

Gap Year - Information

Gap Years

A gap year is usually when you decide to take a year out before going on to university, but a gap year could be taken at any time. Whatever you do, taking a structured gap year can be a good way to help your confidence and become more independent before university.

How best to use your time

There are some definite advantages of taking a gap year, but only if you are going to make the most of the time you have.

If you didn't do very well in your exams, you might consider taking resits. This is an excellent use of a year if you are able to improve your grades to help you get the job or onto the course you that you really want.

Most people get in debt before they graduate and there are few ways to avoid it. By taking a gap year you could earn and save some money to help. The NUS estimate that the current average debt after graduation will be £35,000 – £40,000. You will not be able to earn this much in a year, but you should be able to save some money to help.



If you spend a year volunteering or working for an industry or organisation you would like to get into in the future, employers will see that you are dedicated to advancing your career.

Gap years are also a great way to build your confidence, meet new people and perhaps learn a new language.

What to do?

In your year out you could do anything from volunteering in Africa to doing some work experience in the UK or abroad. Many people use their gap year to travel round the world and visit different countries. You can have amazing experiences such as helping orphans in India or working in the rain forests of South East Asia. If you are happy to volunteer there are agencies that will pay for your flights and upkeep in return for a year of your time.



Travelling and working abroad

You may want to go travelling and sample life in other countries during your gap year. Many tour operators run gap year trips that visit as many places as possible in a year.

If you haven't saved enough cash, you could work your way around the world. You could try working on a summer camp in America, or travel abroad teaching English as a foreign language.

Volunteering

Many organisations offer young people the chance to volunteer in different countries around the world.

Opportunities range from helping out in school classrooms or children's summer camps to assisting in medical clinics or with environmental work. Volunteering takes dedication and hard work, but it is a unique chance to experience other cultures.

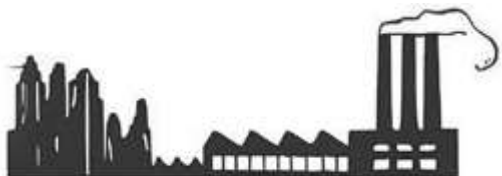
If you want to do your bit but would prefer to stay closer to home, there are many projects in the UK that need volunteers.

Year in Industry

By undertaking a year in industry, you will get the opportunity to undertake interesting projects and learn how business works. The skills you develop will enhance your University education and maximise your graduate job prospects.

Placements generally last about 12 months and in that time you can expect to earn a competitive salary. It's also worth noting some of the students that prove themselves are awarded sponsorships for their time in higher education.

Visit www.etrust.org.uk for more details.



Gap Year - Travel

If you are planning to travel during your gap year, then you must start planning early. There are lots of things that you need to organise before you go!

Passport

Ensure your passport is in good condition and valid for at least 6 months after the date of your return. You can find everything you'll need to know about getting a passport at www.gov.uk/apply-renew-passport.

Visas

Check visa requirements with your travel agent or contact the Consulate or Embassy of the country you plan to visit. Make sure to check the FCO Travel Advice before you go at www.fco.gov.uk/travel.

Insurance

Make sure you get the right insurance. You need comprehensive travel and full medical and repatriation insurance; otherwise you could be billed for any emergencies! Also make sure that it covers you for all activities – including adventure sports.

Money

Take enough money! Work out how much money you'll need on a daily basis and work to a realistic budget.

Check with your bank before you travel whether you can use your debit/credit card in the countries you are visiting and any card usage charges that apply.

Keeping in touch

Set up an email account such as Hotmail or Yahoo! that you can access from anywhere in the world to help you keep in contact. There are public Internet cafes in most major cities in the world. A roam-enabled mobile can be useful.

Health

Visit your GP at least six weeks beforehand and get all vaccinations necessary. Take enough of your medicines with you; this includes medicine that you need day to day, as well as holiday medication (such as anti-malarial measures).

If travelling within the European Economic Area or Switzerland get a free EHIC. You can apply for an EHIC online at www.ehic.org.uk or www.dh.gov.uk/travellers. It will entitle you to reduced cost or free emergency care.

Gap Year Information

Taking a year out after school is an increasingly popular option, but be sure to weigh up the pros and cons carefully.

The Pros

- It will be a break from the pressure of academic study.
- Earning a good regular wage for some months will give me more financial and social independence - and even some savings for university.
- I should make new friends and useful contacts for the future.
- A job or voluntary activity may also be valuable experience for my course, or my career.
- It will broaden my horizons, and give me more confidence to deal with unexpected situations.
- Travel may improve my language skills.
- I will get an extra year before I have to make those final career decisions.

The Cons

- Will it be easy to settle back into the routines of studying and revision?
- Giving up the benefits of being able to spend and save from a good regular wage may not be so easy.
- Certain subjects may be more difficult after a break in learning - maths maybe an example.
- I may lose contact with my friends who are going off to college.
- My ideas about career plans may change during the year.
- I may even change my ideas about the type of course I want to study.
- There will be one more year before I qualify and start earning again - or paying back my Student Loan.
- If I choose a very long course such as medicine it will be even longer until I qualify.
- I may lose touch with the higher education application process.
- I may not be available for University interviews if I am abroad for part of next year.

The Gap Year Book

Authors: Joe Bindloss, Charlotte Hindle
Published by Lonely Planet Publications

Gap Year Guidebook

Author: Alison Withers
Published by John Catt Educational Ltd.

Work Your Way Around the World

Author: Susan Griffith
Published by Vacation Work

Taking a Year Off

Authors: Val Butcher, Christine Swanson
Published by Trotman & Co. Ltd.

Gap Year Volunteer

Author: Joe Bindloss
Published by Summersdale Publishers

Taking a Year Out: Making the Most of Your Gap Year

Author: Polly Bird
Published by Hodder Arnold H&S

Notes

