

Gap years and deferred entry

You may already know what you want to do with your life and are dead set on becoming an artist, teacher or scientist, for example. But for whatever reason, you may not want to launch straight into the world of academia and feel you want to grow as a person by getting some life or work experience first.

Traditionally gap years were associated with travelling abroad to explore other cultures or see the world. And, while that is still the case, more students are using this time to volunteer or work in areas that interest them, as a way of enhancing their career prospects or knowledge of their chosen course of study. For others, it can be a way of checking that they have chosen the correct path; some may decide that a career in care or nursing, for example, isn't really for them and choose another course of study.

Many students are now working for a year before going to university, to save money to help finance their studies, particularly due to recent rises in tuition fees (applicable in England, Wales and Northern Ireland) and greater competition for university places. Some work for part of the year then use their earnings to travel for a few months.

'Mini-gaps' are now more popular, involving shorter trips lasting up to a couple of months, before courses begin in October.

One important fact to consider is that 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 and purpose.

Taking a gap year

Before deciding whether to take a gap year, think about the reasons why you want to do it. Think about your strengths and weaknesses as well as your interests, and what you want to achieve out of it. This should guide you on planning your year out in the right way.

The gap year can last up to 16 months, from the last Higher exam until the university 'Freshers' Week', and can offer many new opportunities such as:

- gaining valuable 'real' work experience – paid or voluntary
- learning a language
- seeing a bit of the world
- learning new skills, such as diving or teaching English as a foreign language
- learning more about yourself as a person.

Once you have decided the reasons why you want to take a gap year, you could choose to:

- do paid or voluntary work, at home or abroad
- work in industry, care or conservation and the environment
- teach English to children or adults in a developing country.

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.

Deferring your year of entry

If you intend to defer entry to university for a year, you should apply in the normal way during 2021-2022 but indicate clearly on your UCAS form that you wish to enter in 2022. 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 2021/22.

- Check that your institution of choice will accept a deferred application. Some departments do not accept deferred applications.
- You must meet the conditions of your offer by the 31 August 2022.
- Conservatoires must be contacted directly.

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.

A note of caution

If you decide to spend your gap year abroad, there are many good gap year providers you can use, 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 \(FCO\)](#) publish a gap year planning guide on their website.

Finance

In most cases, if you plan a gap year abroad, you will have to fund it yourself – perhaps by selling home-made or second hand products, or doing some part time work. You might get some help from charitable institutions and grant-making trusts.

If you are doing paid work, you may be entitled to claim back tax that has been deducted from your wages, providing that you haven't earned over the personal allowance threshold. See [HM Revenue and Customs](#) for more details.

Important further information and resources for gap years

There are countless websites out there with advice and organisations who arrange gap years. But here are some to start you off with.

- [Year Out Group](#) - you can find a list of gap year companies that are registered with this group on the website.
- [BUNAC](#)
- [Volunteer Scotland](#)
- [Raleigh International](#)

