

Learning & Leading: Gap Scholarships

● A guide for parents

What are the Learning and Leading Gap Scholarships?

The Learning and Leading gap scholarships enable young geographers to take an overseas gap experience during a year out between school and university. These scholarships provide opportunities for students who would not normally be able to have such experiences. The gap experience aims to be a meaningful learning experience which will benefit your son or daughter's personal development and prepare them for further study of geography at university. The nature of the gap experience will be determined by your son or daughter and their particular aims, interests and abilities. Examples of activities which previous gap scholars have chosen to do include field research, expeditions, cultural exchanges, conservation projects, teaching, educational courses and independent travel.

They do not have to do this on their own and may wish to travel with a friend or join a group placement, project or expedition.

It is expected that gap scholars will be away for a minimum of three months in order to reap the full benefits of the experience, however if this is not appropriate, it may be possible to take several shorter journeys.

Previous gap scholar experiences include:



Annys wanted to improve her Spanish language skills, gain independence and improve her geographical knowledge before university, so she started her gap year with an internship in Seville, Spain and then undertook a conservation placement in Wellington, New Zealand. Here she worked in national parks and wildlife areas restoring native vegetation and controlling introduced species. She then travelled independently, experiencing the geothermal areas of the North Island and the Fjords and Glaciers in the South Island.

The biggest impact this journey had on Annys was to build her confidence and independence and gave her the urge to travel much more extensively. She felt much more prepared to start university, as she was used to living on her own and meeting new people.



Peter had to take an unexpected gap year and wanted to do something relevant to his future degree. He joined a conservation team on a game reserve in South Africa to work on a number of wildlife monitoring projects. He produced maps of the reserve by using data collected in the field to visually represent the movements of the wild animals that the reserve was monitoring. He gained an understanding of the mapping software he was going to be using during his degree and developed his team work skills working with other volunteers.



Mark was interested in a career in glaciology, therefore he decided to join a 10 week expedition to the Svalbard archipelago in the Arctic Ocean with 15 other young explorers. He was involved in mapping glaciers, monitoring a river during the melts; Biology studies involved counting and documenting sightings of bird and mammals; Adventurous activities such as ice climbing, ski-mountaineering, snow holing and building igloos. His gap experience helped to develop his field work skills which he then took to university. He also learnt winter mountaineering skills and gained the confidence to take on leadership roles.

What is the scholarship programme made up of?

Each scholarship includes a bursary of up to £4,000 which can cover reasonable expenses for a gap experience including flights and other transport, in-country accommodation, placement fees, food, insurance, equipment and fees for obtaining documents e.g. passport and visas, and vaccinations.

The scholarship also includes support from the Royal Geographical Society (with IBG) with planning the gap experience through an induction day hosted at the Society, the Learning and Leading Gap Planning Toolkit, and dedicated members of Society staff to discuss plans with by telephone, email or face to face. The scholarship also includes support from a mentor, a geography undergraduate or Society staff with experience of planning a gap year, who will meet your son or daughter on up to six occasions to help them to plan their gap year.

How will a gap year benefit my child?

As well as being fun, gap years can have many benefits. The Learning and Leading gap scholarships are intended to help your child prepare for and get more out of their geographical studies at university by improving their geographical skills and knowledge. A gap year can also benefit your child by improving their personal skills (such as confidence, independence and communication) and broaden their horizons. It could help them to research careers of interest to them. Comments from previous gap scholars about the benefits include:

“It has broadened my view of the wider world and got me out of my comfort zone. I developed confidence and learnt a lot about myself.”

“I have been able to apply the first-hand experience I gained from travelling in my lectures which has enhanced my interest in my course and helped me to decide what modules I would like to study further next year.”

“The gap year has motivated me to work harder in my degree. It helped me decide on what career I would like to pursue.”

“This scholarship has improved my confidence in so many ways and I feel that I can accomplish so much because of it.”

How does my child apply for a scholarship?

Your son or daughter needs to complete an application form and their geography teacher will need to complete a nomination form and email these to the Learning and Leading Project Co-ordinator by the closing date. For application forms and details of the closing date see www.rgs.org/learning&leading

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The applications will be judged against the eligibility and judging criteria. If your child is shortlisted, they will be invited to a short interview at the Society in London or to conduct it via a computer video link or Skype that can be arranged through the school. Following the interview they will be informed by email if they have been selected to take part in the programme. There are normally 12 gap scholarships awarded each year.

Do I have to give me consent for my child to take part in the programme?

Gap scholars must ensure they obtain parental/guardian approval to take part in the programme if they are under the age of 18.

What happens once my child is accepted onto the programme?

They will be invited to an induction day at the Society in December. You will also be invited to attend a parent session at the end of the induction day where you will be able to speak to members of the senior staff at the Society about the scheme.

You will also be sent a pack with full information about the programme and the terms and conditions which we will ask you and your son or daughter to read and sign.

How much support will they get with planning their gap experience?

At the induction day students will be briefed about the programme and will be introduced to the main areas they will need to address when planning and carrying out their gap experiences. They will meet Society staff with experience of gap year travel, and, if they are available, their mentors.

The Gap scholars will receive the Learning and Leading Gap Planning Toolkit which they will use to plan their gap experience.

After the induction day, they will then have an opportunity to meet with their mentor on six occasions over the next six to twelve months at mutually agreed times and place. The mentor will support your son or daughter in setting aims and objectives and researching and planning their gap experience to meet the agreed aims and objectives of their Gap travels. During this planning process your son or daughter will work on completing a detailed proposal for their gap experience which they will then submit to the Society. The Society will review the proposal and either agree to fund the proposal or ask your child to make amendments and resubmit it. Once the Society has accepted the proposal, the funds will be transferred to your son or daughter's nominated bank account.

Who is involved in the scholarships and what role does everyone have?

- **The Royal Geographical Society with IBG's** role is to provide your child with **advice and support** to enable them to research, plan and choose their own gap experiences following good practice procedures. For the avoidance of any doubt it is your child who will hold the responsibility for their gap experience. The Society will provide your son or daughter with a trained mentor who has recent and relevant experience of a gap year. The Society then reviews the gap scholar's detailed gap proposal and will either agree to fund their gap experience and confirm the amount of funding, or request that the proposal be amended and re-submitted. The Society will also remain a source of advice and guidance during and after your child's gap experience, if they require it. The staff at the Society involved in the programme are:
 - **Amber Sorrell**, Learning and Leading Project Coordinator who coordinates the project on a fulltime basis for the Society. She is the first point of contact for all queries relating to the programme.
 - **Shane Winsor**, who manages Geography Outdoors, the Society's centre supporting field research, exploration and outdoor learning which provides



information, training and advice relating to overseas fieldwork and expeditions; and promotes good practice in safety management.

- **Steve Brace**, Head of Education and Outdoor Learning, senior manager responsible for the Society's work with schools and fieldwork and expeditions activities.
- **The mentor:** Each gap scholar is matched with a mentor. The mentors have recent and relevant experience of planning and researching a gap year involving overseas travel. Most of the mentors are current geography undergraduates, recent graduates or RGS-IBG staff. They have a fully enhanced Criminal Records Bureau check. The mentor has direct contact with your son or daughter, their teacher (if under 18) and reports to the Learning and Leading Project Coordinator.
- **Your son or daughter's teacher:** For gap scholars who are currently in school/Sixth Form College, their teacher should be kept informed about and support their student in their gap year plans. They should also support arrangements for the student to meet with their mentor on six occasions over the period leading up to the gap experience, in a school location, if this is the most appropriate.
- **Your child's role:** Once accepted onto the programme, your child will be required to:
 - Attend an **induction day** at the Society at the beginning of the programme and a **debrief day** at the end of their gap year
 - Commit to undertaking a **programme of mentoring**
 - Ensure they obtain **travel health advice** from a medical professional prior to undertaking the gap experience
 - Inform the Society, the placement organisation, travel insurers and any other relevant individuals/organisations of any **pre-existing medical conditions** or medical needs which may impact on them during the gap experience. If they have an existing medical condition, the approval of their plans will be dependent on them demonstrating that they have planned an experience which takes account of this condition and providing a doctor's note to confirm they are able to do the gap experience without compromising their health
 - Ensure they have a **UK passport** with at least 6 months validity beyond the date of their return flight and to obtain the correct **visas** before departure, and any other necessary steps for travel before departure
 - Provide the Society with written evidence (including policy number and cover note), that they have taken out appropriate **travel insurance** to include medical and repatriation costs. They must inform insurers of any required information and any potential change which may affect their policy.
 - Confirm in writing that they have **conducted checks of any provider** they wish to use for their gap experience using the guidance the Society has provided on selecting and checking an overseas placement.
 - **Provide written, photographic, audio, video or other material** upon request by the Project Coordinator before, during and after their gap experience for the purposes of monitoring, sharing experiences with others and evaluation. This is for the use of the Learning and Leading programme and for the Society.
 - **Commit to sharing their experiences** on the programme with others. Following completion of the scholarship, they should train as and become an active **Geography Ambassador** for the Society throughout their undergraduate studies.
 - Maintain **regular communication with the Project Coordinator** prior to, during and after their gap experience.



Will they be safe on their gap experience?

Your child's safety will be your biggest concern. Gap year activities are often, by their very nature challenging, and overcoming unexpected difficulties is part of that challenge.

- We will do our best to ensure that your child is made aware of and follows good safety management procedures in their gap year planning so that their gap experiences are well planned and carried out as safely as possible. However we cannot fully guarantee or supervise your child's safety while they are abroad.
- Part of the planning process is about what to do in the case of an incident or accident, and what they can do if things go wrong. But prevention is better than cure and we work hard to make sure they understand the risks and how to reduce the chances of things going wrong.
- The Society has been closely involved in developing a British Standard, BS 8848 which aims to reduce risk from injury or illness to those participating in Gap Year and other overseas experiences, and provides those organisations that comply with the standard with a way of demonstrating that they are following good practice to manage the experience safely.
- The planning process for the gap scholarships enables your child to independently research, plan and choose a gap experience drawing on good practice procedures identified in BS8848, the British Standard for the provision of visits, fieldwork, expeditions, and adventurous activities outside the UK. BS 8848 sets minimum requirements developed specially for UK organisations that offer adventurous activities abroad to make sure that ventures are planned and managed with care.

You can download the BSI Parents Guide to BS 8848 to check if a venture your child is applying to take part in is likely to be following safe practice from www.rgs.org/BSI

How will I know what my son or daughter is planning to do and what if I am concerned about their plans?

We encourage your son or daughter to discuss their gap year plans fully with you. If you are still concerned then you can contact the Learning and Leading Project Coordinator at RGS-IBG to discuss any concerns or queries you may have directly with her.

What if they change their mind about taking a gap year?

The gap scholarships are intended to enable the students to have a personalised gap experience which they will enjoy and that will benefit their personal development and their geographical studies. The Society will support your child to plan a gap experience that they feel capable of undertaking and will be available to discuss any concerns with them. If however they do decide they no longer wish to go on a gap year or wish to change their plans once they have been approved, they must contact the Project Coordinator immediately to discuss what options are open to them instead.

What are the conditions of the funding?

It is expected that recipients of the gap scholarships will be going onto study a geography or related degree at university.

Funding is conditional on an agreed plan for the gap experience and funding will not be provided until the plans are agreed and confirmed. Once the Society has agreed the proposed gap experience in writing, if it proves necessary to change the approved plans prior to departure your child must inform the Project Coordinator immediately. The Society's funding is given on the basis of agreed plans. Any reasonable changes are unlikely to affect the Society's support, but we do reserve the right to withdraw support if there are substantial changes.



The Society retains the right to withdraw or take back funding if: the participant's plans for their gap experience to be funded by the scholarship are outside of the aims of the Learning and Leading programme; or if the participant cancels the experience.