

Mature Students: Back To Education Allowance

The **Back To Education Allowance** or **BTEA** can be paid to those who have been in receipt of social welfare payments and wish to return to full time education. Typically a claimant would have to be in receipt of social welfare payments for **12 consecutive months** or more prior to returning to college, but there can be exceptions to this rule, usually in cases involving **statutory redundancy**. These Frequently Asked Questions should answer any queries you might have regarding the Back To Education Allowance.

Frequently Asked Questions 2008/09

Q1: What is the Back To Education Allowance (BTEA)? A: 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 and Family Affairs. 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' only, you may qualify to take part in the scheme but you will not get a payment.

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What kind of courses qualify for the BTEA?

A: You can attend any third level course as long as it:

1. is a full-time day course AND
2. is recognised by the Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC) OR
3. is approved by the Department of Education and Science for the:
 1. Higher Education Grant Scheme OR
 2. Vocational Education Committee's Scholarship Scheme OR
 3. Third Level Maintenance Grant Scheme for Trainees

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Q3: Can I get the BTEA if I already have a third level qualification?

A: If you already hold a third level undergraduate qualification, you can only apply for the BTEA to study an **equivalent** undergraduate course in **exceptional circumstances**. However, if you hold (e.g.) a Level 7 (Diploma or Ordinary Level Degree) qualification and wish to pursue a higher qualification, e.g. a Level 8 (Honours Degree) program, you may qualify. You should contact your local Social Welfare Office to see if you are eligible.

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Q4: Can I get the BTEA for a postgraduate course?

A: The postgraduate option of the BTEA is **only available** for the following:

1. a postgraduate course of study that leads to a Higher Diploma (H.Dip) or Postgraduate Diploma in Education OR
2. a Graduate Diploma in Education (Primary Teaching).

You will not get the BTEA if you already hold a postgraduate qualification.

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Q5: How do I qualify for the BTEA?

A: 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 personal situation.

One way to qualify for BTEA is if you have claimed Illness Benefit for two years or more (from September 2007).

Another way to qualify is if you:

1. are aged at least 21 OR
2. are aged at least 24 if you want to do postgraduate study AND
3. getting one of the following for at least 12 months (312 days):
(*see Q7 for 9 month exception)
 1. Jobseeker's Allowance or Benefit (formerly known as Unemployment Assistance or Benefit)
OR
 2. Farm Assist OR
 3. One Parent Family Payment OR
 4. Deserted Wife's Allowance or Benefit OR
 5. Widow's or Widower's Contributory or Non-Contributory Pension OR
 6. Prisoner's Wife's Allowance OR
 7. Carer's Allowance (having ceased caring responsibilities on a permanent or temporary basis)

You can also qualify for BTEA if you:

1. are aged 18 or over, AND
2. getting one of the following social welfare payments for at least 12 months (312 days):
 1. Blind Pension OR
 2. Disability Allowance OR
 3. Invalidity Pension OR
 4. Incapacity Supplement (formerly known as Unemployability Supplement) (based on a life Disablement Pension)

You can also qualify for BTEA if you:

1. are aged between 18 and 20 years AND
2. are out of formal education for two years AND
3. getting one of the following social welfare payments for at least 12 months (312 days):
 1. Jobseeker's Allowance or Jobseeker's Benefit OR
 2. One-Parent Family Payment

Finally, with effect from September 2007, if you have been awarded **Statutory Redundancy**, you may access the BTEA Scheme, provided you first **establish an entitlement to a Social Welfare payment**.

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Q6: What is the qualifying period for the BTEA and what counts towards it?

A: Typically, you have to be in receipt of social welfare payments for 12 months or 312 days.

Time spent on BTEA , VTOS , FÁS/Fáilte Ireland Training course, Youthreach, FIT, Community Employment Schemes, Social Economy Programme, Rural Social Scheme, Back to Work 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 above 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.

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 the commencement of the course of education.

Time spent on Illness Benefit (formerly known as Disability 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 as, or count towards the qualifying period for BTEA, provided an underlying entitlement to a relevant social welfare payment is established **prior** to commencing an approved course.

Note: You must meet the qualifying conditions **before the start of the first year** of the course of study.

If you qualify for 'credited contributions', you will continue to get 'credits' while you are on BTEA.

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Q7: What is the “9 Month Exception”?

A: You may qualify for BTEA for an approved third level course of education if you are getting an unemployment payment for 9 months (234 days). This is provided you are a participant in the National Employment Action Plan (NEAP) process and the third level course you intend pursuing is recommended by a FÁS Employment Officer as part of your NEAP process. For current information on the schemes qualifying conditions, please contact:

1. your local Social Welfare Office OR
2. Employment Support Services (Headquarters)
Back to Education Schemes
Social Welfare Services Office
Government Buildings
Shannon Lodge
Carrick-on-Shannon
Co. Leitrim,
(071) 96 72698.

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Q8: How do I apply for the BTEA?

A: You cannot apply for the BTEA until you have first been accepted onto a course in DIT. Once you have been accepted onto a course, you should notify your local Social Welfare Office by filling out the **BTEA Application Form BTE1**.

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Q9: Where can I get a BTEA Application Form (BTE1)?

A: You can get one from your local Social Welfare Office OR you can download the form here.

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Q10: Where should I send my completed BTE1 form?

A: The social welfare payment you get indicates where you should send your completed BTE1 form.

If you are getting:

1. One-Parent Family Payment OR
2. Deserted Wife's Benefit or Allowance OR

3. Widow's or Widower's Pension OR
4. Prisoner's Wife's Allowance OR
5. Blind Pension

send the completed BTE1 form to to the relevant section in:

Social Welfare Services Office
Department of Social and Family Affairs
College Road
Sligo.

If you are getting:

1. Jobseeker's Allowance OR
2. Jobseeker's Benefit OR
3. Farm Assist OR
4. One-Parent Family Payment payable from your local Social Welfare Office

return the completed BTE1 form to your local Social Welfare Office.

If you are getting:

1. Disability Allowance OR
2. Invalidity Pension OR
3. Incapacity Supplement OR
4. Carer's Allowance

send the completed BTE1 form to the relevant section in:

Social Welfare Services Office
Department of Social and Family Affairs
Ballinalee Road
Longford.

If you are getting Illness Benefit for at least two years, send the completed BTE1 form to:

Department of Social and Family Affairs
Back to Education Schemes
Government Buildings
Shannon Lodge
Carrick-on-Shannon
Co. Leitrim

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Q11: How is the BTEA paid?

A: The BTEA is paid at a standard 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.

If you are getting:

1. Jobseeker's Allowance OR
2. Jobseeker's Benefit OR
3. Farm Assist

you get a Back to Education Allowance equivalent to the **maximum standard rate of Jobseeker's Benefit**.

If you are getting:

1. One-Parent Family Payment OR
2. Deserted Wife's Allowance OR
3. Deserted Wife's Benefit OR
4. Widows or Widowers Non-Contributory Pension OR
5. Widows or Widowers Contributory Pension OR
6. Prisoners Wife's Allowance OR
7. Disability Allowance OR
8. Illness Benefit OR
9. Blind Person's Pension OR
10. Carer's Allowance

you will be paid BTEA at a rate equivalent to the **maximum rate of your current social welfare payment**.

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Q12: Does that mean that I will get two social welfare payments?

A: No. You will not get two payments. The allowance is paid **instead** of the social welfare payment that entitled you to take part in the BTEA scheme. If you are getting **Incapacity Pension or Incapacity Supplement**, your payment will stay the same.

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Q13: Do I have to sign on every week?

A: No. If you were previously getting Jobseeker's Allowance, Jobseeker's Benefit, Farm Assist, One-Parent Family Payment, Deserted Wife's Allowance, Deserted Wife's Benefit, Widow's or Widower's Non-Contributory Pension, Widow's or Widower's Contributory Pension, Prisoners Wife's Allowance, Disability Allowance, Illness Benefit, Blind Pension, Invalidity Pension, or Carer's Allowance, the **BTEA is paid directly into your bank account**.

You can get Back to Education Allowance direct to your current or deposit savings account in a financial institution or at a post office of your choice.

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Q14: Do I get the BTEA during the summer?

A: No. 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**.

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Q15: Can I get the BTEA for every year of my course?

A: If you are going on to the next year of your course 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.

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Q16: Is the BTEA automatically renewed if I finish one course and start another with a higher qualification?

A: No. If you finish one course of study, but intend moving to a higher qualification in the following academic year, **you must re-apply for the BTEA**. The allowance is not paid between courses.

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Q17: Can I get the Higher Education Grant and the BTEA at the same time?

A: Yes. Your BTEA payment is **not affected** by any Maintenance Grant you may get.

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Q18: What is the Cost of Education Allowance?

A: You can also qualify for an **annual allowance** towards the cost of your studies as well as your weekly payment. This is the Cost of Education Allowance, is paid at the start of each academic year and is currently **€400**.

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Q19: Do I get to keep my Secondary Benefits if I claim the BTEA?

A: Yes. You may keep any secondary benefits you already have such as Christmas Bonus, Fuel Allowance, Diet Supplement, Rent Supplement or Mortgage Interest Supplement under the **Supplementary Allowance Scheme**.

Note: Any increase in income may affect your Rent or Mortgage Interest Supplement.

Earnings from part-time employment do not affect the basic BTEA payment. However, any income which you or your spouse or partner get (except the first €60.00 of weekly earnings from part-time work) **is assessable** for Rent or Mortgage Interest Supplement. Contact your local Community Welfare Officer to see how your Rent or Mortgage Interest Supplement may be affected.

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Q20: Is the BTEA monitored?

A: Yes. You must submit a certificate or letter from DIT to your Social Welfare Office **confirming that you have registered 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.

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Q21: Can I appeal against a decision?

A: 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 Social Welfare Local Office or section, enclosing any new evidence in support of your request for a review.

This information is correct as of 23rd September 2008, Department of Family & Social Affairs

Further information on financial supports available from the following websites:

www.studentfinance.ie

www.citizensinformation.ie

www.gotocollege.ie

www.ivea.ie/student_supports