

Starting Points: Taking a gap year

Taking a gap year - whose idea?

Often, as final year approaches, students think about whether to take a gap year or not, whether on an individual basis, or perhaps going travelling with friends.

Although the term 'gap year' is commonly used, be aware that realistically this may be a much shorter period of time. Consider whether just a few months may:

- provide more flexibility to accommodate other plans and commitments
- provide a preliminary period to save up to fund the experience

However short or long your 'gap year' experience becomes, it is a period of your life, your time and your career plan, so it is in your own interest to research and prepare well in order to benefit from the experience as you see fit.

Gap year - what do you want to achieve?

Opting for a gap year may be to achieve a particular aim and purpose, to create a space between study and work, or to have a break prior to further study. It may be to gain specific skills, cultural awareness, added life skills, or be a period to offer voluntary experience or gain work experience.

Whatever the choices you make, know your aims and direct your plans towards achieving those. In any situation, you are likely to be developing transferable skills such as communication, decision making, adaptability, teamwork, leadership and interpersonal skills. These skills are generally attractive to employers but bear in mind that there may also be other specific skills that may be useful for particular sectors of work that you are considering for the future. You are gathering 'evidence' of skills and experience to demonstrate in future applications and, having opted for this experience, you are showing initiative, resilience and self-reliance. Added maturity, plus the potentially unique experiences that a gap year may bring, can really help you stand out in an application process.

A career plan?

- Do give some thought to a career plan. Some of the advantages of a gap year have already been highlighted - but equally be aware of any disadvantages.
- Know that you will need to sell your experience in a positive light.
- Know the process and timing of applications to the sector(s) you may be interested in applying to, as you may need to plan around this.
- If you plan to return to study, could the 'gap' break your momentum in any way?

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These are all very individual considerations for you to think about before implementing your plans.

Planning a Strategy

We recommend that you follow the **Research - Plan - Prepare** strategy for both your gap year and career plans.

Tips:

- Actively **Research - Plan - Prepare** in order to construct the type of experience you are seeking, either at home or abroad, so that you are formulating plans in line with the objectives you have set yourself.
- Research any specific application processes (such as teaching), as well as gain a general awareness of graduate application processes which may follow a cyclical process.
- Prepare and practise job applications by having your 'application kit' (e.g. CV and personal statement) assembled and up-to-date, and benefit from recording the skills and material of your gap experience as you go, so that you will subsequently be able to add to, and enhance, your CV and applications.
- Explore employer views on gap years. Some may consider deferred entry or they may be able to advise you on how you could still compete in application processes if you are abroad.
- Know where to look for careers information, application and job search support. Use the Student and Graduate Employability Service to help you whilst at Sheffield Hallam and check out the further support you can access from us for up to five years after graduation. Discuss with an Employability Adviser possible actions or implications relating to your own situation.
- Any doubts you have, discuss with others - parents, friends, lecturers. Do it earlier rather than later.

Useful resources

UK graduate websites offering all aspects of online careers information resources and opportunities:

www.prospects.ac.uk Search site for 'Gap Year' and also 'Work Experience'.

<http://targetjobs.co.uk> Search site for 'Working Abroad' and also 'Gap Year'.

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Want to talk it through?

Contact: Careers and Employment for further advice and support:

Phone: 0114 225 3752

Email: careers@shu.ac.uk

[SS Jan 2020]

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