

Bridging the gap: Why a gap year may improve you and your career

Gap year, sabbatical, year out - even 'bridge year' as it is referred to at Princeton University – whatever you call it, the number of young people choosing to delay¹ their entry to university is on the rise.

At present 2.5 million teenagers are believed to be on a gap year. Often associated with backpacking around Asia or volunteering in orphanages, the gap year is frequently criticised. Costing, on average, between £3,000 and £4,000, it is an expensive decision. However, a gap year can be one of the most profitable and rewarding years of your life. That is, if you use it wisely. Backpacking and volunteering is not all there is to a gap year. It can be an exciting way of teaching you much about the world of work and ultimately about yourself.

Some have no choice but to take a year out: failure to meet conditions for university, they may need to gain additional qualifications. For others, fuelled by a desire to break convention and do something thrilling, many teens take the plunge simply because they can. There are many new things I want to experience - a gap year seems the perfect way of transitioning from school to higher education.

Not just a glorified holiday

Vast quantities of work experience can be the jewel in the crown² of any undergraduate CV. It allows better understanding of a particular job, helping teenagers to reaffirm their choices in a certain career. Alternatively, they may realise how wrong they were about their future, and therefore themselves.

Funding³ the year can be problematic. The bank of mum and dad is a necessary requirement for most, but part time jobs also become essential. My part time job will help fund some of the activities I have planned to do. It also keeps me, and my CV, busy. For so many on a gap year it is about juggling⁴ what will improve their future prospects, earning money and attempting new and enjoyable things.

Gap year students tend to expose themselves to completely different environments from the structured study of school and university - the independence and freedom equalling a different approach to studying when they do return to it. This may be an idealistic reason, but while experiencing the world of work – whether abroad or locally - outside the bubble of exams and essays, teenagers may realise what they want to do with their lives.

This might be the most important part of the gap year experience for so many. Not the mountain trekking or volunteering which fills the pages of so many teenage blogs but rather the self-realisation which comes when you are forced to act like a fully self-sufficient, self-motivated adult. Cliché - yes, but probably true.

By Katherine Hodgson

Adapted from <http://www.independent.co.uk/student/>

¹ Delay : retarder

² The jewel in the crown : la cerise sur le gâteau

³ Funding : financer

⁴ Juggling : jongler entre

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