

# Thinking of taking a Gap Year?



Examples of 'Gap Year' Specialists below: -



<https://www.gapyear.com/>



<https://www.gap360.com/>

# Thinking of taking a Gap Year?

Thinking of taking a gap year before starting university or beginning work on a school leaver programme? Plan ahead so you get what you want out of your time out.

There are plenty of potential benefits to having a gap year after you finish your A levels, Scottish Highers or equivalent. But to get the most out of it you need to have some idea of what you want to achieve.

It will help you later on to be able to tell employers why you took a gap year and what you did with it. Recruiters typically don't mind either way whether you take a gap year, but if you do one they may well ask about it and won't be impressed if you ended up spending most of your time at home watching TV.

Your main options will be working, volunteering and travelling. You might find ways to combine these together or do a bit of everything at different points in time.

What do you want to achieve from your gap year?

Reasons for taking a gap year include the following. Which is most important to you?

- Having a break from studying
- Getting work experience (either in a particular area or just in general)
- Getting life experience
- Having time to do something you particularly want to do, such as going travelling
- Deciding what to do in life
- Earning some money
- Having a second attempt at getting into the university/degree programme/school leaver programme you really want
- Being able to apply to university with the advantage of already knowing what grades you've got.

Prioritising your gap year aims will help you plan your time

Knowing which aim is most important to you will help you plan your time.

For example, if it's having a second attempt at getting onto your preferred degree programme then you'll need to make sure you're available for interviews at the relevant time of year.

You might therefore choose to delay that trip to New Zealand until you have an offer of a place. You might also plan to get some relevant work experience early in your gap year that will look good on your application.

If your main aim is to clarify your direction in life, you'll probably want to plan in a series of different activities across the year to allow you to try different things, rather than waiting for inspiration to strike while you work on the till at Tesco.

Taking action before your gap year

Think about what you can do before your gap year that will help you achieve your aims.

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For example, if you want to spend a year travelling overseas before going to university, some courses will allow you to apply in your final year at school and then defer entry if you are offered a place. That would save you the hassle and expense of trying to get back to the UK for interviews, or worrying about where you can find wi-fi to log onto UCAS Track while you're half way up the Amazon.

If you want to work during your gap year, it might be easier to find a job if you have completed relevant voluntary work or training. For example, if you fancy spending a year as a healthcare assistant it may help if you can squeeze in some volunteering in a hospital or mental health setting before you leave school.

## **Pin down your aims**

If you have a clear aim such as 'Get a job in retail and save at least £2,000 towards the cost of uni' then you are well on your way. If your main goal is less clear-cut, try to pin it down.

- If your priority is 'having a break from studying', what would you prefer to do instead?
- Aiming at 'getting life experience'? Think about what this means to you – for example, is it having a full-time job, experiencing a new culture or being the responsible adult in charge of a group of children?
- If you want to spend a year 'deciding what to do in life', consider what your career options are and which potential gap year activities could help you choose between them. For example, if you're deciding between a career as a doctor or an actor you might decide to get a job in a local nursing home, audition for parts in plays with local amateur groups and book yourself a place on a one-week taster course at a drama school.

## **Can you afford your plans?**

If you want to travel, take a course or do a paid-for volunteer placement abroad you need to work out how you will pay for it. You also need to factor in living costs if you are thinking of staying at home. In particular, are your parents willing for you to continue living with them without contributing to costs, or will they expect you to start paying your way? Having an honest chat with them now could prevent your plans being derailed further down the line.

## **Want more information?**

Discuss with Mr M Godley

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