

Taking Time Out

Why do it?

Taking time out is attractive to many students as a break between study and starting your working life. Whether you want to stay in the UK or go abroad, there is a vast range of opportunities. Before you make any decisions however, it is a good idea to ask yourself why you want to do it and what you hope to achieve.

Pros

Depending on what you choose to do, time out can be a great opportunity to gain practical experience in a variety of jobs and help you to decide what you really want to do in the longer term. You can develop a range of transferable skills such as problem-solving and communication and it will increase your confidence and independence and help you develop a greater self-awareness. If you travel abroad you can increase your global and cultural awareness and language skills. You will have the opportunity to try new activities and attempt things you would not normally do. There is also a chance to earn some money and to use these newly acquired skills and experiences in your job applications and interviews on your return. It can be a great opportunity to scratch that travel bug itch, so you are able to focus on your career when you return. It also gives you a break to refresh and consolidate after your studies, before embarking on the next big chapter.

Cons

If you are looking to travel, an obvious consideration is the expense as you could find yourself running up additional debts. If you are out of contact you may not be available to make applications for annual graduate recruitment schemes or employment opportunities. Also beware of the temptation to spend your time on leisure activities rather than developing skills and experiences that will impress future employers. Additionally it could be difficult to secure work experience abroad and you might find yourself working long hours for minimal pay. Adjusting to time away may mean homesickness or equally settling back into working or university life when you return could be difficult.

The employer view

Something else to consider is how potential employers view time out. Most importantly, if you spend your time constructively and can relate it to the world of work, it will be considered favourably. If you are doing something unusual, challenging or adventurous it might help you stand out from the crowd. Try to set yourself objectives on what you would like to achieve which could include specific skills, experience or research relating to your career plans. Spending time challenging yourself may improve your maturity and resilience and your experiences are likely to help you develop other useful employability skills such as determination and adaptability. To make the most of your new found skills and experiences, you must also be able to target and articulate to potential employers.

Decisions to make

In terms of planning, you will need to think about, what you want to do – are you thinking of travelling abroad or staying in the UK? Do you want to spend your whole time doing one activity or in one place? What do you want to gain from the experience? How does this fit in with your career plans? What do you have to offer?

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Do you need to be available on any specific dates in the future? If you are going abroad you also need to check out some vital details about your destination such as whether it is a good time to travel in terms of seasonal weather changes, local events and price rises at popular times of the year. To check out safety and security issues you can use the [Foreign and Commonwealth Office \(FCO\)](#).

Activities

There is a huge range of activities to choose from but it is worth considering how your choice will enhance your skills and how you can articulate your experiences to an employer. There are many opportunities to teach and this will help you develop many useful skills whether you are considering a career in teaching or not. If you have interest in sports or enjoy the outdoor life you might choose something in sports or travel and tourism which will build your teamwork and leadership skills. Similar projects could relate to working on conservation or environmental programmes. Another chance to make a difference could include something related to social work or youth work and community projects. If you are keener on something business related you might consider work experience or an internship which could be more directly related to your chosen career area. This can be a great addition to your CV and an opportunity to gain industry experience and useful contacts for your future plans.

Finance

You will also need to decide how much money you need and how long will it take you to get it. Funds may well come from a mix of sources. Casual work, both before and during your trip, is an obvious option and to save as quickly as possible you will need to be flexible about what you do. Fund-raising could include sponsored events and selling unwanted items online or at car boot sales. You may be able to work while you are away but do research the cost of living, availability of work and any employment or visa restrictions to see how viable this is. Borrowing from family and friends may be an option with a bank loan as a very last resort.

Pre-trip essentials

Depending on your destination you may need to research the country's culture and customs. Are there any healthcare considerations, do you need any vaccinations? For safety and security make a note of your passport, bank and insurance policy details and leave them with someone at home. Check you have the appropriate travel insurance for your chosen destinations and activities. Also check with specific embassies about the necessary terms and conditions necessary for your passport and visas. Do you need a working holiday visa? Does your passport need to be valid after the end of your trip?

Costs and charges

There are numerous organisations with schemes in these areas. However the funding methods vary considerably, some are unpaid, and some may expect you to pay your own travel or even a joining fee so check the terms and conditions very carefully before committing yourself.

Top Tips

- Keep money aside for a flight home and for living costs while you are looking for a job
- Keep a diary whilst you are away as a useful reminder of what you have done. It will help you reflect on the skills you have learned and how you have changed during the year. This will come in useful for applications and interviews

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- Keep your CV updated with the relevant skills, jobs and experience from your time away. This means on your return you should be able to apply for jobs straight away
- Keep up with relevant background reading if you are looking to continue your studies or advancements in your chosen area

Planning for your return

One of the most important aspects of your planning is working out what you are going to do when you get back. Before you go, check application deadlines for graduate programmes in companies and industries that you are interested in so that you can meet early closing dates. Some employers may be prepared to make deferred offers so this may be worth investigating at the start of your final year of studies. Similarly this may also be the case for postgraduate courses but you need to carefully consider the application procedures and implications for funding. Information gathering is much easier while you are still at University as you can attend career talks and employer presentations, as well as discussing your plans with a Careers Consultant, but maybe you can attend events held near wherever you are during your time out. Aim to do as much career planning as you can before you go to ensure you are in the best position to secure a job as early as possible when you return.

Alternatives

Having weighed up the advantages and disadvantages including the fact you will probably leave university in some debt, choosing to take a year out may not always be the best option. You could consider doing a shorter stint and or staying closer to home. As an alternative to deferring a job offer by a whole year consider negotiating a start date around say, April or May as employers may find this more acceptable and you will know you have a job to return to. You might think about combining study with temporary or part time work. This can be a useful way of plugging gaps in your skills and experience record. You might decide to get a job straight after graduation and take a career break once you are in a better position financially and you have a few years work experience under your belt.

Summary

If you are thinking of taking time out after your degree there are a huge range of choices open to you and it can be an unforgettable experience if you decide to do it. When considering your options it is important to be aware of the implications for your career plans and your finances so it's not the right choice for everyone. If you want it to be a success and work for you, you need to carefully plan both your time out and what you are going to do when you come back.

What to do now

[Prospects \(Gap Year\)](#)

[TargetJobs](#) have information on spending your gap year in the U.K.

[Prospects](#) have information on working abroad.

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