

## 6. Taking a gap year

Many students decide to take a gap year before they begin university. This can be a productive way to spend a year and is viewed as a positive experience by many universities and employers. However, you must use your year constructively in order to show it was worthwhile.

If you are thinking of taking a year out, here are some things to consider.

### What you could do

There is a whole range of things you could do during your gap year, like:

- Travel
- Teach abroad
- Volunteer to work on a project at home or abroad
- Work in a paid position to save some money for university
- Gain some unpaid work experience
- Undertake further study or training

### The pros and cons of a gap year

#### Pros

- You may feel more energised and refreshed after a gap year, which could lead to you feeling more motivated towards your studies.
- You may have the chance to work or study in an area related to your course, which will help prepare you for your further studies.
- You may have the opportunity to travel, see new places and have new experiences.
- If you decide on paid work, you can earn some money to help finance your degree.
- You could gain a sense of real personal achievement through your gap year activities.
- A year of more independent living can mean that you are more mature when you begin university.
- If you decide to work or volunteer, you can gain new skills and develop existing ones.

#### Cons

- You may find it hard to settle back into your studies.
- You may not be able to discipline yourself for independent study when you return.
- It could be expensive, for example if you decide to travel or do unpaid work experience.

- Your friends may go off to university, while you will be a year behind them.
- If you don't spend it productively, this could give employers a bad impression.

### Prepare yourself

If you want to take a gap year, you'll need to decide what you want to do and then plan it carefully.

- When deciding what to do, make sure you understand your reasons for a gap year, as this will point you in the right direction.
- A useful starting point is the UCAS gap year guide at [www.ucas.com/gap](http://www.ucas.com/gap).
- Research the options so you make the right decisions – there are a lot of organisations which can give you gap year ideas and more information about what's involved. Some examples can be found in section 14 of this pack.
- Gap year organisations can be helpful, but you don't have to use one. Make sure you shop around to find the best deal and the gap year that's right for you.
- Set yourself goals, so you know what you want to accomplish in your year out.
- Plan your finances, so you don't get into debt. Think about how much you need to earn and/or how much you will spend.

### Completing the UCAS form

If you want to take a gap year, you can still apply to universities one year in advance. You will need to indicate the year that you wish to start on your UCAS form.