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Qualifying conditions for our schemes change from time to time. Always check with your local Social Welfare Office or with Information Services to see if qualifying conditions have changed (see page 26 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 booklet 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)**. Or, you may continue to get your current social welfare payment if you wish to participate in other **education, training or development courses**.

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 do or take approved second or third level courses of education. BTEA is **not** an unemployment payment. Participants get a standard rate of payment which is not means tested. If you are signing for unemployment credits or submitting medical certificates for illness credits, you may apply to take part in the scheme.

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, and
- lead to a certificate recognised by the Department of Education and Skills, or
- lead to a certificate approved by the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC), or

- lead to a certificate approved by the Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC).

Courses include the Junior Certificate, Leaving Certificate, Post Leaving Certificate (PLC), City and Guilds Certificate 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 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
 - Higher Education Grant Scheme,
 - Vocational Education Committee's Scholarship Scheme,**or**
 - Third Level Maintenance Grant Scheme for Trainees,**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 any Higher Diploma (H. Dip.) qualification in any discipline,
- or**
- a postgraduate Diploma in Education (Primary or Secondary teaching).

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.

One way to qualify for BTEA is if you have claimed Illness Benefit for two years or more.

Another way to qualify is if you:

- are aged at least 21, **or**
- are 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**

- Jobseeker's Allowance or Benefit,
- Farm Assist,
- One-Parent Family Payment,
- Deserted Wife's Allowance or Benefit,
- Widow's or Widower's Contributory or Non-Contributory Pension,
- Prisoner's Wife's Allowance, or
- Carer's Allowance.

You can also qualify for BTEA if you:

- are aged at least 18, **or**
- are 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**
- Blind Pension,
- Disability Allowance,
- Invalidity Pension, or
- Incapacity Supplement (based on a life Disablement Pension).

Note

For Jobseeker's claims, the duration of claims are counted in number of days of unemployment. However, Sundays are not counted as a day of unemployment.

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 prior to commencing an approved course of study.

Note

- **Time spent on BTEA, VTOS, Full-time FÁS/Fáilte Ireland Training course, Youthreach, FIT, Community Employment Schemes, Social Economy Programme, Rural Social Scheme, Back to Work Enterprise Scheme, Short Term Enterprise Scheme, FÁS Job Initiative or Job Assist may count towards the qualifying period. You may go directly from one of the above schemes to Back to Education Allowance provided you were getting one of the qualifying social welfare payments listed on pages 6 and 7, before you started the scheme. You must start your approved course of study within four weeks of leaving the scheme. Otherwise you must be getting a qualifying social welfare payment immediately before starting an approved course of study.**

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.**
- **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.**
- **Time spent in prison can be taken, or count towards the qualifying period for BTEA, provided an underlying entitlement to a relevant social welfare payment is established prior to starting an approved course of education.**
- **If you qualify for ‘credited contributions’, 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) **Did not complete your course and are returning to the second or subsequent year of your course.**
 - b) **Are exempt from part of your course because of a qualification you received in a previous course. For example, you have a higher certificate in a course that you now wish to pursue to degree level.**
 - c) **Completed some of your course as a part-time student, but are now getting a jobseeker’s payment and will continue your course on a full-time basis.**

For current information on the schemes qualifying conditions, please contact 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

If you are the qualified adult of a person who can claim BTEA, you can qualify for BTEA in your own right. You will get an allowance equal to the maximum standard personal rate of the relevant social welfare payment your spouse or partner is getting, provided you are a qualified adult for the required qualifying period immediately before starting the course. You will also get the annual Cost of Education Allowance. Both partners can get BTEA while taking an approved course.

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 also advise you on how to get a place on the course of your choice. Remember, only you can get a place on the course of your choice. We cannot help you to do this.

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

Applications for BTEA must be made prior to commencement of an approved course but late applications will be accepted if received within 30 days of the commencement date of the course, provided there are reasonable grounds for doing so.

The social welfare payment you get indicates where you should send the completed form **BTE 1**.

- If you are getting:
 - One-Parent Family Payment,
 - Deserted Wife's Benefit or Allowance,
 - Widow's or Widower's 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 Social Welfare Office

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

Back to Education Schemes

Department of Social Protection
 Social Welfare Services
 Government Buildings
 Shannon Lodge
 Carrick-on-Shannon
 Co. Leitrim.

5. How is the Allowance paid?

Back to Education Allowance is paid at a personal rate. If you are currently getting a reduced rate of payment (because you have means assessed against you, or you only qualify for a reduced rate of benefit), you qualify for a higher weekly rate of BTEA. The allowance includes increases for a Qualified Adult and Qualified Children, where applicable. The rate of payment is affected only by changes in the Budget each year and changes in qualified adult or qualified child status.

The allowance is paid **instead** of the social welfare payment that entitled you to take part in the BTEA scheme.

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.
- If you are going on to the next year of your course or moving to a higher qualification, you will get your BTEA again from the start of the new academic year regardless of whether you got an unemployment payment for the summer.
- If you finish one course, but intend moving to a higher qualification in the following academic year, you must re-apply for BTEA. The allowance is not paid between courses.
- Your BTEA payment may affect any Maintenance Grant - please check 'www.education.ie' for details.

6. What is the Cost of Education Allowance?

If you qualify for the Back to Education Allowance you may also be entitled to an annual allowance towards the cost of your studies. This allowance is paid once we receive written confirmation from your school or college of your registration on your course, at the start of each academic year and is currently €500.

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), under the Supplementary Welfare Allowance Scheme.

Earnings from part-time employment do not affect the basic BTEA payment. However, any income which you or your spouse or partner get, **is** assessable for Rent or Mortgage Interest Supplement.

Contact your Community Welfare Officer to see how your Rent or Mortgage Interest Supplement may be affected.

7. Do you monitor the Allowance?

Yes, you must submit a letter from registrars/admissions office confirming that you have registered as a full-time day student or started the course and that you attend it. 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 you should notify the Department immediately. 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.

8. 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 by the officer in charge of the relevant 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. It must be clear that the course will enhance your employment prospects.

Courses must:

- first be approved by a facilitator. You can arrange an appointment with a facilitator by contacting your local Social Welfare Office
- be wholly or partially funded by a State Agency or Area Partnership Company

- or
- be provided by a voluntary or community group to help develop the person's employment prospects.

Note

Before you start, always check with your local Social Welfare Office to find out if your payment will change.

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 to 20 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, FÁS, Community Employment Schemes, Rural Social Scheme, Back to Work Allowance, FÁS 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 **BTE 1**. Return the completed **BTE 1** form to 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.

If you are getting Jobseeker's Allowance or Benefit or One-Parent Family Payment and take part in a course that is organised and initiated by a facilitator you may qualify for a payment of €32.00 per week towards out of pocket expenses such as those for meals or travel.

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

Maybe not. Your local Social Welfare Office may make special 'signing-on' arrangements where necessary to let you take the classes of your chosen course.

6. How do I look for training?

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

You can also get information about courses from:

- a facilitator (you may contact them through your local Social Welfare Office),

- your local 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. However, you may be allowed to get a small amount for out-of-pocket expenses (such as meal and travel costs) that result from your taking part in the course.**
- b) All income that you or your spouse or partner 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 Social Welfare Office to see if your payment will be affected.

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. You must satisfy your local Social Welfare Office 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.

2. How do I apply?

You should contact your local VEC, 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.

When you have got a place on a course, apply by completing application form **BTE 1**.

Return the completed form **BTE 1** to your local Social Welfare Office.

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 VEC,
- NALA, the National Adult Literacy Agency, telephone (01) 8554332,
- 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 VECs. 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; books and materials may be provided free of charge.

Some VECs run sample courses to help you decide on the most appropriate VTOS course to meet your needs. Contact your local VEC 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 or Widowers Non-Contributory Pension,
- Widow's or Widowers Contributory Pension, or
- Prisoners Wife's Allowance.

Note

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

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 FÁS 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.

Note

You must be getting one of the relevant Social Welfare payments immediately before you start the course.

If you are getting an unemployment payment and you are getting an increase for your spouse or partner, they may also participate in VTOS. However, your spouse or partner 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 VEC), where appropriate.

3. How do I apply?

Apply to your local VEC for a place on VTOS.

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 VEC for the most up-to-date information.

Note

You should contact your Community Welfare Officer to see how your Rent or Mortgage Interest Supplement may be affected.

4. How is VTOS paid?

VTOS is paid at a standard weekly rate. So, if you are currently getting a reduced rate of payment (because you have means assessed against you), you may qualify for a higher rate on VTOS.

If you are transferring from an **unemployment payment to VTOS**, you will be paid a training allowance similar to the highest rate of Jobseeker's Benefit, including any appropriate increases due for a qualified adult and qualified children. You will normally be paid by cheque or Paypath by the VEC each week.

If you are getting a qualifying payment other than Jobseeker's Allowance or Benefit, you will continue to get the highest rate of your current social welfare payment.

If you were getting one of the payments (or a combination of the payments) for 12 months or more immediately before you started the VTOS course, you can get an extra weekly training bonus of €31.80.

You cannot count time spent on a Youthreach or Senior Traveller Training Programme towards getting this training bonus. However, you can get this bonus if you are moving straight from a Youthreach or Senior Traveller Training Programme to VTOS and you have been getting one of the payments for 12 months immediately before starting VTOS.

The VTOS allowance is not means-tested, so you may work without it affecting your payment. You can get the allowance over the summer if you intend going back to the course in the autumn. You can also get the allowance during Christmas and Easter holidays.

You may still claim any secondary benefits you may already have such as, Fuel Allowance and Diet Supplement. Contact your Community Welfare Officer to see how extra income may affect your Rent or Mortgage Interest Supplement.

While on VTOS, you may get a small lunch allowance and may qualify for a travel allowance depending on how far you have to travel to the VTOS centre. You may also get some childcare support.

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

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 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).
- LoCall Information Line at **1890 66 22 44** (from the Republic of Ireland only) or **+353 71 91 93313** (from Northern Ireland or overseas).
- Drop in to your local Social Welfare Office or Citizens Information Centre.

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 Bereavement Grant form, text form bg 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
Bereavement Grant	FORM BG
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 (Transition/Contributory)	FORM SPC
Widow(er)'s Contributory Pension	FORM WCP
Widow(er)'s Non-Contributory Pension	FORM WNCP