



TAKING A GAP YEAR

Good reason, bad reason

Good reasons for taking a gap year include:

- You want to get international experience from living and 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 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 think you'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 could 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 very positive about graduates choosing a gap year but you will need to explain your rationale and what you expect to have gained from the time. Think about your personal development in terms of knowledge, skills, networks and aspects of your character.

Employers can be impressed if you sell the idea that it has developed your cultural awareness and ability to cope with a crisis. On the other hand, they will switch off if it looks as if you've just had a

long holiday or have taken part in highly organised projects where you met very few challenges or were cosseted from the realities of living as most of the local population live.

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 specific 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. Ideally, still participate in recruitment activities starting in the autumn term of your final year.

Research potential job vacancies and employers as soon as you can. The peak advertising time for the larger graduate recruiters will be September – January. But some start and complete the recruitment process even earlier, so that it's possible to get from application to job offer before the end of the autumn semester. 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. In any case, know the typical time scales for your chosen area so that you can plan to be in the right country for any face-to-face parts of the selection process. Much can be done online, including first interviews, or an international employer may even interview you at a local office. But make no assumptions, the employer is certainly not obliged to be flexible and work around your travel plans.

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. Other employers may have more than one entry point per year. But don't rely on either of these options as such employers will be in the minority. Before spending time applying, consider asking the recruitment department if they have a policy on deferred entry. They may not be easy to make contact with so if your target employers are coming on campus ask then. If your preferred employers don't seem keen you then have a decision to make about whether to apply and try to negotiate once you have an offer, to take the offer over a gap year, or leave applications until you are on your gap year.

What are you going to do?

The chance to travel and live abroad can be fantastic for your personal and career development. But if you suspect your plans are in danger of looking like a long holiday, perhaps try to add a twist. 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. You could work on a cruise ship, rather than lounge on one. 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.

Or try to get some experience to develop your commercial awareness or demonstrate your work ethic. You could spend your time living and working in big cities, maybe even connecting with people who work for big international employers you might later work for. You might go to where you feel is at the forefront of scientific research or technological advancement in areas you're interested in. You might make this happen through contacts you've made here with international students or academics.

You might need to combine 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 full-time, part-time or online, with full-time courses lasting between 4 and 6 weeks. Costs vary but can be in the region of £1300 for the Cambridge CELTA. Courses like Cambridge CELTA and Trinity TESOL give you greatest flexibility in where you can work in the world and which schools, although shorter, less expensive courses are available. Check the Careers 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 or 10 months in educational establishments across the country
- i-to-i specialises in TEFL training and volunteer placements overseas.

Expeditions

There are basically two 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.org and the Royal Geographical Society www.rgs.org (under the 'our work' section) pages.

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

The majority of gap year companies provide an excellent service with integrity and reliability. However, 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 where there were many gap year students and not enough 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 for adverse reports on particular organisations
- Our *Finding work experience guide*, www.bath.ac.uk/students/careers/docs.bho/finding-work-experience.pdf, has a section on 'Checking the legitimacy of opportunities abroad' which has more advice on this topic.

Finding vacancies and further information

The Careers Service has the following reference sources:

Directory of Charities, Volunteering & Gap Year Opportunities

www.bath.ac.uk/students/careers/docs/cvgy.pdf

Gap Year section of our catalogue

www.bath.ac.uk/students/careers/information-resources/catalogue/work

Step Together Volunteering www.step-together.org.uk/

Working Abroad section of our website

www.bath.ac.uk/students/careers/information-resources/catalogue/abroad/.

Our information room:

- *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/students/careers/graduates

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This guide is available online at www.bath.ac.uk/students/careers/docs/information-resources/helpsheets.

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

www.bath.ac.uk/careers