

## Taking a Gap Year

Taking a gap year between school and university appeals to many students. The opportunities for travel have grown in recent years and many students take the chance while they are young. However, the traditional travelling year is becoming less popular and more people are choosing to work in their gap year.

- There are no official figures on how many students take a gap year but it could be more than 50,000.
- UCAS (Universities and Colleges Admissions) figures show that in 2006, 28,524 applicants deferred entry until 2007. In 2008 the number deferring rose to 33,171.
- The regional distribution of gap year placements (recorded by the Year Out Group) varies - more than 40% are from London and the south, but in 2008, the number from Scotland rose by 50% on the previous year.
- Those who have taken a gap year are often less likely to drop out of university - they tend to have more self-confidence, maturity and a greater sense of independence.

More students are now working for a year before going to university, to save money to help finance their studies. Some work for part of the year then use their earnings to travel for a few months.

If you intend to defer entry to University for a year, you should apply in the normal way during 2009-2010 but indicate clearly on your UCAS form that you wish to enter in 2011. Give details of how you intend to spend the year. Applications for deferred entry are considered on the same basis as those for entry in October 2010.

- Check that your college or university will accept a deferred application
- You must meet the conditions of your offer by the start of September 2010.
- If you accept a deferred entry place, you cannot re-apply next year unless you withdraw by September 2010.

Used in the right way, the gap year, which can last up to 16 months, from the last Higher exam until the university 'Freshers' Week', has a lot to offer.

It can give you an opportunity to:

- get valuable 'real' work experience - paid or voluntary
- learn a language
- see a bit of the world.

But bear in mind that you will have to go back to study when you come back!

If you are to benefit from your year out, it must be well planned in advance. You could:

- do paid or voluntary work, at home or abroad
- work in industry, care or conservation and the environment
- teach English - perhaps to up to 50 pupils at a time in the developing world.

Whatever you choose, you should have an enjoyable, character-forming opportunity to learn new skills and develop untapped reserves of aptitude.

A **properly structured** gap year can improve your chances of being accepted at university. The personal qualities and skills highlighted by a year out experience can make a difference when universities are trying to distinguish amongst applicants.

After you graduate, the experience of having had a worthwhile year out can impress employers. If you work in industry, the company may sponsor you during your degree and employ you after you graduate. Your work contacts can help open doors.

### **A note of caution**

There are many good gap-year providers, but there are also some distinctly dodgy ones! Research providers carefully, to make sure that your year out is well planned, and that you will receive appropriate support and assistance throughout your programme.

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), in partnership with Lonely Planet, publish a useful booklet for independent and gap year travellers called 'Travel Safe - Know Before You Go'. It is available free from the website: <http://www.gogapyear.com/dont-forget/free-lonely-planet-guide>

### **Home or Away?**

For many people the idea of a year out means a new experience in an unfamiliar land. There are many organisations offering au pair jobs, work in American summer camps, or volunteer projects in game reserves in Africa or orphanages in India.

The overseas gap year, with the chance to see the world, has wide appeal, but it is not for everyone. It is expensive, it can involve living on a basic diet in primitive surroundings, struggling with language barriers and feeling homesick for friends and family.

Many students prefer to use their year out to gain work experience and make useful contacts, in a 'real' job, while earning money. Caring is a popular choice - for entry to social work you need to have relevant experience. Or you may be able to work in business or industry.

Home or away? The choice is yours.

### **Finance**

In most cases, if you plan a gap year abroad, you will have to raise funding yourself - perhaps by organising car boot sales, selling home made products or (more exciting!) maybe doing a sponsored parachute jump. You might get some help from charitable institutions and grant-making trusts.

If you are doing paid work, you can earn up to a specified amount per week free of tax or National Insurance. Ask your employer for a P38(S) form, to stop tax or NI deductions coming off your wages.

### **Organisations offering general information on the Year Out**

**Careers Europe** - publishes 'The Gap Year Resource Pack', price £65. Order it through the website: <http://www.careerseurope.co.uk/>

**Gap Advice** - advice on gap years.

Web: <http://www.gapadvice.org/>

**Gap-year.com** - information on gap years, publishes the annual 'Gap-Year Guidebook',

£12.95 from booksellers, or £12.95, plus p&p from publishers.

Web: <http://www.gap-year.com/>

**Gapyear.com** - lots of ideas, includes a guide for solo female travellers.

Web: <http://www.gapyear.com/>

**Gapyear Directory** - information on volunteer projects, expeditions and language courses.

Web: <http://www.gapyeardirectory.co.uk/>

**Go Gap Year** - general advice and information for gap year travellers.

Web: <http://www.gogapyear.com/>

**findaGap.com** - information on volunteer projects and paid jobs.

Web: <http://www.findagap.com/>

**WorldWide Volunteering** - information on volunteering in the UK and overseas.

Web: <http://www.www.org.uk/>

**Year Out Group** - promotes well-structured programmes, helps you identify suitable, worthwhile projects.

Web: <http://www.yearoutgroup.org/>

### Organisations offering Gap Year Experiences

These are a few of the many organisations through which you can arrange a gap year experience. See also contacts in the article on '**Voluntary Work**'.

**Note: Most of these are private organisations. Continuing Education Gateway cannot accept responsibility for the standards of the organisations and the gap year experience they offer.**

**Africa & Asia Venture** - teaching, community and conservation projects in Africa Asia and Central America, 5 weeks to 5 months.

Web: <http://www.aventure.co.uk/>

**BTCV (British Trust for Conservation Volunteers)** - conservation work in the UK and abroad, 2 weeks to 2 months.

Web: <http://www2.btcv.org.uk/>

**BUNAC** - working and volunteering opportunities, including summer camps, in USA and elsewhere, 5 weeks to 2 years

Web: <http://www.bunac.org.uk/>

**Caledonia Languages Abroad** - overseas language learning and cultural experiences in Europe and Latin America, 4 weeks to 1 year.

Web: <http://www.caledonialanguages.co.uk/>

**Camphill Association** - work in communities with people with learning disabilities, 100 communities in 20 countries, 60 in the UK and Ireland, 6 -12 months, shorter placements in summer.

Web: <http://www.camphill.org.uk/>

**Camp America** - opportunities in summer camps in the USA.

Web: <http://www.campamerica.co.uk/>

**Community Service Volunteers (CSV)** - volunteering in the UK, away from home, in community-based projects, supporting vulnerable people, 4 to 12 months. Web:

<http://www.csv.org.uk/>

**EIL Cultural and Educational Travel** - educational, environmental and health work and work with disadvantaged children, in 14 countries, mostly 2-3 months. Web:

<http://www.eiluk.org/>

**Frontier** - environmental, conservation and development expeditions to over 20 countries.

Web: <http://www.frontier.ac.uk/>

**GAP Guru** - 1-12 months in India and other countries, voluntary or paid work or adventure journeys.

Web: <http://www.gapguru.com/>

**Jobs in the Alps** - paid jobs in Alpine resorts, usually need knowledge of French and/or German.

Web: <http://www.jobs-in-the-alps.co.uk/>

**Kibbutz Program Centre** - live and work on a kibbutz, 2-6 months, also shorter summer programme.

Web: <http://www.kibbutzprogramcenter.org/>

**Lattitude (formerly GAP Activity Projects)** - teaching, care, medicine and the environment in 17 countries, mostly 3-6 months, some longer; also 4-8 week placements.

Web: <http://www.lattitude.org.uk/>

**Madventurer** - 2-8 week placements in building work, teaching, health care, conservation and sport, in Africa, South America and Thailand.

Web: <http://www.madventure.com/>

**Overseas Job Centre** - directory for working, travelling and living abroad including gap years.

Web: <http://www.overseasjobcentre.co.uk/>

**Project Scotland** - opportunities in Scotland for young Scots, up to 12 months, in the arts, environment, sports and working with people with disabilities.

Web: <http://www.projectscotland.co.uk/>

**Project Trust** - voluntary work in 22 countries, teaching, social care, development, conservation or environment, for British or EU passport holders leaving school with university entry qualifications.

Web: <http://www.projecttrust.org.uk/>

**Projects Abroad** - wide range of opportunities, in Latin America, Asia, Africa and Eastern Europe, 2 weeks to 1 year.

Web: <http://www.projects-abroad.co.uk/>

**Quest Overseas** - 3 month voluntary work for 17-25 year-olds, Africa or South America, in conservation or community development, plus learn a language.

Web: <http://www.questoverseas.com/>

**Raleigh** - 5-10 week programmes in Borneo, Costa Rica, Nicaragua and India for 17-24 year olds and volunteer managers over 25.

Web: <http://www.raleighinternational.org/>

**Real Gap Experience** - voluntary or paid work in teaching, community work, sport and wildlife and conservation in nearly 80 countries.

Web: <http://www.realgap.co.uk/>

**Ski Le Gap** - intensive ski or snowboarding instructor courses, in winter, for young people, 1 to 3 months, also learn or improve your French.

Web: <http://www.skilegap.com/>

**STA Travel** - cheap travel and comprehensive assistance in planning a trip.

Web: <http://www.statravel.co.uk/>

**The Year in Industry (Scotland)** - a paid 'year out in industry' in the UK, usually in engineering, science or computing, but also in business and other fields.

Web: <http://www.yini.org.uk/>

**Travellers** - opportunities in 300 projects in 21 countries, flexible programmes, 2 weeks to a year.

Web: <http://www.travellersworldwide.com/>

**Year Out Drama** - intensive, practical drama course, 1 year, particularly good for young actors, links with the Royal Shakespeare Company and Edinburgh Festival.

Web: <http://www.yearoutdrama.com/>