

Your Education Options

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

I'd like to return to education. What are my options?

You have a range of options at both second level and third level. In some cases, you will get an allowance or be able to keep your existing social welfare payment.

Where can I find out about these options?

Vocational Education Committees (VECs) administer adult education schemes at both second level and third level. The VECs also administer maintenance grants and funding for third level education. For more information, visit www.ivea.ie.

The main schemes are:

- VTOS
- BTEA
- Springboard

VTOS – Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme

VTOS is the main second-level adult education programme. It can lead to a Junior Certificate, Leaving Certificate or FETAC qualification. VTOS lets you keep your social welfare payment and return to education. VTOS programmes are full-time and are run by the VECs.

To qualify for VTOS you must be:

- aged 21 or over; **and**
- getting either Jobseeker's Benefit or Jobseeker's Allowance for 6 months or signing on for credits for 6 months. Your spouse or partner may also qualify for VTOS.

What payment will I get on VTOS?

- You will get the same as your social welfare payment.
- You will not get a payment if you are signing on for 'credits' only.
- You will get a training bonus of €20 if you have been getting a Jobseeker's payment or certain other social welfare payments for 1 year or more.
- You can work part-time or casually during your studies and this will not affect your payment.
- You will get travel and meal allowances.
- You may qualify for free childcare places under the Childcare Employment and Training Support (CETS) scheme.
- There are no course fees.

Do I have to 'sign on' while I am on VTOS?

If you are on a Jobseeker's payment, you will not have to 'sign on'.

How do I apply for VTOS?

Contact your Local Employment Service (LES), library or VEC.

BTEA – Back to Education Allowance

The BTEA scheme lets you keep your social welfare payment and return to approved full-time education. This may be at:

- second level – for example, Junior or Leaving Certificate **or**
- third level – for example, a diploma, or degree.

The scheme does not cover courses at private schools or colleges.

Do I qualify for BTEA?

This depends on whether you are thinking about a second level or a third level course.

To qualify for the second-level option, you must be:

- 21 years of age or over and have been getting Jobseeker's Benefit or Jobseeker's Allowance for at least 3 months; **or**
- 18 to 20 years of age, out of formal education for at least 2 years and getting a Jobseeker's payment for at least 3 months;

To qualify for the 3rd Level option you must be:

- 21 years of age or over and have been getting a Jobseeker's payment for at least 9 months; **or**
- 18 to 20 years of age, out of formal education for at least 2 years and getting a Jobseeker's payment for at least 9 months.

If you are applying for a third level post graduate course you must be at least 24 years of age.

You may also qualify for BTEA if you have been getting certain social welfare payments such as the One-Parent Family payment. You must be getting a qualifying social welfare payment **immediately** before you start the course.

Can I keep my other benefits?

If you qualify for BTEA, you may keep any other benefits you already have such as the fuel allowance or the rent or mortgage interest supplement.

I have just been made redundant. Do I qualify for BTEA?

You may access the BTEA scheme immediately if:

- you have been made statutorily redundant; and
- you are entitled to a Jobseeker's payment

BTEA – Back to Education Allowance

How do I apply for BTEA?

Before you apply, you will need to get a letter from the college offering you a place on the course.

When you get this letter, fill out Form BTEI and return it along with the letter to your local social welfare office. You can get this form from www.welfare.ie or from your local social welfare office.

What payment will I get on BTEA?

- You will get the full rate of BTEA regardless of your current social welfare payment.
- The BTEA payment will only be paid for the 9-month course year. It will not be paid for the 3 summer months between course years unless you are on work experience. If you are not employed during the summer, you may be able to claim Jobseeker's Benefit or Jobseeker's Allowance.
- Your BTEA payment will include any increases for a qualified adult and qualified children. A qualified adult is a spouse or partner who does not get a social welfare payment in their own right.
- You will get €300 each year to cover course material costs.

If you work part-time or do some casual work, this will not affect your BTEA payment as long as you remain a full-time student. However, it could affect your secondary benefits such as rent or mortgage interest supplement.

Can I apply for a student grant as well?

The Student Grants Scheme covers maintenance grants and fee grants. You cannot get both the BTEA and the maintenance grant. However, you may qualify for a fee grant to help towards the cost of your student contribution.

How do I apply for a student grant?

You must submit a student grant application form. For more information, contact your local VEC or visit: www.studentfinance.ie

Do I still have to 'sign on' while on BTEA?

No, you do not have to 'sign-on' while on BTEA.

Springboard

This programme provides places on part-time higher education courses such as the green economy and financial services. The courses range from certificate to master's degree levels.

Springboard is aimed at people who are unemployed but who previously worked in sectors such as construction and manufacturing.

Do I qualify for Springboard?

To qualify for Springboard, you must:

- get either Jobseeker's Benefit, Jobseeker's Allowance or One-Parent Family Payment; **or**
- be signing for social insurance credits; **and**
- have a history of employment; **and**
- be actively seeking work.

You may also qualify if you:

- are on short-time working and getting a Jobseeker's payment; **or**
- were previously self-employed.

Do I have to pay for the course?

- You do not have to pay course fees or charges while you are unemployed.
- If you take up full-time employment, your fees will still be paid for the year you find work.

Will I still get my social welfare payment?

- Yes, you will continue to get your existing social welfare payment while taking part in Springboard.

How do I apply for Springboard?

You can only apply online at www.springboardcourses.ie

Can I do courses that are not part of VTOS, BTEA or Springboard?

You may be able to take up certain courses under the education, training or development option.

Do I qualify for this option?

To qualify for the education, training and development option and keep your Jobseeker's payment you must be:

- 21 years of age or over; **or**
- 18 to 20 years of age and out of formal education for at least 2 years

and

- getting a Jobseeker's payment for 6 months

An employment services officer at your local social welfare office must approve the course.

You must prove to the employment services officer that the course will improve your chances of getting work.

How do I apply?

- Fill out the BTEI form and return it to your local Social Welfare Office.

For more information talk to an INOU information officer.

Can I get any other financial assistance?

You may be able to get further funding if you are looking to return to education. This includes VEC scholarships, the Higher Education Grants Scheme and student bank loans.

Where can I get more information?

You can find a list of courses and colleges at www.qualifax.ie.

INO SERVICES FINDER

Information on over 1,000 community and state-based services

www.inou.ie



To contact the INOU call: 01 856 0088