



returning to
education

returning to education

The decision to return to education can be a difficult one to make. While you may feel that education could bring many benefits, you may also have fears and anxieties about how you will manage to juggle everything in order to make it happen.

'I won't be able to keep up. How would I get my study done with the children?'

'I'm too old to go back and do my leaving certificate. I'd be embarrassed with everyone else probably being really young.'

'I've no idea even how to switch on a computer. How would I ever be able to get the course work done.'

'My spelling and maths are really awful. Everyone will think I'm stupid.'

'I don't know if I can afford to go back and study.'

'My English is not good. I'm afraid I won't be able to keep up.'

There is no doubt that many practical barriers exist for parents returning to education such as childcare, course fees, books and time pressures etc. However, support is available to help you to find practical solutions.

In the long term, the professional and personal benefits of returning to education will outweigh the difficulties you may have at the beginning.

Step 1: Taking time to reflect

Why do I want to return to education?

If you are thinking about taking up a course or training you will have your own personal reasons for this. Being clear about why you want to return to learning will help you to decide what type of course you should undertake. Take time to think about this before you choose a course.

What am I interested in?

No matter what course you undertake, your chances of really enjoying the experience and being successful will be increased if you are really interested in it. Being clear about your interests will help you to choose the right course for you.

Knowing when the time is right!

While there may be opportunities available to you, it is important to consider whether this is the right time for you to go back to education. Take time to think about the following:

- Are there a lot of other changes going on in my life right now that might affect my ability to study?
- Are there things I need to sort out first in order to be ready to study?
- Is my accommodation secure?
- Have I all the information I need in order to make a decision?
- What am I looking for? Do I want to do a more informal class for my own personal development? Do I want to start training in a particular area that may lead to a job?

Step 2: Getting information and guidance

There are thousands of courses on offer each year. Courses can range from personal development classes and special interest classes to more formal training leading to awards such as certificates, diplomas and degrees. Equally, there are flexible ways of studying on offer; studying from home, online courses, night courses, part-time day or evening courses, distance learning and full-time day courses.

With so many choices it is really important to find guidance and information from people who really understand your needs and the courses on offer.

Where to get information and guidance

There are a number of sources of information and guidance available to you:

- **Aontas** – The National Association of Adult Education offer an internet based information referral service
Web: www.aontas.com/inforeferrals
- Your **Local Employment Service (LES)**
- The employment services officer in your nearest FÁS office
Tel: 01 607 0500
Web: www.fas.ie
- The **adult education officer/VTOS coordinator** in your local Vocational Education Committee



- **The Adult Education Guidance Service** with your local Vocational Education College
- Adult education guidance projects are available throughout the country. To find out if there is a project near you telephone the **National Centre for Guidance in Education**
Tel: 01 869 0715/6
Web: www.ncge.ie/adult_details.htm
- **Youth Information Centres (YICs)** can provide you with information if you are a young parent
Tel: 01 889 2014
Web: <http://www.youthinformation.ie/>
- The **education coordinator in your local partnership company**. To find out if there is one in your area contact Pobal
Tel: 01 240 0700
Email: enquiries@pobal.ie
Web: www.pobal.ie
- **Local community groups** can also be a great source of information
- **Centres for the Unemployed**
- Many colleges and universities now employ **access officers** to assist students who may have difficulties in accessing third-level education

Step 3: Facing the practicalities

Financial matters

Second chance education programmes

Once you have found the right course, you will have to consider how you are going to cover fees and other costs.

There are a number of schemes to help parents return to education and keep their social welfare entitlements.

These include:

1. Back to Education Allowance (BTEA)
2. Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS)
3. Youthreach for younger parents between 15–20 years of age

You can get more information about these schemes from:

- **Adult education officer/VTOS coordinator** in your local Vocational Education Committee
- **Department of Social and Family Affairs**
Tel: 01 874 8444
Lo-Call Leaflet Request Line: 1890 20 23 25
Web: www.welfare.ie
- **Facilitator** in your local social welfare office
- **FÁS**
- **Local Employment Service (LES)**
- **One Family**
askonefamily National helpline
Lo-Call: 1890 66 22 12
Web: www.onefamily.ie
- **The Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed (INOUE)**
Tel: 01 856 0088
Email: welfare@info.ie
Web: www.inoue.ie
- **Centres for the Unemployed**
- **Treoir** – The National Federation of Services for Unmarried Parents and their Children have a publication for young people in education, *Information for Young Parents in Education* and *Work It*

Out: A Guide for Parents on One Parent Family Payment (Re)entering the Workforce or Education

Tel: 1890 25 20 84

Email: info@treoir.ie

Web: www.treoir.ie

Maintenance grants

Maintenance grants are allowances to assist students with travel costs and other expenses while they study. They do not cover course fees. Part-time or night-time classes are not covered.

Information about maintenance grants is available from the Department of Education.

Web: www.education.ie

The Higher Education Grant Scheme

This grant is for students undertaking a full-time undergraduate course of no less than two years duration in certain universities, institutes of technology and other third-level institutions. The grant scheme also covers full time post-graduate courses of at least one year duration in approved colleges and institutes. Contact your local city, county council or Local Employment Service for further details.

The Third Level Maintenance Grants Scheme for Trainees (TLT Scheme)

This grant covers two-year National Certificate and three-year National Diploma courses, pursued in the institutes of technology. Contact your local VEC.

Vocational Educational Committees Scholarship Scheme (VEC Scheme)

This Scheme caters for students who hold a National Certificate or National Diploma (gained from attendance at courses covered under the TLT Scheme) and are progressing to approved degree courses in third-

level institutions, including universities. It also caters for students pursuing degree courses in institutes of technology, students pursuing Higher National Diploma courses in Northern Ireland, students progressing to approved degree courses in Northern Ireland, students progressing to approved degree courses in third-level institutions in other EU member states and students pursuing post-graduate courses in Ireland.

VEC maintenance grant for PLC courses

Covers approved Post Leaving Certificate courses of at least one-year duration run in approved PLC centres throughout the country. Contact your local VEC for more information.

The Millennium Partnership Fund for Disadvantage

This fund is available to assist students from partnership areas to participate in further and higher education. To find out more about the fund contact your local partnership company or community group. To find out if you live in a partnership area contact Pobal.
Tel: 01 240 0700.

Student Assistance Fund for Third Level Institutions

Available to students who are experiencing financial difficulty or hardship. Details are available from the access officer in the university or college.

Bank of Ireland Millennium Scholars' Trust

Offers scholarships to students who are experiencing financial or other barriers to education. The scheme is administered on behalf of Bank of

Ireland by National College of Ireland (NCI)
Tel: 01 449 8500/1850 22 17 21
Email: boiscolars@ncirl.ie
Web: www.ncirl.ie

Childcare

It is really important to think about childcare as early as possible as it can take time to find a service you are happy with and there is very little financial assistance available for childcare.

If you are attending a FÁS course, Youthreach or VTOS course you may be able to get a childcare allowance. Some universities and third-level institutions have a crèche service. For more information on childcare see our leaflet, *Childcare: Finding What Works for Both You and Your Child*.

Updating your reading, writing and numeracy skills

If you feel you need to improve your reading, writing or maths there are many schemes throughout the country to help you. The National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) offers classes throughout the country designed to suit your needs. To find out about your nearest scheme
Tel: 01 855 4332

Web: www.nala.ie/schemes/

You can also contact your local LES or adult literacy organiser in your local VEC for details of their Adult Literacy Scheme.

Getting help with English

If English is not your first language and you feel that you need to improve, there are classes available throughout the country. Classes are often called

ESOL classes meaning English for Speakers of Other Languages. The purpose of ESOL classes is to help you improve your day-to-day use of English. To find out more contact:

- Adult literacy organiser in your local VEC College
- Integrate Ireland Language and Training
Tel: 01 667 7232/01 667 7295
Email: info@iilt.ie
Web: www.iilt.ie
- SPIRASI Asylum Service Initiative
Tel: 01 838 9664
Email: info@spirasi.ie
Web: www.spirasi.ie
- The National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA)
Tel: 01 855 4332
Email: literacy@nala.ie
Web: www.nala.ie
- Many libraries now offer conversation exchange classes

Step 4: Going for it!

Coping with fears and anxieties

Returning to education will inevitably mean that you will have to make changes in your life. While some people enjoy change and find it

exciting, for many people it can be stressful. Remember to expect some difficulties at the beginning as you and your family adjust to the new situation. Acknowledging your feelings and honestly facing your fears is the first step. Talking to friends and family may help. Schools, colleges, education centres and universities are often very aware of the concerns you may have and will be very willing to help and encourage you to take up educational opportunities. Many organisations and community groups offer support groups such as women's groups, men's groups and groups for one-parent families which give you encouragement along the road to learning. Support groups for students who are parents are also held in many colleges and universities. Talk to the student welfare officer or student counselling service for details.

Making the decision to return to education is a bit like starting out on a journey that is both exciting and terrifying. Getting the right support and taking things at a pace that suits you will make this a journey full of new opportunities, helping you to gain more control over your future.

