



CHAPTER 6

Training and Education Options

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Introduction

Thousands of adults have successfully returned to education and training to learn new skills, develop existing abilities, and improve their chances of getting the job they want.

In this chapter we identify the range of training and education opportunities available to unemployed people and explain how you can take up education or training while keeping your payment.

In addition, we look at what you can do and where you can go to find help or guidance with literacy issues.

Training

This section outlines 3 distinct types of training options. These are:

- Industry related training
- Training for people with disabilities
- Training for young people

The content, style and certification of training courses will differ from course to course. Weigh up your options to make sure you choose the course that suits you best. Your life experience and work experience may help you get on to certain courses. If you are not ready for specific job-related training, then a Return-to-Work Course may be the best option for you.

Further Education and Training

SOLAS is Ireland's National Further Education and Training Authority. Education and Training Boards (ETBs) are the main providers of state-funded Further Education and Training (FET). While SOLAS funds most of the FET programmes offered by ETBs, it does not provide FET directly.

FET is available to anyone over 16 who wants to learn new skills or improve existing ones. This can help you get the right job, move on to higher education, or achieve personal goals. You can access FET courses through ETB guidance, information and recruitment services, by self-referral or through referrals from Intreo/DSP

For more information about FET and the opportunities available online visit www.ThisIsFET.ie and www.fetchcourses.ie.

A. Industry Related Training

Skills to Complete

In response to the need for upskilling and reskilling for people who have been displaced from their jobs SOLAS has put in place a new activation initiative-Skills to Compete.

Skills to Compete combines and ramps up three strands of further education and training (FET) provision run by the Education and Training Boards (ETBs), linked to tailored advice and support:

- transversal skills development to help employability.
- building the digital capabilities now required for almost every job.
- specific Level 4-6 courses targeting growth sectors and occupations.

Skills to Compete will be delivered through ETBs and work in tandem with Intreo offices, Regional Skills Fora, and Enterprise Ireland to effectively target individuals in need and prospective employers.

Specific Skills Training Courses

The Education & Training Boards (ETBs) run a substantial number and range of training courses through its national network of training centres.

These courses are run in the daytime (full time) and evenings (3 hours a week over 10 weeks). They are aimed at people who wish to acquire new skills or up-date existing skills. Courses available include business administration, childcare, healthcare, information technology skills.

The duration of full-time courses can vary, but typically last for 6 months. To apply, register with your local Department of Social Protection Employment Service office / Intreo Centre where you will receive a guidance interview to determine the most relevant training available for you.



Daytime courses are prioritised for people who are unemployed. The evening courses are open to everyone. For persons not unemployed there is a fee.

Training Allowances

Training Allowances for Full-Time ETB Courses

If you join a full-time course with an Education and Training Board (ETB), you might get a training allowance instead of your Social Welfare payments. Here's how it works for different benefits:

- **Jobseeker's Payments:** If you start an approved full-time ETB course, your Jobseeker's payment will stop, and you will get a training allowance equal to your Jobseeker's payment. If you're signing for Credits, you can join a course, but you will not get a training allowance.
- **Disability Allowance or Blind Person's Pension:** These payments will be paused, and you will receive a training allowance of the same amount. You will keep any extra benefits like your medical card or travel pass.
- **Illness Benefit or Invalidity Pension:** You will keep your Social Welfare payments. You will not get a training allowance or training bonus. You need approval from the Department of Social Protection (DSP) before starting full-time training.

- **One-Parent Family Payment (OFP):** You will keep your OFP while on an approved SOLAS or ETB course. You can choose to keep your OFP and apply for a student grant or switch to the Back to Education Allowance (BTEA) when you return to education.

People with disabilities registered with the Department of Social Protection (DSP) will be prioritised for training.

How to apply

To join an ETB training course with a training allowance, you need to register and apply at your local Department of Social Protection Employment Services office or Intreo Centre. An officer there can help you understand the training options available to you.

Traineeship Programme

Traineeship is a short-structured training programme which combines learning in an education and training setting and in the workplace. Traineeships in the further education and training sector in Ireland provide occupation-specific training delivered by Education and Training Boards (ETBs), working in partnership with employers.

Traineeships have been part of the Irish education and training system for over twenty years and are supported by the National Training Fund and the European Social Fund. Their primary aim is to provide learning in partnership with employers, improve employment outcomes for participants and increase retention and productivity within industry. Periodic reviews of the outcomes of work-based programmes have underlined the consistently strong employment outcomes from traineeship.

Traineeships have the following features:

- Are free to access and open to potential participants of all ages and backgrounds including school leavers, older learners, and those in, or seeking employment.
- They respond to an identified industry skills need.
- Lead to an award at levels 4-6 on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ), or equivalent.
- Are between 6-20 months in duration.
- Have at least 30% of learning on-the-job.
- Combine transversal and technical skills development.
- Are designed for flexible delivery - online, face-to-face, blended learning.
- Provide open access to prospective trainees, unemployed people may be eligible for income support.

There are over 75 programmes available nationally in a range of industries with new Traineeships being developed on an ongoing basis by ETBs. Examples include engineering, Information and Communications Technology (ICT), hospitality, construction, retail, business and logistics, sports and leisure, fashion and beauty, and finance.

People who are unemployed and wish, following engagement with their Intreo Employment Personal Adviser, to access traineeship to upskill for employment may be eligible for a training allowance or income support. Further information on traineeships can be found from Education and Training Boards (<https://www.etbi.ie/etbs/directory-of-etbs/>) and in the Guide to Traineeship in Ireland on <https://www.etbi.ie/traineeship/>.

Apprenticeships

Apprenticeship is a work-based learning opportunity, which formally combines and alternates learning in the workplace with learning in an education and training institution. An apprenticeship prepares participants for a specific occupation and leads to an internationally recognized qualification from level 5 to level 10 on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ).

Apprenticeship training is required to be substantial in depth and duration, and the apprentice must be employed under an approved Contract of Apprenticeship for the duration of training.

For a programme to be classified as an apprenticeship, it should be of no less than two years' duration. The structure of the programme should provide for more than 50% workplace-based learning. Off-the-job training is delivered in a number of different ways according to the apprenticeship. This ranges from remote or online learning, to one day per week in an education institution, or periods of off-the-job training in an education and training institution at further or higher education level.

There are 73 national apprenticeship programmes. Of these, 25 are craft apprenticeships which follow a standard seven phase programme over a minimum of 208 weeks. The remaining apprenticeships range from two to five years in duration with varying off-the-job training arrangements, depending on the apprenticeship.

A key strength of the apprenticeship model, as highlighted in the recent Action Plan for Apprenticeship 2021-2025, is that it is a demand-led approach to meeting workforce and skills needs. For example, in the case of craft apprenticeship, the number of places is determined by employers, with off-the-job training provided to all registered apprentices.

The bulk of registrations on these apprenticeships happen in January and in September / October of each year but this can vary from programme to programme.

Employers are supported to engage with apprenticeship in a few ways.

- Apprentices employed under one of the 25 craft apprenticeships are paid a training allowance by their local ETB in lieu of wages during their three periods of off-the-job training (Phases 2, 4 and 6 of their apprenticeship).
- Employers of apprentices under the consortia apprenticeships are eligible for an annual grant payment of €2,000 per apprentice to offset some of the costs inherent in employing an apprentice, including the requirement to continue to pay the apprentices during off-the-job training.
- A bursary is also payable to employers of female apprentices in certain craft apprenticeships. Full details are available from your local ETB or www.apprenticeship.ie.

Apprentice vacancies are advertised through www.apprenticeship.ie, can be accessed through the local ETB or through the relevant apprenticeship consortium (where relevant).

The statutory minimum age at which the employment of an apprentice may commence is 16 years of age. The minimum educational requirements are:

1. Grade D in five subjects in the Department of Education Junior Certificate Examination or an approved equivalent, Or
2. The successful completion of an approved Pre-Apprenticeship course, Or
3. Three years' work experience gained over sixteen years of age in a relevant designated industrial activity as SOLAS shall deem acceptable

An apprentice must obtain employment with an employer approved by SOLAS. In certain crafts, apprenticeship applicants are also required to pass a colour vision test approved by SOLAS.

Additional criteria above the statutory minimum may be set by employers or the relevant apprenticeship consortium. These depend on the level of the apprenticeship qualification with, for example, a requirement to hold a 2.1 Honours degree in the case of the Principal Engineer apprenticeship. Some employers / apprenticeships also specify a minimum age of 18. For further information visit the www.apprenticeship.ie website.

Apprenticeship Fees

Apprentices undertaking training in ETBs do not pay fees. In common with all other learners at higher education level, apprentices are required to pay the student contribution charge where their off-the-job training takes place in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) for the period during which they attend the institution – this includes phase 4 and 6 of a craft apprenticeship.

How to Apply

You should contact the Apprenticeship section of your local ETB, www.etb.ie or visit www.apprenticeship.ie for more information.

Access to Apprenticeship Initiative

The Access to Apprenticeship Initiative supports the transition of young people

(16-24) from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds into an apprenticeship scheme. Eligible participants can access a €3,000 grant to support living costs including travel, accommodation and materials. It is planned to deliver the programme at the Technological University of the Shannon (TUS) Moylish and Athlone campi and Technological University Dublin (TU Dublin). It is further planned to expand the initiative to all ETBS as well as Munster Technological University (MTU) and Atlantic Technological University (ATU) Galway.

The Traveller Apprenticeship Incentivisation Programme (TAIP)

The Traveller Apprenticeship Incentivisation Programme aims to increase uptake of and retention on apprenticeships within the Irish Traveller community. The Programme offers a bursary of €3,000 to successful applicants and separately a €2,000 grant to eligible employers. The Programme went live in April 2023 and is administered by the Irish Traveller Movement (ITM).

Apprenticeships – Care Leavers

The Department has become increasingly aware of the barriers to accessing apprenticeships for young people leaving state care, who may have had disruptions to their education at primary and secondary level. €100,000 is being made available for Care Leavers undertaking apprenticeships and supported by TUSLA Education Support Service (TESS).

Fáilte Ireland

Fáilte Ireland is the National Tourism Development Authority to guide and promote the evolution of tourism as a leading indigenous component of the Irish economy. Fáilte Ireland provide a range of training courses in the hotel and hospitality sector as first steps on the road to working in an exciting and flexible industry. The courses are aimed at people who wish to enter the workforce on either a full/part-time basis in the hotel, catering, and tourism industry. Visit the training section on the www.failteireland.ie website.

B. Training for People with Disabilities

ETB education and training courses are open to everyone, including people with disabilities, if they meet the eligibility criteria. By law, FET providers must offer reasonable accommodations to learners with disabilities based on their individual needs. These accommodations can include personal assistants, readers, scribes, note takers, sign language interpreters, one-on-one tuition, and assistive technologies.

For students with disabilities in Post-Leaving Certificate (PLC) programmes, there is funding available from the "Fund for Students with Disabilities" (FSD). This fund helps further and higher education colleges provide services and supports to both full-time and part-time students with disabilities.

While many ETB training courses are open to people with disabilities, there are also special training providers funded by SOLAS that offer courses just for people

with disabilities. These special courses are designed to give extra support, like longer training times and adapted facilities, to help meet their needs.

On a course, delivered by either a Specialist Training Provider or an ETB Training Centre, please note the following:

- If you receive Disability Allowance or Blind Person's Pension, you will get a training allowance equal to your Social Welfare payment while you attend the course. You will also get a training bonus.
- If you receive Illness Benefit or Invalidity Pension, you need to get an exemption from the Department of Social Protection (DSP) before starting the training. Once you have this exemption, you will keep your Social Welfare payments, including any increases you get for your dependents. You do not get the training allowance or the training bonus.
- If you cannot continue the training for any reason, the Department of Social Protection will restore your Social Welfare payment. For more information, contact your local Intreo Centre.

C. Training for Young People

National Youthreach Programme

Youthreach is a programme for young people who leave school early. It offers education, training, and work experience for two years to help early school leavers get qualifications and find jobs. It's for young people aged 15 to 21 who don't have any qualifications or job training. The programme helps build self-esteem, skills, and knowledge.

Youthreach is available free across the country in over 100 centres run by 16 ETBs and more than 30 Community Training Centres (CTCs). Participants might get a training allowance instead of Social Welfare payments, and there may be extra allowances for meals, travel, and accommodation.

Payments to Youthreach participants

Participants may be eligible to be paid the basic training allowance, a lunch allowance and may also qualify for a travel allowance.

If you are over 18 years of age and you are currently getting a Social Welfare payment of more than the basic training allowance, you will continue to get the higher amount while you are on Youthreach as long as you are eligible.

If you were getting a reduced age-related Jobseeker's Allowance (JA) before starting Youthreach any means that were deducted from your JA will also be deducted from your training allowance. This also applies to people getting a reduced age-related basic Supplementary Welfare Allowance (SWA).

You can take up part-time work while on Youthreach without it affecting your training allowance.

Local Training Initiatives (LTIs)

Local Training Initiatives (LTIs) are created by Education and Training Boards (ETBs) to help local communities with important projects. These projects also

give participants work experience and training. Participants get a standard training allowance, and the training leads to Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) certification. Most projects are full-time (35 hours a week), but some are part-time, and the length of the projects can vary. To join, participants must be unemployed and over 16 years old.

Education

The rest of this chapter explores a range of options available if you are considering returning to education. These options can allow you to keep your existing Social Welfare payments and entitlements while studying.

Back to Education Allowance (BTEA)

The BTEA scheme which encompasses the Back to Education Allowance, Part-Time Education Options and Education, Training and Development Options, is a second chance education scheme for persons in receipt of certain qualifying social welfare payments. Under the programme, income support is provided to allow participants undertake courses at further and higher education level to improve their education, subject to meeting qualifying conditions.

Post Leaving Certificate Programme (PLC)

The Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) programme provides an integrated general education, vocational training and work experience programme for young people who have completed their Leaving Certificate, adults returning to education and the unemployed who are seeking to upskill to enhance their prospects of gaining employment. Its purpose is to enhance their prospects of gaining employment or progressing to further or higher education. From September 2024, charges for participating on a PLC programme will be removed. Maintenance grant assistance is available under the Student Grant Scheme to eligible students pursuing an approved PLC course in an approved PLC centre. Post Leaving Certificate courses are full-time one-year programmes of integrated education, training and work experience provided in schools and colleges outside the third level sector. Applicants should contact their local Education and Training Board (ETB), offering PLC courses.

eCollege

www.eCollege.ie is a leading learning platform that delivers online training courses in business, project management, information technology, graphic design, web design, digital marketing, software development and basic computer literacy. These courses are all industry recognised programmes, accessed on a continuous intake basis, and enable flexible learning for unemployed learners, workers in sectors vulnerable to automation with skills levels below NFQ level 5, and those over 50 years of age.

Adult Educational Guidance Service (AEGS)

Further information and guidance on FET options is available in each Education and Training Board (ETB), through their dedicated Adult Education Guidance Service. This confidential service is free of charge, open to all and

provides guidance to learners and potential learners before, during and after their training. Guidance is also provided to apprentices and trainees through the training centre network, and to participants of Youthreach and Community Training Centre programmes through the Guidance, Counselling and Psychological Service and the Advocacy Service. Anyone interested in participating in a FET programme should contact the Adult Education Guidance Service in their local ETB for details of FET options and supports that may be available to them.

Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS)

VTOS offers second chance education and training to unemployed individuals. It is funded by the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation, and Science (DFHERIS) through SOLAS and managed by 16 Education and Training Boards (ETBs).

- Be 21 years or older.
- Be receiving one of the following for at least 6 months: Jobseeker's Benefit, Jobseeker's Pay-Related Benefit, Jobseeker's Allowance, Illness Benefit (with approval), One-Parent Family Payment, Invalidity Pension, or Disability Allowance.
- For Jobseeker's Pay-Related Benefit (JPRB) be in receipt of payment for at least 6 months.
- Be signing for PRSI 'Credits' for at least 6 months.
- Be a dependent spouse, civil partner, or cohabitant of an eligible person.
- Have received Carer's Allowance and stopped caring duties.
- Have received statutory redundancy but not been on a qualifying payment for the required period.
- Time on approved training courses, Community Employment schemes, Job Initiative, Youthreach programs, or time in prison can count towards the six-month period, but you must be receiving a relevant Social Welfare payment before starting VTOS.

Additional Eligible Payments: You can also join if you are 21 or older and have not worked for at least six months, and are receiving:

- One-Parent Family Payment.
- Blind Person's Pension.
- Deserted Wife's Allowance / Benefit.
- Widow / Widower's Contributory / Non-Contributory Pension
- Prisoner's Wife's Allowance.

Studying on VTOS: VTOS programmes focus on education and vocational training to help you:

- Improve your education level
- Gain certification through the National Framework of Qualifications
- Develop workplace skills
- Progress to employment or further education/training

Payments: If you receive Jobseeker's Allowance, Jobseeker's Benefit or Jobseeker's Pay-Related Benefit, you will get a weekly training allowance equal to the maximum rate of these benefits.

VTOS Allowance and Work: If you return for a second year, you will continue to receive your VTOS allowance during the summer months.

VTOS Allowance and Dependents: To add a dependent to your payment, notify the Department of Social Protection (DSP), which will inform the ETB of any changes required to your payment.

Other Social Welfare Payments: If you receive other eligible Social Welfare payments, you will continue to receive them as usual. If you are on a reduced means-tested payment, it will be increased to the maximum amount while you are on VTOS. You will also keep your secondary Social Welfare benefits.

How to Apply: Contact your local Education and Training Board (ETB), AEGI, or local library. VTOS courses usually start in September/October, but you may be able to start at other times.

Back to Education Initiative (BTEI)

The Back to Education Initiative provides for an expansion of flexible part-time options across Further Education. Its priority is to increase the participation of young people and adults, with less than upper second level education, in a range of part-time accredited learning opportunities leading to awards on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ), to facilitate their access, transfer and progression to other education or employment pathways. It offers Post Leaving Certificate, VTOS and Youthreach programmes on a part-time basis. Courses are free for any adult with a less than upper second level education.

Courses offered can include subjects in the Junior or Leaving Certificate and a wide range of modules such as Communications, Personal Development, Business, Computing, Childcare, Arts and Craft, Tourism, Catering, Sport and Leisure etc. For information contact the Adult Education Officer, Community Education Facilitator or Adult Guidance Information Officer at your local ETB.

If you are getting a Social Welfare payment, you may keep your payment and participate in BTEI, if you continue to satisfy the conditions attached to your payment. If you are getting a jobseeker's payment you will need to apply for the Part-Time Education Option.

Adult Literacy

The Adult Literacy scheme is funded by the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research Innovation and Science (DFHERIS) through SOLAS and delivered by local Education and Training Boards (ETB) nationwide. It focuses on those with low levels of literacy skills and includes English language tuition for adult migrants and basic education services. Adult literacy now extends to basic education, numeracy, personal development and digital skills.

Community Education

Community Education refers to education and learning, generally outside the formal education sector, with the aims of enhancing learning, empowerment and contributing to civic society. It is firmly community-based, with local groups taking responsibility for organising courses and deciding on programme-content.

Back to Education Allowance (BTEA)

The Department of Social Protection administers the Back to Education Allowance. This scheme allows you to keep your Social Welfare payment and return to approved full-time courses at further and higher education levels. The approved full time education course must lead to a higher qualification on the National Framework Qualifications (NFQ) other than that already held.

BTEA – Assessment of Income from part-time Employment

BTEA participants who take up work during the academic year will be assessed under the rules (including means assessment) that apply to their primary payment – the payment they qualified for BTEA from. BTEA participants who qualify from Jobseeker's Pay Related Benefit (JPRB) cannot engage in any part-time employment or self-employment.

BTEA – Means Assessment:

John is a single person, aged 26, currently on the BTEA, having previously been on Jobseeker's Allowance of €244. His rate of payment on BTEA is €244.

He has been offered 15 hours' work over 5 days @ €12.00 per hour = €180.00. If he takes the job his BTEA will be affected as follows:

Jobseeker's Allowance Means Test as applies to BTEA rate:

- €20 disregard per day at a maximum of 3 days = €60
- The balance is then assessed at 60%
- €180.00 (wages) - €60 = €120.00 assessed at 60% = €72.00

Assessable Means of €72.00 assessed against BTEA of €244

New Rate of BTEA payable:

- John's BTEA payment will be reduced by €72.00 per week
- John's BTEA payment will be reduced from €244 to €172 per week

BTEA – Redundancy

If you are awarded statutory redundancy under Irish legislation, you can have immediate access to the BTEA (or within one year of the award of the statutory redundancy). You must be entitled to a qualifying Social Welfare payment before starting the course.

BTEA – Further Level Education

You can attend a Further Level education course at any community, comprehensive, secondary, or vocational school, with which the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research Innovation and Science (DFHERIS) has a funding relationship. The course must be full-time and lead to a certificate recognised by the DFHERIS or approved by QQI as laid out under the Irish National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ).

BTEA – Higher Level Education

You can attend a Higher-Level Education course of education at any university, third level college or institution, provided that the course is a full-time day course of study and is QQI approved. BTEA is only permitted for courses commencing in Ireland and Northern Ireland.

BTEA – Postgraduate option

If you already have an undergraduate third-level qualification (i.e., a degree), your application for a BTEA while pursuing post-graduate education will only be considered if you are doing a

- Higher Diploma in any discipline
- Professional Diploma in Education (Primary or Post Primary teaching only).
- Master's degree (QQI Level 9) based solely on life experience where the customer holds no other third level qualification.

(Only Postgraduate courses in Ireland are eligible for the BTEA). BTEA is not awarded to a person who already holds a postgraduate qualification

BTEA – Payment on the BTEA

The Back to Education Allowance will only be paid for the duration of the academic year for those in receipt of Jobseeker's payments. It is NOT payable for the 3-month summer period between academic years. BTEA participants who are unable to find employment during the summer period may be entitled to claim a jobseeker's payment. They will be required to satisfy the normal qualifying conditions.

BTEA – Payment – JPRB

Depending at what point in the eligible period for Jobseeker's Pay-Related Benefit a person swaps to BTEA, the BTEA rate will be paid at the rate applicable at that stage of the JPRB claim. Time spent on Back to Education Allowance (BTEA) will be treated as if Jobseeker's Pay-Related Benefit was paid.

BTEA – Other Payments

People getting a Back to Education Allowance cannot work full-time and are

not eligible for Community Employment, Tús, Rural Social Scheme, any other FET or Fáilte Ireland training programmes, Part-time Job Incentive Scheme or any other employment or training scheme or programme operated by the National Learning Network. People getting a Back to Education Allowance are not eligible for Working Family Payment (WFP).

BTEA – Monitoring Arrangements

You must provide the Department of Social Protection with confirmation of your registration as a full-time student, commencement date and details of the course. This document/email is only acceptable from the Registrars, Admissions office, or Student Records Office. You must supply this information to the DSP before payment on the BTEA can begin. During the academic year, you may be asked to provide confirmation that you are still taking part in the course.

How to qualify for the Back to Education Allowance?

You will be eligible for the Back to Education Allowance if you are:

- A certain age,
- In receipt of a qualifying social protection payment for a specified period of time,
- Starting the first year of a course,
- Taking a course requiring full-time attendance for the complete academic year which leads to a recognised qualification in an accepted college
- Advancing in the level of education that you currently hold.

BTEA – Further Level Education

- Aged 21 or over and be in receipt of the following payments for at least 3 months:

— Jobseeker’s Allowance	— Jobseeker’s Benefit
— Jobseeker’s Benefit Credits only	— Farm & Fish Assist
— Jobseeker’s Benefit (Self-Employed)	— Prisoner’s Wife’s Allowance
— Jobseeker’s Transition Payment	— Deserted Wife’s Payment
— Jobseeker’s Pay-Related Benefit	
— Widow’s/Widower’s Contributory or Non-Contributory pension	
- Aged 18 or over, and be in receipt of one of the following payments, for at least 3 months:

— One-Parent Family Payment	— Blind Person’s Pension
— Carer’s Allowance	— Disability Allowance
— Invalidity Pension	— Incapacity Supplement

or

- Aged between 18-21, and out of formal education for two years, and receiving one of the following payments for at least 3 months:

— Jobseeker’s Benefit	— Jobseeker’s Allowance
— Jobseeker’s Benefit – Credits only	— Farm & Fish Assist
— Jobseeker’s Benefit (Self-Employed)	— Jobseeker’s Pay-Related Benefit

or

- Aged 18 or over and in receipt of Illness Benefit for 2 years or more.

BTEA – Higher Level Education *

- Aged 21 or over and be in receipt of the following payments for at least 9 months; Jobseeker's Allowance, Jobseeker's Benefit, Jobseeker's Pay-Related Benefit, Jobseeker's Benefit Credits only, Jobseeker's Benefit (Self-Employed), Jobseeker's Transitional Payment, Farm & Fish Assist, Deserted Wife's Allowance / Benefit, Widow's/ Widower's Contributory, Non-Contributory pension, Prisoners Wife's Allowance; or
- Aged 18 or over and getting one of the following payments for at least 9 months; One-Parent Family Payment, Carer's Allowance, Blind Pension, Disability Allowance, Invalidity Pension or Incapacity Supplement; or
- Aged between 18 and 20 and out of formal education for two years and getting one of the following payments for at least 9 months; Jobseeker's Benefit, Jobseeker's Pay-Related Benefit, Jobseeker's Allowance, Farm and Fish Assist, Jobseeker's Benefit (Self-Employed) or Jobseeker's Benefit Credits only.
- Aged 18 or over and in receipt of Illness Benefit for 2 years or more.

** BTEA is not awarded to a person who already holds a post-graduate qualification*

BTEA – Returning to the Back to Education Allowance (Higher Level only)

Applicants must be starting the first year of an approved full-time course in order to qualify for the BTEA. In certain circumstances, this condition may be waived where there are mitigating circumstances.

- A person can now avail of the BTEA where they previously did not complete their course – they may have 'dropped out', due to unemployment, redundancy or mitigating circumstances, 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 based on a previous course or on life experience.
- Where a person completed earlier year(s) of their 3rd level course on a part-time basis but are now getting a Jobseeker's payment, they may apply for BTEA to continue their course on a full-time basis.

For further information on the Back to Education Allowance, visit the Department of Social Protection website at (www.gov.ie/welfare)

BTEA – Other Qualifying Periods

Periods spent on Education and Training Board (ETB) courses, SOLAS, Training Courses, Youthreach, CE, Back to Work Allowance schemes, Rural Social Scheme, WPEP, Part Time Job Incentive Scheme, TÚS or Job Initiative may count towards the qualifying period to qualify for the BTEA. You may access the BTEA

Scheme if you establish an entitlement to another qualifying payment first.

Periods spent in receipt of Supplementary Welfare Allowance (SWA), Direct Provision or periods spent in prison may count towards the qualifying period for BTEA, but you must establish an entitlement to a Social Welfare payment before you commence your course of study.

BTEA – How to apply for a place

- Contact the colleges directly to get information about courses. The Area Based Partnerships (see Chapter 7), the local Education and Training Board (ETB) will be willing to help you do this and can help with general information. In addition, they may help you with financial assistance towards the application fees.
- Most applications are made through the Central Applications Office (CAO). Some colleges may also ask you to make a separate application to them directly. Ask if this is necessary.
- The college may ask you to attend an interview to assess your knowledge of the subjects you wish to study. During this interview they might ask about your motivation and commitment to staying in college for the duration of the course.
- When you receive a letter offering you a place at college, fill out 'Form BTE1' available at your local Intreo Centre or download at www.gov.ie/welfare

BTEA–How to apply for a student grant

The Student Grant Scheme is administered by the centralised national grant awarding authority Student Universal Support Ireland (SUSI), a business unit of CDETB (City of Dublin Education and Training Board). Grant applications are submitted online via SUSI's website www.susi.ie.

A student cannot hold both a student maintenance grant and BTEA simultaneously as this is considered a duplication of payments. However, students in receipt of BTEA may apply to SUSI to have their student contribution and any fees not covered under the Free Fees Initiative paid on their behalf if they satisfy eligibility under the Student Grant Scheme.

– New Applicants

Following an initial assessment of your application, if eligible, you will receive by post, notification of provisional grant approval and a personalised list of the supporting documents you will need to return to complete your application. Completed documentary evidence packs (photocopies of the documents, not originals) should be returned as soon as possible in the envelope provided to you.

When you return all the necessary supporting documents, SUSI will process your application to award stage, subject to confirmation of your acceptance

on an approved course. When you confirm acceptance of a place on an approved course (usually late August/early September), your grant will be awarded. You should notify the fees/registration office in your college of your grant eligibility.

If a student wishes to discuss their circumstances with SUSI, they can make enquiries regarding eligibility for grant assistance by contacting the SUSI Support Desk by calling 0818 888 777 or email: support@susi.ie. Information in relation to student grant assistance is also available from SUSI's website: www.susi.ie

In terms of SUSI grant support, qualifying students can receive both maintenance and/or fee grant support for eligible full-time courses and fee grant support only for eligible part-time courses.

Detailed information on financial supports for students can be found on the website: www.susi.ie

Student Grants Available to Persons in Direct Provision Centres Attending Courses in PLC Colleges and Third-level institutions

The Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation & Science operates the International Protection Student Scheme for persons in the international protection process or at the leave to remain (but not deportation order) stage. The scheme provides supports to qualifying students which are like those available in the statutory based Student Grant Scheme administered by SUSI.

To qualify for the International Protection Student Scheme, prospective students must meet several criteria, including a requirement to:

- Meet the definition of a protection applicant or a person at leave to remain stage (other than those at the deportation order stage).
- have been continuously resident in the State for a continuous period of 3 years or more and is a protection applicant or a person at leave to remain
- stage for a continuous period of 3 years or more as at the day before the date of commencement of the course and have not had a deportation order issued against them; *and*
- be attending an approved Post Leaving Certificate, an approved undergraduate course or an approved post graduate course in the State.

Further information is available on <https://www.gov.ie/en/service/e786a-student-grant-scheme-for-asylum-seekers/>

BTEA – Grants and Funds available for Mature Students.

- If you wish to enter or return to third-level education and you are over 23 years of age, Irish third-level colleges have places on their courses for mature students. You will have to consider the costs of fees and maintenance depending on whether you are going to do a full-time or a part-time course.

If you are leaving work to study full-time on an undergraduate course, you may be eligible for a third-level maintenance and / or fee grant.

- If you do not qualify for a student maintenance grant and you are doing a full-time undergraduate course, you may be eligible for free fees. If you are applying for an undergraduate course and have already completed an undergraduate course, you are not eligible for either a student maintenance grant or free fees.
- Students may apply for the Student Part-Time Fee Scheme for Specified Undergraduate Courses (introduced for the first time in 2024/25), if you plan to study on one of the eligible part-time undergraduate courses listed in the associated Regulations. A person in receipt of a jobseeker's payment is advised to engage with their local Intreo Centre if they plan to take up one of these part-time courses.
- If you do have to pay fees you may be able to get tax relief at the standard rate.

People who are getting Back to Education Allowance, and those on Post-Leaving Certificate courses who are getting VTOS allowances, will not be eligible for a student maintenance grant, but may be eligible for the Free Fees Scheme or a fee grant under the Student Grant Scheme.

Help with Fees and Maintenance

The main schemes that apply to mature students (generally persons over 23 years of age) are:

- The Student Grant Scheme, which is available to eligible students who plan to study full time on approved third-level courses (of at least two years' duration), including mature students.
- A Student Part-Time Fee Scheme for Specified Undergraduate Courses has been introduced for eligible students who plan to study on one of the listed part-time undergraduate courses listed in the Student Part Time Fee Regulations for Specified Undergraduate Courses.

Postgraduate students

Student Grant Scheme:

Postgraduate students, studying full time may be eligible for a maintenance and/or fee contribution grant under the Student Grant Scheme. Further details of both schemes are available on www.susi.ie

Other Funds

There are several other funds available to support you in your return to third-level education. These include:

— Fund for students with disabilities

The Fund for Students with Disabilities (FSD) is the principal funding source

for students with disabilities in further and higher education. The purpose of the Fund is to provide funding to higher and further education institutions, to assist them in offering supports and services to eligible full and part-time students with disabilities, so that they can participate on an equal basis with their peers. Eligible students can receive assistance from the FSD from further education level 5 up to doctoral level 10, and it can be applied for during any year of study. Funding can be used to provide supports and accommodations in any of the following broad categories:

- Assistive technology equipment and software (including student training).
- Non-medical helpers (e.g. personal assistants, notetakers).
- Academic / learning support.
- Deaf supports (e.g. sign language interpreters, Speed Test)
- Transport support.

— Students Assistance Fund

The SAF is allocated to higher education institutions (HEIs). It provides financial assistance to students experiencing financial difficulties while attending third level education. Students can be assisted towards costs such as food, utility bills, rent, childcare costs, transport costs, medical costs, and books / class materials. This list is not exhaustive. Funding is not available to assist students with the costs of tuition fees, registration fees, student loans or any costs that are borne by the HEI.

Students on full or part-time courses leading to a higher education award (NQF level 6-10) in the universities, institutes of technology and other approved colleges can apply for the SAF.

— Where to Apply

- Contact the Access Office or the Admissions Officer at the college
- For the Special fund for People with Disabilities apply to the Access Office or Disabilities Support Officer at the college of your choice.

FIT (Fastrack to Information Technology)

FIT is an industry-led initiative which works in close collaboration with government departments and national education and training agencies, local development organisations and a host of community-based organisations. Its primary partners in education and training include SOLAS, ETBs (Formerly VEC), Third Level Institutions, Léargas, Leader Companies, Rapid Coordinators, Local Authorities and Employment Pacts.

FIT programmes are carefully tailored to give jobseekers new marketable skills to compete for sustainable jobs in the emerging knowledge economy. FIT courses are accessible, and results are achievable even for people who may not have taken part in formal education for many years. To find out more

information on the wide range of courses on offer, to check the eligibility criteria and to enrol on a FIT course visit: www.fit.ie

Skillnet Ireland

Skillnet Ireland is an enterprise-led body funded from the National Training Fund (NTF) to provide companies with new opportunities to develop relevant, effective solutions to their training and development needs.

Skills Connect offers free training programmes, including enterprise-led job placements, to jobseekers looking for new jobs and careers. Skills Connect is delivered in close partnership with employers and can help individuals develop the skills to explore a career in a sector with greater employment potential. Over 20 Skillnet Business Networks deliver Skills Connect programmes.

For further information contact Skillnet Ireland on: (01) 207 9630. Website: www.skillnetireland.ie

Education, Training and Development Courses

You may be able to take up short-term full-time education, training or development courses not normally covered by the BTEA. This can be discussed with a Job Coach / Employment Personal Adviser at your local Intreo Centre.

Persons who qualify under the ET&D option continue to be paid Jobseeker's Allowance, Jobseeker's Benefit or Jobseeker's Pay-Related Benefit. To qualify a person must, immediately prior to commencing an approved course be:

- 21 years of age; or 18-20 and out of formal education for 2 years
- In receipt of Jobseeker's Allowance or Jobseeker's Benefit / Jobseeker's Pay-Related Benefit payment for at least 6 months (156 days).
- A Job Coach / Employment Personal Advisor must approve the course.
- You must satisfy a Job Coach / Employment Personal Advisor that the course will specifically improve your chance of getting employment.

A broad range of basic courses may be approved, e.g. personal development courses, basic education, literacy classes and general training courses.

Part-time Education Options

If you are a Jobseeker, you can take on part-time study and you may be able to retain your Jobseeker's payment. Although this option is not part of any return-to-education programme or course, it is your 'right' as an unemployed person to pursue training, re-training, or education, which may improve your ability to seek and find work, while you continue to look for work. To be eligible you will still need to be Genuinely Seeking Work (see Chapter 1).

To avail of this option, you will need to complete the form PTEO (Part-Time

Education Option) with details of your planned education and submit it to your local Intreo Centre. You should do this prior to starting your course to ensure that no problems arise.

A Student Part Time Fee Scheme for Specified Undergraduate Courses has been introduced for eligible students who plan to study on one of the eligible part-time undergraduate courses in the Student Part Time Fee Regulations. Further details are available on www.susi.ie/funding-for-part-time-undergraduate-courses

Springboard+ Initiative

If you are unemployed, you may want to continue your education or take part in a training course to develop your skills and improve your chances of getting back to work.

Springboard+, which incorporates the ICT Skills Conversion programme, is an initiative to help the unemployed, and previously self-employed people and returners (homemakers) remain as close as possible to the labour market. Since 2018, those in employment are also eligible to apply and pay 10% of the cost of the course fee. A full list of approved Springboard+ and HCI courses together with the eligibility criteria are available on the Springboard+ website HEA-Springboard+ (www.springboardcourses.ie)

How to apply

Applications for the Springboard+ programme can only be made online through the dedicated information and applications website: www.springboardcourses.ie). Potential applicants can also contact the Springboard+ Guidance Helpline on 1800 303523 for further information.

If you are getting a Social Welfare payment, you should notify your local Intreo Centre and check what further steps (if any) you need to take.

Springboard+ Qualification Eligibility

Returners (Formerly referred to as Homemakers)

- May apply to all courses free of charge, if they meet the nationality/visa requirement and residency criteria. Course specific criteria may also apply.

People in employment

- If they meet the nationality / visa requirement and residency criteria.
- Please note that a 10% course fee contribution for Level 7, 8, and 9 courses is applicable for employed participants. Payable directly to the provider.
- Level 6 courses are free to all participants.

The unemployed or formerly self-employed

- May apply to all courses free of charge, Unemployed applicants in receipt of a qualifying DSP payment should contact their local office to complete an application to retain their payment prior to starting the course.

Springboard+ Qualification

At the time of starting a Springboard+ course, you must either be getting a qualifying Social Welfare payment or be in one of the other eligible categories listed below. The qualifying Social Welfare payments are:

Jobseeker's Benefit, Jobseeker's Allowance, Jobseeker's Benefit Self-Employed, Jobseeker's Benefit Credits ONLY, Jobseeker's Transition Payment, Deserted Wife's Allowance, Jobseeker's Pay-Related Benefit, Disability Allowance, Qualified Adults of Working Age *, Carer's Allowance, Farm Assist/Fish Assist, Blind Persons Pension, Prisoners Wife's Allowance, One-Parent Family, Widow's, Widower's or Surviving Civil Partner's Contributory or Non-Contributory Pension.

** Subject to conditions. Contact your local Intreo Centre for more information*

A qualifying period of 9 months is required for full-time Springboard third level courses.

People participating in the Community Employment Scheme, the Rural Social Scheme, Tús or in receipt of the Back to Work Enterprise Allowance or the Short-Term Enterprise Allowance may apply for Springboard+ and, with the approval of a Department of Social Protection Employment Personal Advisor, take up a Springboard+ course.

You can also apply for a course if you were formerly self-employed but are now unemployed and actively seeking work, even if you are currently in receipt of a Social Welfare payment.

Returners: Returners are eligible to apply for a free Springboard+ course. This refers to people who are not in receipt of a payment from the DSP but who have been out of the work environment for a number of years.

Springboard+ ICT Skills Conversion Programme

Places have been made available on Higher Diploma Level 8 ICT Conversion Programmes. The programmes are targeted at Jobseekers who have the capacity and underlying aptitude, as well as an honours degree in a cognate discipline, to undergo an intensive programme of study and work experience to acquire honours degree level ICT programming skills. Specific eligibility criteria are available at: www.springboardcourses.ie.

A person who is in receipt of Jobseeker's Benefit / Jobseeker's Pay-Related Benefit or Jobseeker's Allowance for 9 months may qualify to retain their income support while participating on a one-year, Springboard+ course. Eligible participants will transfer to a bespoke version of the Back to Education Allowance (BTEA).