 years of age.

An applicant must be in receipt of a relevant social welfare payment for 3 months if pursuing a 2<sup>nd</sup> level course or 9 months if pursuing a 3<sup>rd</sup> level course. A 2 year qualifying period applies to participants who are getting Illness Benefit.

A person who has been awarded statutory redundancy can have immediate access to the Back to Education Allowance scheme but they must be entitled to a qualifying social welfare payment before starting their course.

**How to apply:**

Contact your local 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> 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.



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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](http://www.welfare.ie) and from your Social Welfare Local Office.

Further information and the detailed qualifying conditions for the Back to Education Allowance are available at [www.welfare.ie](http://www.welfare.ie) or [www.citizensinformation.ie](http://www.citizensinformation.ie).

**PRESS RELEASE ENDS**