



TAKING A GAP YEAR

Good reason, bad reason

Good reasons for taking a gap year include:

- You want get international experience from living & working in another country
- You want to gain more or new skills to enhance employment prospects
- You need to gain relevant experience to be accepted for postgraduate study.
- You're finding it hard to combine applying for jobs with getting a good degree. Remember planning your gap year takes time and you will need to spend time doing some careers research and accessing Careers Advisory Service resources, staff and events while you are still here.

Bad reasons for taking a gap year:

- You want to postpone the decision about what you do with your life. Beware as you can easily come back and be no further forward unless you are prepared to think about it now.
- You deserve a break from studying. A gap year might refresh you but how long do you really need? You could have as much as a three month break if you are an undergraduate and you don't start work until September.
- You haven't done anything about getting a job so I'll have to. Be aware that vacancies are advertised throughout the year, and you might get a good job in the first few months after graduation. Vacancies are advertised on MyFuture (<https://myfuture.bath.ac.uk>).

The advantages

- You can earn money for future plans like further study or travel
- You can gain new, or develop existing skills valued by employers
- You can experience a new culture, meet new people, learn more about yourself and increase your confidence
- You will be adding an extra boost to your CV which could differentiate you from other graduates.

The disadvantages

- You could find yourself in more debt
- You could find the job market worse when you come back
- You could end up with "itchy feet" or just find it hard to settle
- You may find it difficult to apply for jobs/attend interviews if you are out of the country or if you are working full-time
- Some employers do not see the benefit of a gap year so you may have to work hard to convince them.

What do employers think?

Many graduate employers are still very positive about graduates choosing a gap year but you will need to think about how you sell what you did to them in terms of the skills you gained and the personal development opportunities your gap experience gave you.

Employers can be impressed if you sell the idea that it has developed your cultural awareness and ability to cope with a crisis. But there are some types of gap year which will switch them off – such

as looking as if you've just had a long holiday or taking part in highly organised volunteering projects where you met very few challenges or were cosseted from the rigours of the locals' way of life.

Demonstrating the benefits

There can be ample material to use in applications and interviews but if you have a whole year of new experiences it may be hard to remember everything that happened to you. It's a good idea to keep a journal so you can reflect on your positive and negative experiences especially if you are going overseas or trying to achieve some goals. Learn how to describe your greatest achievement, challenging situations you encountered, what you learned, skills you gained and anything you would do differently, if you had a second opportunity.

How do I manage applying for jobs too?

Timing your availability for applications and interviews is a big problem. Don't leave your job investigation until you have finished your gap year otherwise you could find one gap year slipping into two. The best plan is to participate in recruitment activities starting in the autumn term of your final year.

As soon as you can research potential job vacancies; this means you will understand the recruitment timetable for your chosen area. The peak advertising time for the larger graduate recruiters will be October – January, so if you plan to apply to these employers you may need to manage being in the UK during peak interview times in the Spring of your Gap Year. Some areas of work require you to apply as and when a vacancy arises so you may have no option but to wait until your return. Make sure you know what the pattern is for your chosen area and make plans appropriately.

Can I get a deferred offer?

Some big-name companies with large annual graduate intakes may be prepared to consider deferred entry into their graduate positions. The better the economy the more open employers are likely to be; others will consider it if you put in a good case. Other employers may have more than one entry point per year. Before applying for jobs in your final year, contact the employer's recruitment department to see if they have a policy on deferred entry. Another time to find this detail out is to ask at campus presentations and the Autumn Careers Fair.

What are you going to do?

The chance to travel and live abroad before launching into your career is often a popular choice. This can be character building – but it is now harder to get off the beaten track and live with the locals. If you are going to travel try and add a twist to it. Examples we have come across include a world record challenge attempt involving playing football across five continents and following the footsteps of an earlier famous traveller and writing a blog. Putting something back into society or the environment by dedicating yourself to some form of volunteering either at home or abroad is another popular option.

You might need to combine these options with a period of paid work to raise the funds for your travelling or engage in some fundraising if it's an expedition. Be realistic about the kind of work you may have to take. It can be hard to find a short term job which is both well paid and interesting. A further option you could add to the mix is a short course e.g. languages or IT, either here or abroad, which could enhance your employability in your chosen area.

Here are a few more ideas:

Teaching English abroad

Gaining a TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language) certificate can be a passport to work abroad. You can study either full or part time, with full time courses lasting between 4 and 6 weeks with costs in the region of £1000. Costs vary starting in the region of £850. Courses like Cambridge CELTA and Trinity TESOL give you greatest flexibility in where you can work in the

world although shorter less expensive courses are available but will restrict you to only teaching in selected schools. Check the Careers Advisory Service for a book by Susan Griffiths called *Teaching English Abroad* published by Vacation Work which is a pretty definitive guide on the topic.

Some organised programmes we regularly advertise include:

- JET (Japan Exchange and Teaching) Programme offers opportunities to assist teaching English in Japan for 1 to 3 years. You don't need a teaching qualification or to speak Japanese
- Teach in China and Teach in Thailand are programmes offered by IST Plus to teach for 5 to 10 months in educational establishments across the country
- i-to-i specialises in TEFL training and volunteer placements overseas.

Expeditions

There are basically 2 types:

- **Commercial expeditions** – costing around £2000 but you are saved the time and effort of planning your adventure. Sometimes they will run as part of a charity fundraising project where you will have to raise sponsorship money to cover costs and a donation to charity.
- **Non-commercial expeditions** – usually organised by students, academics or research organisations and are linked to a particular type of study or piece of research. Funding may be available, or you may need to raise money yourself to cover your costs. Allow a lot of time for planning. For information on planning projects and funding options look at the Conservation Leadership Programme: www.conservationleadershipprogramme.com and the Royal Geographical Society www.rgs.org (under 'our work') websites.

“Package” gap years: a word of warning...

The majority of gap year companies provide an excellent service with integrity and reliability. Occasionally students have reported problems such as:

- Accommodation with poor local families, who received none of the money paid by the student to the organisation for board and lodging
- Lack of health care in emergencies
- Teaching in a school where there were so many gap year students that there was nothing to do.

So how can you check you use a good organisation?

- Ask to speak to past participants
- Find out where your money will go
- Ensure you get satisfactory answers to all your questions – ideas for questions to ask are listed by the Year Out Group at www.yearoutgroup.org
- Check the press for coverage of adverse reports on particular organisations.

Finding vacancies and further information

The Careers Advisory Service has the following reference sources:

Vacancy listings in **MyFuture** accessible via <https://myfuture.bath.ac.uk>

Directory of Charities, Volunteering & Gap Year Opportunities
<http://www.bath.ac.uk/careers/earlybird/cvgy>

Gap Year section of our catalogue www.bath.ac.uk/careers/catalogue/work

Working Abroad section of our catalogue
www.bath.ac.uk/careers/catalogue/overseas

Worldwide Volunteering database www.wvv.org.uk

Our information room:

- *Green Overseas* files
- *Burgundy Work Experience* files for year out and short term opportunities, from vacation work to 12 months
- *Purple Charities, Volunteering and Gap Year* files for opportunities with charitable organisations, e.g. VSO.

Can I get help after I graduate?

If you are job-hunting, still unsure of what you want from a career or thinking about further study, our services are available to you indefinitely after graduation.– see our web pages for graduates at www.bath.ac.uk/careers/graduate.

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This guide is available online at www.bath.ac.uk/careers/earlybird/gapyear

If you need this information in another format, please contact us.

www.bath.ac.uk/careers.