



**Submission to the Department of Social & Family Affairs,  
Regarding the review of the Back to Education Allowance Scheme**

**By PLANET – The Partnership Network**

**1. Introduction:**

PLANET (*The Network of Area-based Partnerships*) has evolved over the past six years with its origins in the regular meetings of the original twelve PESP Area-based Partnership Companies. The Network is now a registered Co-operative representing the 38 Partnerships Companies, which are part of the current National Development Plan under the Local Social Inclusion Programme (LDSIP), 2000-2006.

The role of the network is to act as the voice of Partnerships to (a) raise the profile of Partnerships both nationally and locally (b) act as a conduit where models of good practice are identified and exchanged between members (c) identify the key common policy issues affecting Partnerships and progress these forward (d) keep PLANET members informed of relevant developments taking place at both EU and national level.

It is within the context of the recent changes to the Department's Back to Education Allowance Scheme (BTEA) that we write to you. We have advised all the partnership education co-ordinators of this review and also our education and training policy group. We have listed below the response from one particular partnership, which encapsulates a number of the issues of concern to partnerships regarding the scheme. There are also three case studies highlighting the benefits the scheme can give to individuals using education as a means of escaping the poverty trap.

**We would also have to state our concern at the changes in the eligibility criteria for the scheme, i.e. having to be 15 months unemployed instead of 6 months, is a retrograde step and is not justified.**

**Feedback from Options discussion around BTEA submission.**

***Note, clients discussed are mature students in the Finglas Cabra areas***

Friday 7<sup>th</sup> November 2003

Present: Careers Information Officer, Employment Facilitators, Mediators, LEC & LESN Coordinators

***Issues of concern in relation to the operation of the scheme:***

**1. Non Payment through the summer**

- Several clients of the LEC service came in to the Jobs Club over the summer. One individual in his third year of a BA in Humanities at St Pat's spent 5-6 weeks looking for work in the Jobs Club and eventually had to sign on just to keep going – very stressful period.
- Very stressful as clients have financial commitments so if they cannot obtain work quickly they will default. If they have children who are also of school the cost of childcare would be more than the basic wage that many clients would be receiving on student jobs

**2. BTEA as a factor in the uptake of education by those on Social Welfare Payments**

- The continued basic pay is a huge factor in the decision to take up the opportunity of returning to education. These clients have grown up in an area with traditionally very low uptake of third level education. Financial support for living and subsistence cannot come from any other source if a family is social welfare dependant. If BTEA the vast majority of mature students from this area would not decide to go to 3<sup>rd</sup> Level

**Other notes**

- There has been an increased number of applications to the Millennium Fund from approx 50 last year to 86 applications this year, perhaps a sign that more people in Finglas are choosing to access third level and also that a greater need for supports exists.
- Since 1996 approx 30 mature student clients of the LEC per year have been enabled to access third level through BTEA in Finglas Cabra area
- A recent report on job losses in the midlands highlighted that those with primary or 2<sup>nd</sup> level education made up the redundancy job losses in the area and that having third level qualifications was a strong factor in retaining job during hard times

Finglas Cabra would have had experience of many clients who have used the BTEA as a means to accessing third level education, moving from social welfare dependency to mainstream employment:

### **3. Case Studies:**

#### **Thomas**

Thomas has been a client of the Local Employment Centre since September 19<sup>th</sup> 2002. Thomas's work history has always been in general operative positions until his last employment, which unfortunately he was made redundant from in August 2002. Since then, Thomas has been on UA.

Since his initial contact with our service Thomas has shown considerable potential and with much encouragement and support he applied for and was accepted onto a degree course with NCI. Upon completion of this course, Thomas will have a Bachelor of Arts in Accounting and Human Resource Management. This is a three-year full time course, which would enable Thomas to move from low paid work to sustainable employment.

Without the Back to Work Allowance, Thomas would not have been in a position to return to full time education.

**Gerry** left school after his Inter Cert and started to work as a mechanic. He did this for a number of years but then became very disillusioned with it. He left his job but had no clear idea what to do. He drifted into long-term unemployment and had been unemployed for 7 years when he decided that a return to education would open more opportunities for him. He did his Leaving Cert through the VTOS Programme and subsequently went on to do a BA in English and Economics. He was supported through his third level education by the Third level allowance (now BTEA). As a single man living with his pensioner parents he would not have been able to access third level education without the support of the BTEA.

On completion of his degree he secured a position as a library assistant through the Job Initiative Scheme. 2 years later he applied for and was successful in obtaining a full time position as a librarian in Trinity College.

#### **Martin**

Was long term unemployed on UA payment. He returned to do his Leaving Cert through the VTOS scheme and then on to St Pat's to train as a teacher with the assistance of BTEA. He is now employed by the CDVEC on a permanent basis as a teacher of adults.

**November 2003**