



ABINGDON

Gap Year Guide

December 2019

If you are a Sixth Form pupil at Abingdon School who is thinking – even remotely – about taking a Gap Year, this Guide is for you! It is intended to help you think carefully through all the considerations involved in electing, planning, and managing a Gap Year. We hope it assists you in making a decision that is right for you.

WHY TAKE A GAP YEAR?

There are five reasons why you might decide to take a Gap Year:

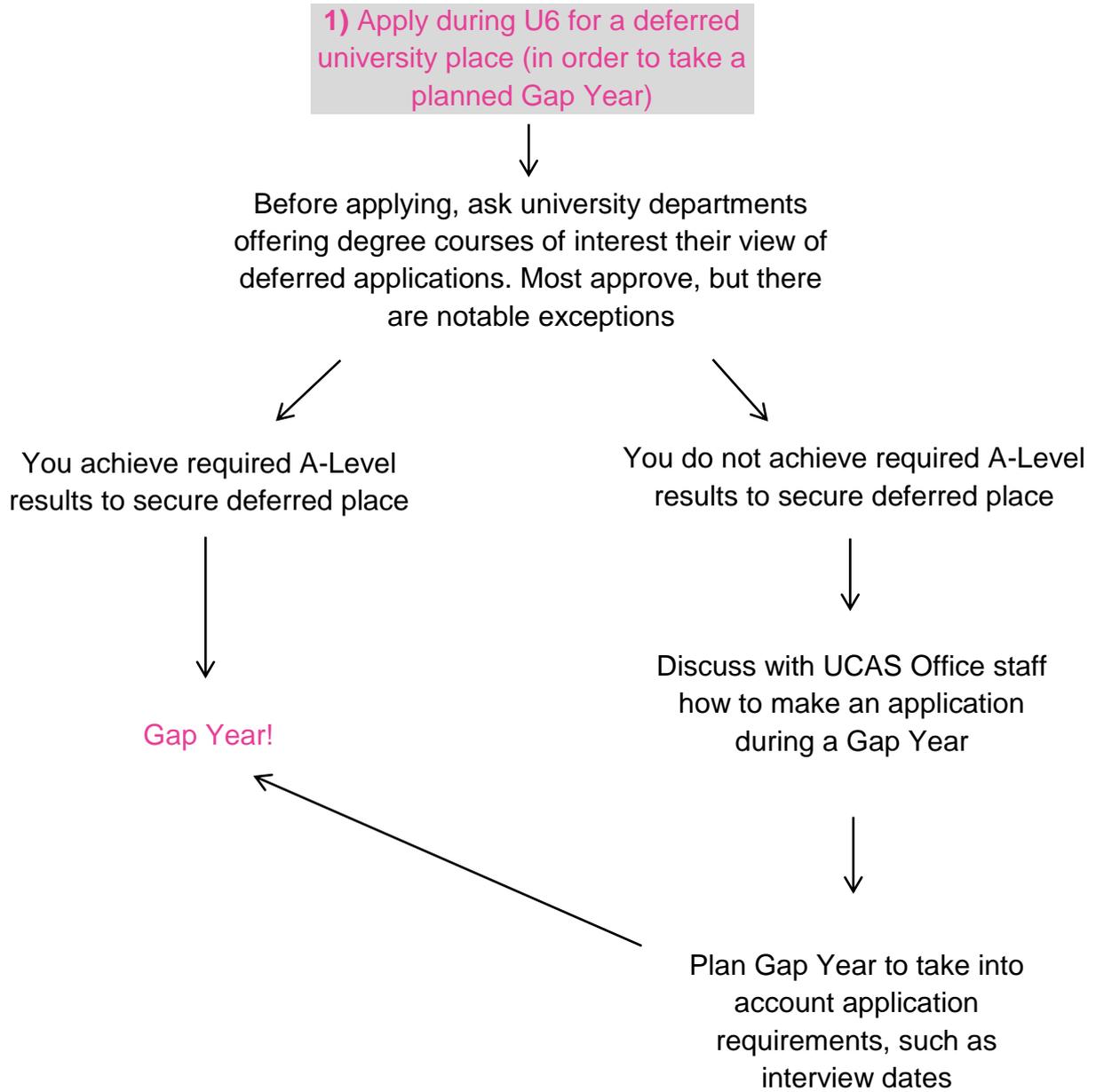
- **Things you want to do.** You might have things you want to do that you can only do if you have an extended period of time to do them, with little else demanding your attention, such as study.
- **A break from school.** You might feel it's just too much to go straight from secondary school to university and you feel you want or need time to take a break from your studies, think about what your next move might be, and perhaps do something indulgent for yourself.
- **Time to figure out what comes next.** You might need time to figure out what to do next. There's no sense in spending time or money on your education if you really have no idea what direction to pursue. Taking time to think about your future, outside of the hurly-burly of the school timetable, can bring clarity.
- **Quench thirst to socialise/party.** If you are someone who has a big social life and likes to party, you might benefit from some time to quench that thirst before you're truly ready to submit yourself to another 2-4 years of full-time education or the demands of a full-time job or apprenticeship.
- **Opportunity to earn money.** You might want or need to earn money to pay for whatever comes next, whether it is to pay course fees, to provide seed capital for a start-up business idea, or to travel.

- **Secure better grades or different A-Level.** You might need better predicted or actual grades to get offers from a preferred university or a preferred university course. If your predicted grades are low, you might conclude it's a waste of time to apply with those predicted grades because of the kinds of offers you are likely to get. And if actual grades, you might need the time to re-study, revise and resit exam modules. You might even need to take a different A-Level in order to be eligible for an offer from a preferred university course and need a Gap Year to get that A-Level.
- **Apply for a different university course.** You might want (or need) another shot at the UCAS or Overseas university application process because you realise you applied to the wrong university course and places on the course you now want are not available through UCAS Extras or Clearing.
- **Improve your university application.** You might be unhappy with the offers you have, and you think doing certain things during a Gap Year could significantly improve your application next time around and potentially get you better offers, including an offer from a top choice university/course.

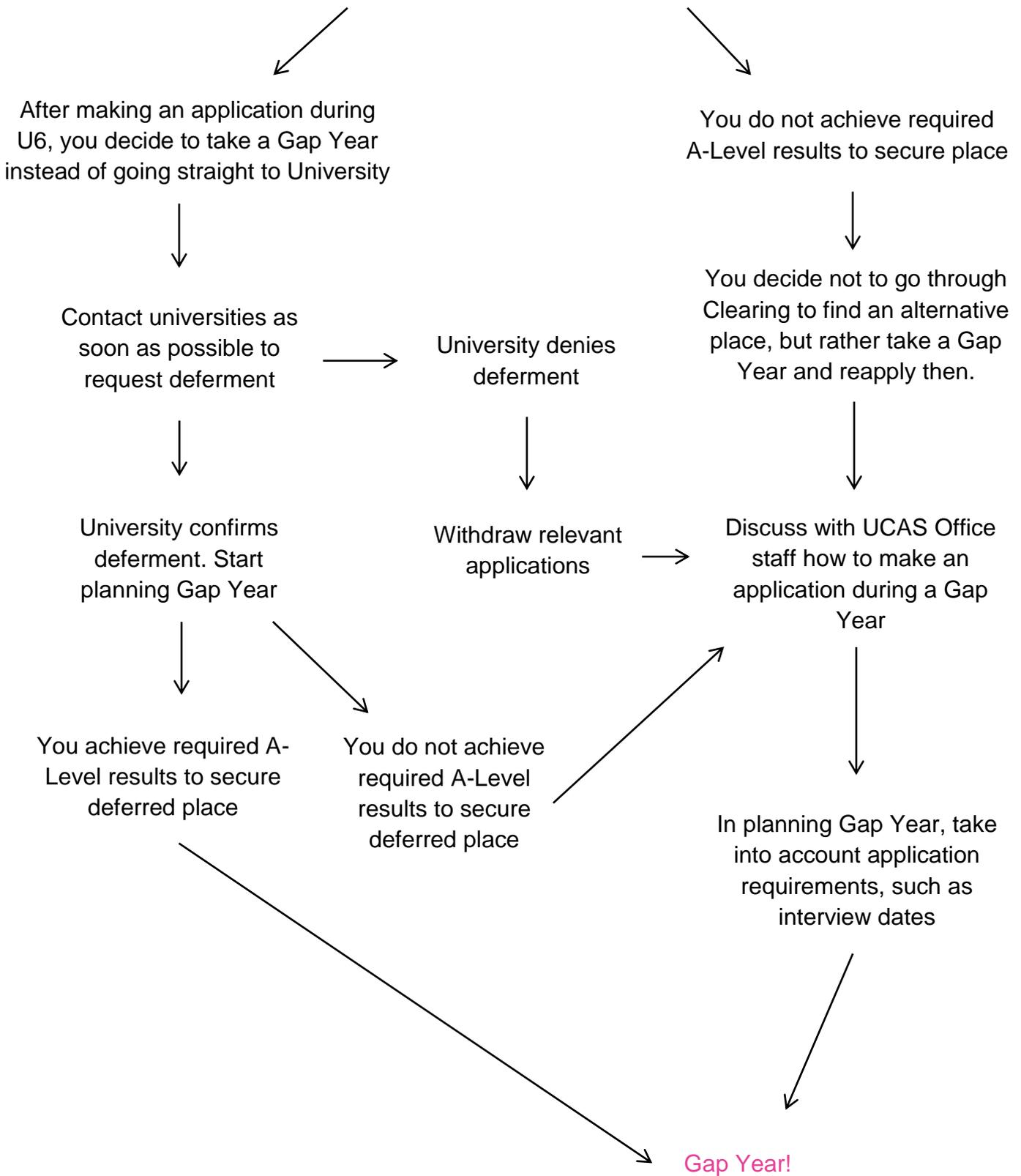
There are of course variations on all these themes, and you might have more than one of these reasons for considering a Gap Year.

UCAS AND GAP YEAR PLANNING

There are three common routes to a Gap Year:



2) Apply during U6 for a university place starting following academic year



3) Decide not to apply during U6 for a deferred university place (in order to take a planned Gap Year)



Discuss with UCAS Office staff
how to make an application
during a Gap Year



In planning Gap Year, take
into account application
requirements, such as
interview dates



Gap Year!

If you apply during U6 for a deferred place so you can take a Gap Year...

- you may well be asked about your Gap Year should you be invited to interview, so make sure you have something constructive to talk about!
- make sure you understand when and how you will need to apply for a student loan with deferred entry (if you intend to apply for a loan)
- you will need to be contactable during your Gap Year to receive important information about starting your course, as well as applying for accommodation and other preparation work. On the UCAS application form, you should nominate someone else (e.g. a family member) to be contacted on your behalf during your Gap Year, but there will be some things you need to do personally, so make sure you find out exactly what is required in advance

If you decide to defer entry after having received offers from university in order to take a Gap Year...

- you will need to contact these universities to discuss why you want to defer your entry and whether it will be possible
- the university has the right to deny deferment
- you will need to consider the same implications as if you decided to defer before application (see above)
- keep in mind that Clearing is only for places for the next academic year

If you decide to reapply for university during a Gap Year...

- because you did not achieve the A-Level results required by the offers you hold or you did not want to go through Clearing, use a Gap Year to retake A-Level exam modules in which you did poorly and gain valuable experiences that will put you in a stronger position for a second application
- the UCAS process can restrict your plans, particularly travelling, so make sure you are aware of when you need to be available, such as for interviews

If you decide not to apply for university during U6 and to take a Gap Year...

- If your actual A-Level grades are better than your predicted A-Level grades, and if your Gap Year has been full of constructive experiences, your application may be stronger than it otherwise would have been
- the same implications as deciding to reapply for university during your Gap Year apply if it is your first application (see above)

REWARDS AND RISKS OF TAKING A GAP YEAR

Below are some of the rewards and risks of taking a Gap Year. These are, by definition, subjective, so what might be listed as a reward might be a risk for you, and vice versa!

Rewards	Risks
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• meeting new people• visiting new places• learning new skills• the chance to develop existing skills• experiencing things you might not otherwise have the opportunity to experience• the chance to return to education with renewed enthusiasm and an enhanced perspective after a refreshing break• if undecided about the future, the chance to clarify what you want to do• the chance to gain experience and skills that could prove useful in a further/higher education and beneficial to a future career• the chance to earn money	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• can incur significant costs• requires significant planning• demands a very independent approach• easy to lose touch with friends who aren't taking a Gap Year• you will start further/higher education a year later than the majority of your peers• you may have to apply to further/higher education more autonomously (dependent on which path to a Gap Year you take)• skills and knowledge necessary for your course could go 'rusty'; your 'study muscle' could atrophy.• if you have a further/higher education place lined up and then decide you want to take a different path, you will have to start all over again• you could lose academic focus or

- the chance to experience total independence and responsibility for a period of time
- having the bond of a shared experience with others who take a Gap Year
- time to rectify mistakes made with A-Level choices and/or results
- opportunities to boost your CV for a future employer looking for the skills that come from planning and experiencing a Gap Year
- momentum ahead of continuing your education
- total independence and responsibility can be daunting and difficult to deal with
- if you aren't constructive with what you do, you may have lost more than gained from the Gap Year
- you may not attain the clarity and purpose you wanted to, and feel like you've 'wasted' a year
- Some universities are less willing to consider deferred entry for some of their courses

GOALS FOR A GAP YEAR

The individual goals you set for your Gap Year are very personal and subjective. However, the chief goal for any Gap Year should be a **constructive** use of your time. Alongside pursuit of your goals will come endless opportunities for personal development, fun and adventure, of course, often in ways that you did not expect or plan!

Benefits of Setting Goals

- Having a structure to your year can help smooth the transition back into 'real life', whatever you end up doing next
- Goals can help you continue life after your Gap Year with a renewed sense of purpose, focus, and direction
- Volunteering and gaining work experience in relevant sectors can enhance your future prospects in education and employment

Tips for Setting Goals

The overriding objective of any Gap Year should be a constructive use of your time to achieve something important to you. What is important to you may not be important to the next person. The individual goals you set for your Gap Year will be very personal, and thus no two Gap Years will (or should) look alike. Your Gap Year should be a year of activity that reflects what you want to get out of it.

Choosing what you will do on a Gap Year starts with setting goals, which broadly fall into four 'categories':

Goal: 'Adventure' – You might seek some kind of adventure. For example, a physical challenge that requires you be in peak physical condition; some sort of culturally immersive experience that you are yearning for; a unique experience that you will likely never have the chance to pursue if you don't do it now; or just a

chance to get out of the cozy environs of Oxfordshire and out there into a whole new world.

Goal: 'Course and Career' – You might want to learn a new skill or enhance existing skills in some area of interest, perhaps an area you did not have a chance to explore while at Abingdon? Or gaining experience in a career area you intend to pursue or would like to trial to see if it suits you so you can make a better decision about what comes next.

Goal: 'Cause' – You might want to do something for a worthy cause that you feel passionate about and which benefits someone other than yourself...or the environment.

Goal: 'Money' – You might want (or need) to earn money for your continued education or to buy something (like a car) or for some future use (like seed capital to start up a business).

Remember...

You can combine goals in any or all of these categories into your Gap Year plan. You will also achieve things you did not expect or intend, so reviewing your experiences after your Gap Year can help you understand how your Gap Year has benefitted you.

It might be worth discussing your goals with other people and getting feedback on how you intend to spend your Gap Year.

People with an insight into university admissions, such as tutors and the UCAS Applications team, can help you think about activities that would benefit current and future applications, while friends or family who have taken a Gap Year can help you understand more personal elements.

WHAT MIGHT YOU DO ON A GAP YEAR?

What you do on a Gap Year depends on what you want to get out of it, which varies from person to person. Your Gap Year should be tailored to your interests. A Gap Year is what you make it.

There are four broad categories of Gap Year activities: **Work, Travel, Study** and **Volunteer**.

Remember...

A Gap Year can be a combination of any of these activities. You can spend time doing all three, combine volunteering and travel by volunteering abroad, work for 6 months in order to travel or to fund a volunteering activity, or even work abroad.

Think outside the box. There is a world of opportunities to explore, so the obvious option for someone else may not be the best option for you. Look beyond your learning, beyond School to find something you're really interested in and pursue it.

Work

Why work during your Gap Year?

- earn and save money
- gain real experience of the world of work, potentially in an area of career interest
- meet new people, some of whom might serve as referees in future
- develop your maturity and sense of independence
- take advantage of networking opportunities
- build valuable experience and skills for launching a career
- complete something tangible to discuss in your first job interview
- gain a real work ethic and understand the value of earning your own money

Remember...

Working in a field you may eventually pursue in your career shows real passion and enthusiasm, and can enhance your application to and ultimate experience of a further/higher education course as well as your chances of securing your first job. Different work placements can vary greatly, so it might be worth completing two shorter placements to give you more workplace experience.

Being employed for a year could make returning to academic study feel like a step backwards; going back to essays and exams after working can be a difficult transition. Alternatively, it could leave you ready to return to education with renewed enthusiasm for a particular subject and future career.

There could be a steep learning curve between School and employment, which may be difficult to adapt to, particularly if working unsociable hours.

If you choose to work abroad, make sure you do thorough research into working visa requirements to avoid any problems.

Travel

Why travel during your Gap Year?

- experience new places
- understand new cultures
- improve current language skills
- learn a new language
- meet new people
- exercise independence and responsibility

Remember...

Make sure you travel with purpose; when it comes to discussing your Gap Year with prospective employers or university admissions tutors, you don't want it to come across as one very long holiday.

There are a huge number of companies dedicated to planning travel experiences for Gap Year students. They vary in quality, however, and 'trips/expeditions' often come with a hefty price tag, so beware! Some experiences offered by Gap Year travel companies are beneficial to local communities, some are frivolous, and some sound beneficial but turn out to be frivolous! The greatest of care must be taken if choosing to use a Gap Year travel company.

Gap Year Fairs can be useful events where you can meet representatives from Gap Year travel companies and discuss the travel opportunities they organise. If you go, bring a very discerning eye and ear, ask the tough (if awkward) questions, and don't accept answers that don't make sense to you. Probe beyond the headlines.

University admissions tutors and prospective employers may look more favorably on a truly independent approach to travel, one that demonstrates your organizational abilities, independence, and maturity, so relying on a Gap Year travel company to organize your experience for you may reflect poorly in the eyes of some.

It is very easy to over think and over plan travel. The best experiences come with an open mind and an open book, so leave your plans somewhat fluid! The people you meet while travelling will influence how you spend your time, so it's unlikely things will go exactly as you might have planned...and that's OK.

Study

Why study during your Gap Year?

- study a subject of interest that you simply did not have an opportunity to study at Abingdon, perhaps a subject you dropped after GCSE which you now regret.
- prepare to re-sit modules of A-Level exams in which you did poorly
- study for A-Level subjects you need to be eligible to apply to a particular degree course
- improve your university application by demonstrating intellectual curiosity in a subject that relates to your proposed degree course
- see what a university is like before applying to it by attending a summer study programme in the UK or abroad.

Remember...

Studying can be a small or large part of a Gap Year; it's entirely up to you. But don't dismiss the idea of study out of hand just because it seems incongruent with taking a Gap Year.

Volunteer

Why volunteer during your Gap Year?

- the opportunity to make a difference in other people's lives
- helping a charity achieve its mission
- gain skills relevant to your future course or career path (e.g. future medics can volunteer at hospitals, care homes, or even charities that provide holidays and experiences for disabled children and adults)
- can provide opportunities for travel and cross-cultural exchange
- can enhance personal development

Remember...

If you intend to volunteer abroad, realise that some forms of 'voluntourism' organised by Gap Year companies, especially in parts of the world that are very popular with students, can be damaging – or at best ineffective – for local communities, depending on what you actually do and how it is organised. The rise of 'voluntourism' has led to countless commercial Gap Year companies claiming to aid the local community, but actually profiting while making little impact, and giving volunteers unsatisfying experiences with little purpose or reward. Do substantial research before committing yourself.

A month should be the minimum time commitment to make a positive impact, and 12 weeks is thought of as allowing enough time to integrate with the local community and deliver useful work. Volunteer work can be office-based as much as 'hands on', so do some research to work out where you can make the most impact.

There are innumerable causes that need volunteers in the UK as well as abroad – don't forget to look for opportunities closer to home.

COSTS OF A GAP YEAR

The cost of a Gap Year depends entirely on what you plan to do. Below we outline the types of costs you might incur for each of the three categories of Gap Year activities: Work, Travel and Volunteering. The more research you do, the fewer surprises you will have!

Work

- **Commuting costs**
- **Accommodation and living costs.** Even if you intend to live at home, will your parent(s)/guardian expect you to contribute financially?
- **Clothing costs.** Your workplace may require a certain standard of dress, so you may need to buy clothes.
- **Social activities.** Going out after work to pubs, restaurants, sporting events, shows, etc. can be costly!

Remember...

Earning real money for the first time – and spending it just as quickly – can leave you with a zero balance in your bank account. Take the opportunity to learn and practise budgeting skills.

Travel

- **Travel.** Planes, trains, buses, car hire, taxis, tuk-tuks, rickshaws...all cost money
- **Luggage.** Do you need to pay for hold luggage if flying on a budget airline?
- **Visas**
- **Vaccinations**
- **Insurance.** If you intend to do watersports or extreme sports, try and decide this beforehand so that you can get an appropriate travel insurance policy and not have to try and change it while away. Do you also need to insure cameras, phones, etc.? In the event that you need to be repatriated (flown home) for emergency medical treatment, would you be covered? Read the small print before signing a policy so you know what you are covered for and what not!
- **Accommodation.** There is a wide range (and price) of basic overnight accommodation, so do your research to find the best value for money
- **Exit fees.** Some countries charge visitors a fee to leave. The amount and accepted payment methods for these fees vary from country to country
- **Clothing.** You'll need to dress appropriately for the country you're visiting, not just for weather but also for entering some historic/religious sites
- **Living costs.** Cost per day will vary dramatically, depending on how you live and living costs of different countries
- **Social activities.** Costs will vary depending on what you do and the country you are in
- **Keeping in touch.** Using your phone abroad can incur high charges. Using an internet café to email and Skype will also cost you (but nowhere near as much!)
- **Activities and excursions.** Guided activities and trips will vary greatly in cost, and currency exchange rates and commissions can vary widely depending on where/from whom you change money
- **Emergency funds.** It is a good idea to set aside a pot of money to tap if you need it urgently

Remember...

Be realistic with your plans – you need to be able to fund them! The costs of travelling can seem very daunting, but doing research and discussing your plans with people who have travelled before can help you save money and get the best bang for your buck. Try looking at blogs and advice pages for up to date tips about travel costs.

It may seem like a good idea to work briefly while travelling to increase your spending budget as you go; however some countries do not allow tourists to work and others require you to have a working visa. If you choose to disregard this, you could be deported and banned from visiting that country again.

Study

- **Course & Exam Fees.** Certain summer study programmes, especially those outside the UK, can be very expensive.
- **Books and Materials**
- **Accommodation and Living costs.** If you enroll in a summer course, and it is too far to commute to from home, and you live residentially, you'll have costs to bear.
- **Computer.**
- **Transportation.** If in the UK, probably low cost, but if outside the UK, transportation costs could be considerable.

Volunteer

- the costs of volunteering are likely to be a combination of the costs of work and travel
- some volunteering placements may cover all your costs as a reward for your time
- some organisations may not be able to afford to cover any of your costs
- you may have to pay up to large sums to volunteer for some causes, as extra resources will need to be used on you (e.g. a wildlife conservation charity will need to assign rangers to assist and protect you, who need to be paid)

Remember...

Given the type of volunteering you intend to do, research thoroughly for any unexpected costs. You might want to do some sightseeing or activities during your volunteer placement, so make sure you factor those costs in too.

TIPS WHILE ON GAP YEAR

Here are three tips of things to do while on your Gap Year – three things that you will be glad that you have done after returning:

- Keep a journal of your experiences. Use 'DLA' as a reminder to note what you Did, Learned, Achieved).
- Note education/career ideas for the future. You won't remember everything!
- Build a network of people who might prove helpful in future; note their names in photos – an aide memoire of what key people looked like.

RETURNING FROM A GAP YEAR

A Gap Year – no matter what you do – can be a life-changing experience. You may finish the year having learned some invaluable life lessons that you hope to continue to apply back in the 'real world'; you may feel like you have become an independent adult; and in any area of activity, it's likely that your perceptions and attitudes will change (and you may not realise this until you return to 'normal' pre-Gap Year life).

It's worth keeping in mind when you plan your Gap Year that it will end, and you may need to schedule a little time to adjust.

Remember...

No matter what you have done during your Gap Year, it's very beneficial to keep a note/diary of it and, at the end of the year, review everything you've done.

This review process can help you realise the skills you've gained or honed, the personal development you've undergone, and how you can use these in future job applications or during a further/higher education course.

If you have been travelling...

- You will experience reverse culture shock, and need to adjust to being in the UK again
- It won't be just you that has changed while you've been away; you may find it difficult to reconnect with friends and family who have also changed in some way
- Try not to be a travel bore; it's understandable to want to tell everyone about your amazing experiences, but it will be difficult for people to understand and appreciate them when they haven't experienced them. You will need to be patient with people and explain things as much as possible, to help them understand why you found something so incredible. Make sure you keep the contact details of the people you meet travelling, so that you can reminisce with them as well!
- You may have caught the travel bug and be desperate to get back on the travel trail. Leave time until your next trip, so you have something to work towards.

If you have been in employment...

- It can be difficult to adjust to not having a steady wage and the independence and responsibility to which you have become accustomed
- Try and take advantage of your employment experience as a real world context for a further/higher education course (if your employment was in a field relevant to your course)
- Update your CV with what you have done
- Maintain the contacts you made, as you may want to complete another placement there in future or ask them for a reference
- You can line up your next placements during holidays in further/higher education as soon as you finish your first one!

If you have been volunteering...

- If you are very passionate about the cause you were supporting, you can spread the word to family and friends, continue to support them financially or even hold fundraising events for them
- If you want to make a difference in other areas, research your local community at home or university for charities you can get involved with. Universities will almost certainly have a RAG (Raising & Giving) society

USEFUL LINKS

Below is a chart of useful websites to kick off your Gap Year research, and an idea of the areas they cover. This is just a starting point – independent research is vital for planning a Gap Year! Find the most up to date information you can and try to find realistic accounts of different experiences, not just the accounts designed to market them.

Company	URL	General Advice	Work	Travel	Volunteer
The Gap Year Guidebook	www.gap-year.com	x	x	x	x
Year Out Group	www.yearoutgroup.org	x	x	x	x
YINI	www.etrust.org.uk/the-year-in-industry		x		
Not Going to Uni	www.notgoingtouni.co.uk	x	x	x	x
Gap Guru	www.gapguru.com		x	x	x
Prospects	https://goo.gl/qPd1w6	x		x	
Studential	www.studential.com/gap-year-guide	x			
Step Together	www.step-together.org.uk				x
Raleigh International	https://goo.gl/4yRI1				x
Time Bank	www.timebank.org.uk				x
Student Ladder	https://goo.gl/mX0GhA	x	x		

Company	URL	General Advice	Work	Travel	Volunteer
Gap Year	www.gapyear.com	x	x	x	x
Global Volunteer Network	https://goo.gl/sOEA5			x	x
Overseas Job Centre	https://goo.gl/CBfCvd		x	x	
Responsible Travel	https://goo.gl/XGRzN			x	
Anywork Anywhere	https://goo.gl/wAfaa		x		
Gap Work	www.gapwork.com		x	x	x
Summer Jobs	www.summerjobs.co.uk		x		
Working Abroad	www.workingabroad.com		x	x	
Project Trust	www.projecttrust.org.uk			x	X
Travellers Worldwide	https://goo.gl/VEvgL		x	x	x
The Student Room	https://goo.gl/TJQQ	x	x	x	x
Real Gap	www.realgap.co.uk		x	x	x
Plan My Gap Year	https://goo.gl/bszo8o		x	x	x
Success at School	https://goo.gl/hbAbMC	x	x	x	x