



Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed

March 2011

# Education options for unemployed people

This leaflet outlines many of the education options available to unemployed people




## Introduction

This leaflet outlines a range of education options. You may be able to take up some of these options and still retain a Social Welfare payment.

## Key Providers

**Vocational Education Committees (VECs)** are statutory education bodies that administer secondary and adult education by providing a wide range of services. VECs also administer maintenance grants and funding for third-level education. There are 33 VECs located around the country. Your local VEC can be found on the website: [www.vec.ie](http://www.vec.ie)

**Colleges/universities** provide third-level education and thousands of courses for students including places for unemployed people through initiatives such as part-time undergraduate and post graduate schemes.

 [www.qualifax.ie](http://www.qualifax.ie) provides a comprehensive list of courses and colleges on their website.


## VTOS

**Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS)** is the main second-level adult education programme which allows unemployed people to keep their Social Welfare payment and return to education. VTOS is a full-time programme (30 hours per week) and run by the VEC.

The main courses available are Junior/Leaving Certificate Courses, Foundation Courses, Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) Courses and Special Skills training. The range and content of courses vary. Contact your local VEC for more details. There are 5,000 annual places available nationwide on VTOS.

### To be eligible you must be:

- Aged 21 or over **AND**
- In receipt of Jobseeker's Benefit(JB)/Jobseeker's Allowance (JA) for 6 months or signing on for credits for 6 months.

 You may also qualify for VTOS if you are in receipt of other types of Social Welfare payments, including if you are in receipt of an adult dependant payment.

## PAYMENT ON VTOS

- You will receive the equivalent of your Social Welfare Payment – €188.00 for a single person.
- You will receive a training bonus of €20 if you have been in receipt of JB / JA or certain other Social Welfare payments for 12 months or more.
- You will not receive a payment if you are signing on for PRSI 'credits' only.
- If you work part-time or casually during your studies, this will not affect your payment.
- Travel and meal allowances are paid at FÁS rates.
- People on VTOS may qualify for some financial assistance towards costs e.g. childcare.
- There are no course fees.

 If on JB/JA you will no longer have to 'sign-on'.

## APPLYING FOR VTOS

- Contact your LES, Library, VEC or [www.vtos.ie](http://www.vtos.ie)
- Each VEC has a VTOS Co-ordinator who can assist you with information on suitable courses.

## BTEA

**Back to Education Allowance (BTEA)** is a scheme which allows unemployed people to keep a Social Welfare payment and return to approved full-time education through either a second level (e.g. Junior/ Leaving Certificate / FETAC Level 6), third level (Diploma/ Degree/Higher Diploma / HETAC) or a third-level post graduate option. You must apply and be approved for BTEA before you take up the course and also be in receipt of your Social Welfare payment for at least 3 months (2nd Level option) or 9 months (3rd Level option) immediately before starting the course.

 Private institution courses are not covered.

## QUALIFYING FOR BTEA

### Second Level Option

To qualify for the Second Level option you must be:

- 21 years of age or over and in receipt of a Jobseeker's Payment for at least 3 months **OR**
- Aged 18-20 and out of formal education for at least 2 years and in receipt of a Jobseeker's Payment for at least 3 months

### Third Level Option

To qualify for the Third Level option you must be:

- 21 years of age or over and be in receipt of a Jobseeker's Payment for at least 9 months **or**
- Aged 18-20 and out of formal education for 2 years and be in receipt of JB/JA for at least 9 months
- Aged 24 or over (3rd Level Post-graduate course)

**i** If you are in receipt of other types of Social Welfare payments you may also qualify for BTEA

**i** You may also qualify for BTEA in other circumstances e.g. where a person previously did not complete their course and are returning to the second or subsequent year of their 3rd Level course. For further details contact the INOU.

### BTEA and Secondary Benefits

If you qualify for the BTEA, you may keep any secondary benefits you already have including:

- Fuel Allowance
- Rent or Mortgage Interest Supplement

**i** You may access the BTEA immediately if you:

- Have worked for 2 years or more **and**
- Have been made statutorily redundant **and**
- Have an entitlement to a Jobseeker's payment.

**h** You can apply for BTEA more than once depending on the type and level of the approved course you are looking to do.

### APPLYING FOR BTEA

- When you receive a letter offering you a college place, fill out the BTE1 form and return it to your local Social Welfare Office (SWO). The form is available at [www.welfare.ie](http://www.welfare.ie) or from your local SWO.
- Contact the colleges directly to get course information. Area Based Partnerships, local VECs, and your Local Employment Services (LES) will be willing to help you.
- Most applications are made through the Central Applications Office (CAO). Visit: [www.cao.ie](http://www.cao.ie) for further information.

### PAYMENT ON BTEA

- You will be entitled to the full rate of BTEA regardless of your current Social Welfare Payment. This allowance replaces your Social Welfare Payment
- The BTEA will only be paid for a 9-month academic year, for those on JB/JA. It is **NOT** payable for the 3-month summer period between academic years unless on work experience. BTEA participants who are not employed during the summer may be entitled to claim JB/JA.
- BTEA will include any increases for a qualified adult and qualified children. A qualified adult is a spouse or partner who does not receive a Social Welfare payment in their own right.
- You will also receive an annual €500 education allowance covering the cost of course materials.
- BTEA is payable in the same way as your current Social Welfare payment.
- If you work part-time or casually, this will not affect your BTEA payment as long as you maintain your full-time student status but it could affect your secondary benefits.

You will not receive a Student Maintenance Grant while on BTEA. However you must apply for the grant to qualify for the Student's Services Charge and Tuition Fees (up to €2,000).

**h** You will not have to 'sign-on' while on the BTEA

### Part-time Education Option

If you are a jobseeker, you can take on part-time study and retain your Jobseeker's payment. Although this option is not part of any return-to-education programme or course.

- You will need to be genuinely seeking work
- If you are offered a place on a course, you will need a letter from the college or school stating that the course is part-time.

Make sure you bring this letter with you when you go to your local Social Welfare office.

## Back to College Initiative

The Back to College Initiative is a scheme which allows people receiving a Jobseeker's Payment for 3 months an opportunity to go back to college. Particular emphasis is placed on people under 35. Three quarters of the 11,000 college places are aimed at those with qualifications below Leaving Certificate. There are no tuition fees and the person keeps their Jobseeker's Payment subject to the approval of the Department of Social Protection. A full list of college places is available at [www.qualifax.ie](http://www.qualifax.ie)

## Grants and Financial Assistance

There is a wide range of funding available for people looking to return to education. These include VEC Scholarships and the Higher Education Grant Scheme. You may also be able to take up education, training or development courses not normally covered by the BTEA by contacting the Facilitator at your local Social Welfare Office.

**h** Check out locally for further information about grants including banks and student unions etc.

## Useful Websites

[www.inou.ie](http://www.inou.ie)

[www.welfare.ie](http://www.welfare.ie)

[www.hea.ie](http://www.hea.ie)

[www.qualifax.ie](http://www.qualifax.ie)

[www.nightcourses.ie](http://www.nightcourses.ie)

[www.learning.ie](http://www.learning.ie)

[www.cao.ie](http://www.cao.ie)

[www.fetac.ie](http://www.fetac.ie)

[www.vec.ie](http://www.vec.ie)

[www.fas.ie](http://www.fas.ie)

[www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie)

[www.vtos.ie](http://www.vtos.ie)

[www.studentfinance.ie](http://www.studentfinance.ie)

[www.gotocollege.ie](http://www.gotocollege.ie)

[www.educationireland.ie](http://www.educationireland.ie)

[www.aontas.com](http://www.aontas.com)

[www.hetac.ie](http://www.hetac.ie)

[www.bluebrick.ie](http://www.bluebrick.ie)

[www.citizensinformation.ie](http://www.citizensinformation.ie)



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For further information contact the INOU.

**01 856 0088**



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