

Every year thousands of young Brits take a year out of education in search of an experience of a lifetime, escaping from the pressures of sixth form, exams, the endless university courses on offer, or the thrilling prospect of having to find a job. Last year 20% of uni applicants applied for a deferred entry so they could take a "gap" and the increasing interest has sparked new and exciting programmes which cater for everything, from round the world trips to voluntary work in the UK. The deadline for university applications is drawing closer and closer, and as the cost of higher education increases with

top-up fees and living expenses it's more important that if we do go to uni, we can start our course knowing we've made a good choice instead of feeling that it was just the next step up the ladder. So for anyone who isn't sure which direction they're headed after school, then a gap year could help sort you out. For example, you might end up trying different types of work that you wouldn't normally consider, and your CV will benefit from the new skills.

Most gap year projects give you skills that are valued by employers, such as team work, communication and resilience, simply because you'd be in a new situation with new people. For

anyone who already has a career in mind then it's a great time to gain work experience that isn't boring - for instance teaching English abroad to children could help with teaching or psychology, as well as being fun!

Is it a waste of money or a chance of a lifetime?



The possibilities are never ending,

so choosing the programme right for you could seem a bit daunting. You can go abroad on a cultural exchange, work with children, animals or people with disabilities, participate in conservation projects or community projects, learn a language or gain sport qualifications... just to mention a few! The best programmes usually have a mix of paid work, volunteer work, learning and travelling, but can be expensive. Is it a waste of money or a chance of a lifetime? Some organisations offer financial help to school leavers to raise funds for trips through sponsorship, or some gapers work full time for half a year to pay for a 3-6 month course during the second half of the year.

On the other hand, when travelling there's more to think of than just the pluses. You have to think of medical issues like jabs and first aid kits, visas and any extra travel expenses as well as guidebooks and maps in case you get lost!

So, to end, if you feel lost and don't know what you want to do or simply want to have a good year doing something a bit different then there are plenty of gap year programmes out there for you, showing that getting a job or going to uni isn't the only option after school. The most important thing is just to do something that you enjoy, and not be pressurised into doing anything you don't want to do. Above all else, have fun!

USEFUL INFORMATION

- » www.changingworlds.co.uk
- » www.gapwork.com
(masses of online info, guidance about choosing, publications and surveys as well as parents pages)
- » www.gaoyeardirectory.co.uk
- » www.gapyearfares.co.uk
(defiantly worth a look to see if one's happening near you)
- » www.yearoutgroup.org
- » www.worldwidevolunteering.org.uk
(has a huge searchable database for young people)
- » www.i-to-i.co.uk
- » www.findagap.com