

Gap Experience Planning Toolkit

**Royal
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Advancing geography
and geographical learning



- For more gap travel information visit www.rgs.org/gap

● Learning and Leading Programme

Learning and Leading is an eight year programme ending in 2016, which uses geography, travel and fieldwork to help raise the aspirations, motivation levels and achievements of young people and students who, through challenging circumstances, have not previously have the opportunity to benefit from such experiences.

Around 400 young people and teachers will directly benefit through the Learning and Leading initiatives which are carefully managed opportunities for learning and personal development.

The programme is delivered through four strands:

- **Summer School:** fully-funded geography fieldwork summer schools for Year 12 students
- **Gap Year Scholarships:** grants and mentoring to enable meaningful travel overseas to Year 13 students wishing to undertake a 'year out' before university
- **Field Apprenticeships:** grants to enable first year undergraduates to undertake overseas geographical research with an academic from their university
- **Teachers Masterclasses:** fully-funded physical and human geography fieldwork masterclass weekends for GCSE and A Level geography teachers

Participants' learning experiences are shared on our website (www.rgs.org/landl) to encourage more young people to undertake fieldwork, get the best out of their gap years and make the most of their studies.

Although the programme will be ending in 2016, the Gap Experience Toolkit will be available to download from the RGS-IBG website and the aspiration is that further funding will be secured to allow the programme to continue further.

For more information about the programme or the Toolkit contact:

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Gap Experience Planning Toolkit

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This toolkit is designed to be used as a framework for planning your gap experience. It contains information and resources to help with your research and planning and questions to consider regarding every aspect of your travel. The Toolkit was put together as a resource for students who had been awarded a Gap Scholarship by the Royal Geographical Society (with IBG) Learning and Leading programme but its content is relevant for anyone wanting to undertake safe, meaningful travel overseas.

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1. Introduction

The 'Gap Year' concept whereby pre-university students take a 'year out' to work or travel overseas has gathered momentum over the last decade or so. Taking time out before university, whether to work, travel, volunteer or get non-paid work experience can have enormous benefits. A 'year out' can give young people the opportunity to learn new 'life skills', become more independent, increase their confidence, make new friends and start university with often a greater sense of purpose and more maturity than those moving straight on to university from school or college.

Starting out: aims and objectives

A Which? University report from 16th July 2014 about gap years sought advice from the Higher Education Liaison Officers Association (HELOA), made up of admissions tutors and university staff (source: <http://university.which.co.uk/advice/how-do-universities-view-gap-years>). Which? University reported that "most universities see the advantages of deferred entry and welcome the maturity and motivation, as well as the additional experience that an applicant who has taken a gap year can bring to their degree".

However, the report goes on to say that in order to give the best impression to the establishments you're applying to, it is crucial to make your time out 'count'. You can do this by trying to gain some relevant experience and/or by earning money to fund your studies and doing something that will help you "discover yourself". Whatever you do, a gap year should not be just wasted time!

The questions below are intended to help you plan your gap year so it counts! Having a plan and remembering that there is a clear link between your gap year experiences and how they can help you as you move into Higher Education is important.

Start by thinking about what you want to do on your gap year and why. This will help you establish your overall aims and objectives, and from these you can research what sort of activities you might undertake to achieve these. You should then think about these aspirations in the context of your previous experience and the practicalities of what you have in mind. You may have to modify your ideas or even start all over again! If this happens, don't be disheartened, it is all part of the planning and learning process and should help you plan a gap year that best fits your aspirations.

Exploratory questions to ask yourself: Previous experiences, aims and objectives

- What is my previous experience of independent and overseas travel; different locations, countries and environments; and of fieldwork or volunteer activities?
- What are my current interests?
- What are my aspirations for the future?
- What are my concerns or apprehensions about my gap year? E.g. particular locations, types of experiences, being alone, group activities, safety, health
- What are my aims and objectives for my gap year?
What do I hope to achieve in terms of:
 - my personal development
 - my geographical knowledge, understanding and skills
 - preparing for university
 - gaining work experience
 - researching particular careers?

It is useful to spend some time establishing your aims and objectives for your gap year. Your aims are your general broad goals and objectives are the activities you set out to do to work

towards your aims. Choose objectives that are achievable. You may find that your objectives may change as you start planning, but try to set aims that will remain broadly the same.

Your aims may be to improve your geographical knowledge, understanding and skills, to increase your confidence and other personal skills or to increase your employability. Your objectives will be activities you can do on your gap year to help achieve these aims.

Here are some examples from previous RGS-IBG Learning and Leading Gap Scholars:

Mark's aims were to improve his geographical knowledge and specifically his knowledge of cryospheric processes before studying physical geography at university. He also wanted to work with different people and to experience a remote environment. He chose to go on an expedition with a provider to the Arctic Circle for 2 months to take part in a variety of glaciological, biological and adventure activities which included mapping glaciers and measuring snow depths. This gave him valuable skills and knowledge for university and a certainty that he wanted to pursue this area of interest. The opportunity to work with different people had the unexpected outcome of Mark discovering that he enjoyed leading groups and intended to undertake leadership training in the future. The activity gave him the opportunity to access an environment that he could not otherwise have been to.

Mark's tip: *'Go for something unusual. Not just the standard trip to Australia or New Zealand. The further off the beaten track you go, the bigger and more exciting your adventures will be.'*

Annabelle wanted to develop her geographical skills and knowledge and specifically to gain a deeper understanding of geomorphological processes and their impact on people. She also wanted to build her confidence and initiative. She decided to work towards these aims by carrying out her own research project. She travelled to New Zealand and Japan to carry out research through guided tours, visiting key locations and organisations and interviewing professionals. She gained confidence by organising this independently and from talking to academics and professionals in the field she wants to go into and felt much more confident to do this in the future.

Annabelle's tip: *'Don't be afraid to push yourself out of your comfort zone and try something new, e.g. travelling around a country on your own is not as scary as it sounds. If opportunities you were not expecting arise, go for them. Try and get away from the tourist haunts, and talk to locals, it gives you a much deeper flavour of the country you are visiting.'*

Peter wanted to prepare for his Geomatics degree which involves mapping and GIS usage and he also wanted to experience a new environment. He found an opportunity with a provider to go to a game reserve in South Africa for 3 months. Prior to departing he undertook a short GIS course. When on the volunteering project he joined in the day to day monitoring of the reserve and he was also able to work alongside a PHD student who gave him GIS tutorials. Peter produced maps of the reserve and gained an understanding of the mapping software and applications he would be using during his Geomatics degree.

Alina wanted to build her geographical knowledge ready for university and wanted to learn Korean which was important for her future goal to work for the UN. She spent 3 semesters studying the Korean language and culture at Yonsei University (Korean Language Institute). Since starting university it has inspired her to learn another language alongside her geographical studies.

Alina's tip: *'Plan out a gap experience based around personal interests and the particular skills you want to develop. Make your gap year different from usual gap experiences in order to stand out.'*

Chris wanted to gain more independence, improve his knowledge before university and to gain a diving qualification which would be useful to his future career and studies. He went to Indonesia to work on a marine conservation project. He gained an open water dive qualification, took a reef ecology course, assisted in scientific research on the reef and performed reef checks and monitoring. This experience in studying reef ecology influenced him to select modules in coastal conservation and marine biology. The experience made him more confident and he no longer felt intimidated by independent travel. He fulfilled a life-long dream of learning to scuba dive and developed a passion for coastal conservation.

Achieving your aims

Exploratory questions to ask yourself: How am I going to achieve this?

Activity

- What kind of activity would meet my aims during my gap year? E.g. volunteering, paid work, internship in an organisation relevant to my degree, taking part in a particular activity or course, travel, or a combination of these?
- Do I want to experience a particular environment; undertake a challenging activity; work in a team or independently; do an activity that would help with future geographical studies or intended career?
- Are there any constraints on how I might achieve this? E.g. health/fitness, previous experience, specialist equipment, price, time of year.
- Would participation in the activity need any special preparation (fitness training, building skills in the activity etc)? How could I work towards this before departure and would I have the time and/or funds to prepare?

Location

- Do I want to travel/work/volunteer in the UK or abroad or a combination?
- What countries/regions interest me and would meet my aims? Am I interested in learning a particular language or experiencing a particular culture or way of life, experiencing the developed or developing world or a certain environment (urban/rural, desert/rainforest/marine etc)?
- Is there a location that is known to be particularly good for the activities I would like to do?
- Are there any restrictions on visiting the country(s) or region(s) I would like to visit? (check www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice)
- Do I hold a British passport or other? (This could affect where you go and what visas/permits you require)

Structure

- Do I want to travel alone, with friends or in a group?
- Would I like to travel independently, with a provider, or a combination? Consider:
 - your previous experience of travel
 - your own self-confidence
 - the type of activity/experience you are seeking (some may only be possible with an organisation)
 - safety considerations
 - support: before, during and after your gap year
 - your wish to travel with others of your own age
 - value for money
- How long do I want each phase to last and how long do I want to be away altogether?
- Do I want to undertake more than one trip, coming back to the UK in-between?
- Do I want to keep dates and plans flexible to allow for changes or spontaneous trips?

Getting there/getting around

- Is my trip more about the destination or do I want to get 'creative' about the actual journey?
- Are there other ways of getting the most out of my experience rather than just jumping on and off plane, trains or buses? Do I want to, for instance, explore other methods of transport such as: bicycle, canoe, travelling on foot, container ship, horseback, for example? Consider, again:
 - Your previous experience and confidence/whether a certain level of skill is needed
 - Cost
 - Safety considerations
 - Weather considerations
 - Whether any specialist equipment or clothing will be required

2. What to do

There is a wealth of opportunities open to you. Some you might be able to do by travelling independently and others may take place in a more formal setting such as on a course, voluntary placement, or an expedition. Below is a list of just some of the activities gap year students choose to do:

- Conservation projects e.g. working on wildlife reserves; planting trees
- Field research e.g. as a field assistant on a research project, independent research or on a course at a Field Study Centre www.rgs.org/fieldcentres.
- Expeditions in remote or challenging environments www.rgs.org/je.
- Caring e.g. working with street children, in an orphanage.
- Teaching e.g. being a teaching assistant or Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL).
- Outdoor education and camps e.g. working in Outward Bound centres or Summer Camps.
- Learning a new outdoor skill: e.g. climbing, sailing, canoeing, trekking, skiing, desert travel.
- Courses and cultural exchanges: e.g. languages, university summer courses.
- Work: e.g. paid work, work experience, internships.
- Independent travel.

Also look at the 'Meet the Participants' part of the Learning and Leading web pages to see how other gap scholars have spent their time www.rgs.org/Landl

To help you decide:

- Think about what experiences would fit in with your aims and objectives.
- Speak to people who have been on or are knowledgeable about gap years.
- Look at books and gap year web-sites. Some you may wish to look at include:
 - www.rgs.org/je
 - www.yearoutgroup.org
 - www.gapadvice.org
 - www.gapyear.com
 - www.gap360.com
 - www.freevolunteering.co.uk
 - www.omprakash.org
 - www.volunteersouthamerica.net
- When you find something which sounds attractive, search for other similar opportunities and compare what is on offer.

Exploratory questions to ask yourself:

- What are the particular activities I would like to do during my gap year? E.g. teaching, conservation project, research, instructor training.
- Are there any particular skills I want to acquire or environments I would like to experience?
- Do I need any specific qualifications or a certain level of health and fitness in order to participate in any of these activities? If so, how will I achieve this before departure?
- Will the activities fit in with my budget?
- Do I want to travel with a provider or independently?
- Do I want to travel alone or in a group?
- Do I want to organise the activities before departure or during travel?
- If booking activities with local activity providers during travel, what should I look for to check that they are reputable and offer good value for money?

See **Section 5: Choosing a Gap provider** for more detailed questions to consider if thinking of travelling with a provider.

If travelling independently, you may choose to undertake activities when you get to your destination, perhaps using local providers. If so, it is important that you check them out to ensure they are safe, reputable, and give value for money. Some of the things to look for include:

- Do they hold a suitable license? E.g. PADI or BSAC for diving schools.
- Are guides/instructors suitably qualified?
- Does the equipment look well looked after and of good quality?
- How long have they been in operation? Are they well established in the area?
- How are they reviewed? Consult guidebooks and talk to other tourists staying in the area. You can also use internet travel forums for reviews and to contact previous customers e.g. www.lonelyplanet.com/thorntree

3. Where to go

For information on different countries have a look at guidebooks such as those in the 'Lonely Planet' or 'Rough Guide', series, and at travel websites to find out the best time to go and learn more about the culture, customs and ease of travel for foreign visitors.

It is important to check out your intended destinations on the individual country profiles at the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) website: www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice. This will inform you if there are any reasons why it might not be safe to travel there, and if there are any precautions you may need to take when visiting the country.

When you have decided on which countries you want to visit you should also read as much as you can to find out about the culture, language, climate, development status, safety, political situation, and points/issues of geographical interest for each country.

To search for details of available guidebooks and maps you can search the website of the map and guidebook shop Stanfords www.stanfords.co.uk. Remember that there is an unofficial 'Top Ten' list of countries that gap year travellers tend to go to. This list tends to include most of the following countries: Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, USA, Peru, Thailand, Vietnam, Fiji, South Africa and India. This list exists because these are all fantastic and relatively safe places to visit, but there's no harm in looking a bit more 'off the beaten track' if you want your gap experience to be a bit different.

Exploratory questions to ask yourself:

- Where would I like to go during my gap year? What destinations would meet my aims and objectives?
- Do I want to experience a particular environment? E.g. desert, tropical forest, glacier.
- Do I want to experience a particular culture or learn a certain language?
- Are my desired destinations considered to be safe and politically stable by the FCO? (check the above FCO website)
- Which regions of the country would I like to visit and for what reasons? Are there any sites of particular geographical interest I'd like to visit? (if you want to spend time in remote locations or rural environments remember to consider safety)
- Is this location a popular destination for travel? How easy will it be to get around the country and find accommodation?
 - What will the climate be like at the time that I'll be there? Will it impact on my ability to travel around (is road travel harder/more unsafe during the monsoon season, for example?)
- How common are English-speakers in the country? Is it a problem for me if English is not widely spoken? Do I need to have some knowledge of the local language before I leave?
- Are there any cultural nuances I need to be aware of?
- What are local attitudes to women in the country? How would a lone female traveller be viewed? Are there any behavioural aspects I should consider whilst travelling (e.g. don't go to bars alone)?
- Do I require a visa to travel there? Are there any restrictions on how long I can stay?
- If I am intending to work there, do I need a special sort of visa and/or are there any restrictions on taking paid employment?

4. Should I travel independently or use a provider?

There are many things to take into consideration when deciding whether to travel independently or with a gap provider. The increasing popularity of gap years has given rise to a burgeoning industry and there is now a huge range of gap companies and projects to choose from. Likewise it is now easier to travel around than ever before in many countries as they open themselves up to international tourism, and there are increasing opportunities for independent travellers for different styles of accommodation, activities, and cultural experiences.

Both independent travelling and using a provider present their own advantages and disadvantages. Ultimately your decision should depend on your own experience, competence, and confidence in travelling, the kind of gap experience you want (including the environments you wish to go to and activities you want to do), and perhaps cost and the time you have available to you for travel. The points below suggest some pros and cons for each to help you decide which experience would best suit you. Of course, many gap students choose to divide their time and experience both!

Independent travel

Pros:

- Independent travel gives you the freedom to create your own schedule and to move on when you want to.
- You can choose your destination(s), when you go, and for how long.
- You can choose who you go with.
- It can be cheaper than using a provider if you research well beforehand and budget whilst away.
- Travel can be relatively cheap using local transport networks, (although these can sometimes be unreliable or even unsafe).
- You can decide where you stay and follow any recommendations obtained whilst travelling. Many hostels are good value for money and are a good way to meet other travellers.
- Independent travel gives you flexibility, allowing you to change your schedule spontaneously to discover places you may not have known about when planning your trip.

Cons:

- Independent travel can feel too unstructured for some.
- Certain environments and activities that require qualified guides may be closed off to you, although sometimes these can be arranged in-country.
- You must carry out your own checks on activity providers to ensure they are safe.
- The costs of travelling around a lot can mount up. You will need to budget carefully and keep an eye on your spending.
- You will not have any medical support, so will need to take responsibility for your own health care before and during travel, and be aware of the procedures for arranging any treatment whilst away.
- Although safety is an issue however you are travelling, independent travellers need to be especially vigilant as have no direct support in an emergency.
- You will need to take responsibility for researching and arranging all the documentation you need for travel, backing up your documentation, and knowing the procedures if it gets lost or stolen.

Travelling with a provider

Pros:

- Travelling with a provider may allow you to have certain experiences (e.g. of extreme environments or cultural home-stays) that may otherwise not be possible.
- Projects can give you experience in an area of interest e.g. conservation or teaching.
- You can gain qualifications e.g. TEFL.
- Much of the planning may be done for you. This can lessen the worry of organising the logistics of a trip as placements, accommodation and transfers are often pre-arranged and many of the costs of travel already paid for before departure (although this varies greatly between providers).
- Providers often give advice on fundraising, kit lists, and preparations before travel, as well as helping with the organisation of the necessary documentation.
- Some organisations provide kit and equipment.
- Activities often take place in a supervised environment.
- Providers often offer medical support during the programme, which can give peace of mind.
- Opportunity to meet like-minded and often similar-aged people in project groups.

Cons:

- Your time will be structured and you will have a set schedule – this suits some people but not others.
- Some programmes may be glorified package holidays.
- Some programmes/providers have been shown not to deliver what they promise – it is important to check them out.
- They are often expensive.
- Presents less, if no, choice in accommodation as it is often booked for you.
- The majority of programmes are short-term and may not be suitable for those looking for a longer experience.

5. Choosing a Gap provider

There are many organisations that offer gap experiences in return for payment. The costs involved and the services they offer vary enormously, so you will want to find one that best suits your needs and aspirations. Building an impressive-looking website is a lot easier than providing a quality overseas experience!

Identifying smaller, local, in-country charities or activity providers can be a more cost-effective way of spending your money and in many cases can mean that the money you spend ends up in the pockets of the people you'd like to help, rather than an international organisation based in the UK or elsewhere outside the country that you're visiting. Most large gap providers use local charities or activity providers anyway, so by cutting out the 'middle man', you might save money and may end up with a more 'authentic' experience.

We strongly recommend that you try and find out as much as possible about the experience you are paying for **before you book or put down an initial deposit**.

To ensure you have a safe, rewarding and worthwhile gap experience, use the questions below to gather detailed information on the project you want to do, and evaluate different providers.

The Year Out group also has a more extensive list of questions that you can use to help you choose a provider www.yearoutgroup.org

Exploratory questions to ask yourself:

- Have I chosen this project just because it sounds interesting rather than because it will help me develop the skills and experience I want to gain?
- How much support and supervision do I want while I am overseas? This varies between organisations, from those who will have their own staff with you for the majority of the time, to organisations which offer unsupervised placements where you will be spending much of your time on your own in a local community.
- What exactly is included in the programme fee? Does it include travel to the project site, food, accommodation, specialist equipment and/or insurance? Are there additional costs that I need to cover?
- Can the provider introduce me to someone who has recently taken part in a similar programme so I can contact them and find out more about their experiences with the organisation?

Other questions to consider:

Provider details

- What is the legal status of the organisation? (E.g. registered charity or commercial business).
- Where is the organisation based? In the UK, host country or elsewhere?
- Is the provider running this project themselves, or using a third party or local organisation?
- What does the programme set out to achieve?
- What will be your role on the project?
- What are the tasks you will be undertaking on the project and will you need and/or receive any training to carry them out?
- How has the project been chosen, planned and vetted?

Group composition

- Will you be alone or in a group?
- How many others will be taking part in your programme and what age are they likely to be?
- Will you be working with UK, international or local people?
- Is there a selection process for programme participants and if so what is the procedure for selection?
- Are there any restrictions on participation e.g. age, health, or previous experience required?

Supervision

- Who is responsible for you at the project location?
- Are you supervised during the project?
- If you are not being directly supervised, where is the nearest representative of the organisation once you are in-country, and what would you do if you had a problem with your work or placement during the programme?
- What are the arrangements for times when you are not supervised (e.g. free time, weekends)? What will your accommodation arrangements be during these periods? Does the provider organise trips or activities that you can join?

Safety management

- If the organisation is based in the UK, ask them if the health and safety management systems for your programme are compliant with the new British Standard BS 8848. By stating that the programme is compliant with BS 8848, the organisation is making a commitment that good safety management procedures are in place for your programme, and that they will share these with you. For further information on BS 8848 see www.rgs.org/bsi
- If a UK organisation says that they are not BS 8848 compliant, please ask them why and make a careful note of their response. It is not necessarily a problem if they're not as it is quite a difficult standard to comply with. You should ask them to provide more detailed information about their safety management systems on the programme however, including the qualifications and experience of the people responsible for your safety while you're there (including their First Aid qualifications)
 - Ask for a copy of their 'Safety Management Plan' and a 'Risk Assessment' for the programme or activity.
 - Do you have access to professional medical help during your placement, if you need it?
 - Does the provider have any procedures in place for your emergency evacuation and possible repatriation back to UK should this be necessary?
 - What insurance is in place for your participation in this programme? Do you need to buy your own or any additional insurance?

Terms and conditions

- Is there a written agreement between you and the gap provider?
- Are the host organisations paid to take you? Do they pay you?
- What is expected of you during the programme? What will be your responsibilities? Is there a code of conduct for participants?
- What does your programme fee include and not include? E.g. food, transfers from airport
- What are the terms of cancellation if you are unable to participate in the programme for any reason?

Contacting Previous Customers

- Have you personally contacted previous customers about their experiences of the provider and project? What were their responses? It is a good idea to contact some past participants directly (obtaining their contact details from the provider or other sources) to ask about their experiences. Remember that the testimonials on the provider's website have been carefully selected (or perhaps in some cases written!) to present the image the provider would like to convey.

Financial protection

- If you are buying your flights through your provider or a travel agent ask if they hold an ATOL license? (ATOL is a financial protection scheme for travellers. If an ATOL tour operator fails, the ATOL scheme ensures customers contracted with the ATOL holder for an air package or a flight, do not lose the money paid over or are not stranded abroad.) Check with your provider if they hold one or check at www.caa.co.uk.

6. Timing

You may have as much as fifteen months between leaving school and starting university. How you use this time may be constrained by a number of other factors such as you needing to raise additional funds for your gap experiences or to start university, the dates of a programme you wish to participate in, and/or local weather conditions, amongst other things.

If you are an inexperienced traveller or have not spent time away from home before, then spending a long period of time outside the UK might be daunting. Consider whether you would like to go away for a long or short period of time – there are pros and cons to each. There is also the option of undertaking several short periods away, returning to the UK in-between. To help you decide, consider points such as:

- Environmental impact (multiple short periods may mean more flights)
- Whether you want to develop a wide experience and understanding of the culture
- Whether you want to learn a language (this takes time!)
- Cost (again, multiple short trips may be more expensive as flights are often the single biggest expense)
- How much of the country you want to see
- Homesickness (particularly if it will be your first extended time away from home)
- Culture shock on return to UK (this can be a consideration if you are away for a long period of time)

If thinking about participating in a project with a provider, consider the potential pros and cons to a long or short term project. A short term project may enable you to experience volunteering whilst allowing time for independent travel, and fit into a shorter time frame. A long term project is a greater commitment, but may give you more time to get involved with the local community and potentially make a greater contribution.

Exploratory questions to ask yourself:

- How long do I want to be away for altogether?
- Am I confident about being away from home for this amount of time?
- Do I want to undertake one long-term gap experience or multiple shorter ones, returning to the UK in-between?
- When would I like to leave the UK? Are my departure dates flexible, and do I have to be back in the UK by a certain date?
- Are there any time constraints on when I could do my gap experience? E.g. are some of my planned activities only on offer for specific dates?
- Do I want to keep my arrangements flexible to allow for changes or spontaneous trips?
- Do I want my travel to coincide with a particular time of year in my destination(s)? E.g. for a particular activity, event or season.
- Is there a particular time of year I should avoid travelling in the country or countries I plan to visit, e.g. hurricane season?
- Can I extend my flight ticket whilst away if I wanted to stay out longer?

Example itinerary template

If you're someone who likes to be organised and well prepared, or if it's your first trip away alone, it's a good idea to put together an itinerary of your trip so you have a clear idea of where you'll be and when. The table below shows a sample of the itinerary for part of the trip shown in the budget (see section 7). You may wish to use it as a template for your own proposed gap experience and adjust it as necessary. If you are doing the same activity for a period of time you can group the days together as one row.

Date	Activity	Details	Accommodation	Address or contact
15/03/16	Flight London Heathrow to Auckland airport, New Zealand, via Los Angeles International	Flight NZ15: Depart 16.00, Arrive LA 19.00 Flight DJ165: Depart LA 23.45	-	-
17/03/16	(flight leg LA to Auckland)	Arrive Auckland 07.30	Anna's hostel	146 Hobs Street, Auckland Anna.hostel@auckland.nz
19/03/16	Move out of hostel to friend's house		Room in friend's house	Tom Green, 286 Craiger Road, Auckland +64 9 8693521
20/03/16	Start work at Tom's parents' cafe	The Red Pepper café, Brickster Street, Auckland +64 9 1027549	Room in friend's house	Tom Green, 286 Craiger Road, Auckland +64 9 8693521
21/03/16 - 24/03/16	Work in Red Pepper cafe		Room in friend's house	Tom Green, 286 Craiger Road, Auckland +64 9 8693521
25/03/16	Day off – sea kayaking with Tom	Grovey beach, 30 mins drive from house	Room in friend's house	Tom Green, 286 Craiger Road, Auckland +64 9 8693521
26/03/16 – 02/04/16	Work in Red Pepper cafe		Room in friend's house	Tom Green, 286 Craiger Road, Auckland +64 9 8693521

7. Finance and budgeting

Careful budgeting and financial management will help you make the most of the money you have. You will also need to think about how you will manage your money and keep it safe on your travels, and what you would have to do if you needed extra money in an emergency.

As part of the planning process it is important to research costs carefully as your budget will often dictate what you can do with your trip. It will make your planning much easier to put together a structured budget on a spreadsheet before you go and also keep account of what you're spending your money on while you're away. An example budget can be found below to help you do this.

If you need/want to raise more money, be aware that it can be hard work! Many students take on boring, low-paid jobs in an attempt to fund their gap year. Why not incorporate your need to raise funds into your gap year plans by working abroad instead? There are many resources that can help you with this, including: 'Working holiday Visa' schemes in Australia, New Zealand, and Canada.

Planning your finances

You can put together your budget in whichever way works best for you, or even request an example budget template such as the one below from the RGS-IBG (contact Charlie on landl@rgs.org). But in order for it to be as useful as possible to you, it should contain the following information:

- Flights (for multiple flights detail the cost of each. For a round-the-world ticket state the overall cost of the ticket)
- Insurance
- Visas
- Passport application/renewal (if applicable)
- Vaccinations and first aid kit
- Equipment and clothing
- Transport costs within each country (detail cost of each journey planned)
- Accommodation (include the name and cost of accommodation and the number of nights staying)
- Daily living expenses (food, activities, entrance fees to places of interest, spending money for miscellaneous items such as toiletries, drinks etc.) for the duration of trip. Many guidebooks give estimations of average daily living costs for individual countries and destinations.
- Any fees charged by provider(s) and/or for projects /activities/ placements
- Any training costs

Always include a sum for the unexpected (sometimes called a contingency fund) in your budget – usually 10-15% of your total budget. The sum will vary for each person.

Remember too, that you will inevitably lose money in exchange rates as you change currency. This will be very hard to factor in to your budget so it is sometimes easier to over-estimate costs to cover this, or be prepared to scoop it out of your contingency money.

Cost cutting ideas include:

- Look carefully at the ticket options for the journeys you hope to make – multi-trip tickets such as a 'round-the-world' flight ticket can help you save money.
- Bank transaction fees can add up over a year - research which banks offer the lowest fees for overseas transactions. In some areas you might consider using pre-pay cards that are credited with money before setting off and can be topped up - usually online as well as over the phone - by the cardholder and family members.

Fund-raising advice

If you are using a Gap provider, they may be able to give you fundraising advice. You can also consult these web sources for advice and information:

- Fund-raising to join an expedition www.rgs.org/je
- <http://www.gapyear.com/plan/fundraising/>

Money on the move

- Take a written or electronic copy of your budget with you whilst travelling and refer to it and update it regularly to ensure you don't overspend and run out of money.
- Note the exchange rates between each of your destination currencies and UK pounds sterling, and between destination currencies, so that you get a fair deal if changing money in-country or at a new destination and can budget daily spending whatever currency you are using.
- When obtaining foreign currency, particularly for travel to less-developed countries it's a good idea to ask for the money in smaller denominations, as small shops, taxi drivers and local businesses often won't have enough change to take big notes.
- Speak to your bank about your travel plans (so they don't lock your account if you try and use an ATM overseas) and make sure that you have the contact details of your bank and a 24hour helpline number. Leave your account details in the UK with a parent or guardian and if your card gets stopped, lost, or stolen, get in touch with your bank straight away.
- Always take your money in several different forms (e.g. cash, credit/debit card, traveller's cheques) so that you have different ways of accessing it (some regions may not accept certain bank cards or deal with travellers cheques for example).
- Pre paid cash cards, are a safe alternative to cash and a good way of accessing money abroad. Cash cards can be topped-up before departure. More information about a small selection of cash card options can be found at:
www.cashpassport.com
www.statravel.co.uk/cashcard.htm
<http://uk.virginmoney.com/virgin/cards/prepaid-cards.jsp?ast=cc-splash-tabs>
- Divide your money and keep it in several different places when travelling – in a security pouch about your person, and several places in your luggage. Try not to carry large sums.
- Keep your record of purchase and cheque numbers for any travellers cheques you have separately – it allows you to get your money back if you lose the cheques.
- For further advice on managing your money and keeping it safe whilst abroad, go to: www.gov.uk/gap-year-foreign-travel-advice

Emergency funds

- Western Union points are a useful way of getting money transferred from the UK in an emergency. Check out the nearest point to where you are staying.
- Note the contact details of any contacts you may have in-country who could help in an emergency.
- It is a good idea to set up an online banking system before you go away, this is something that you can speak to your bank about. It allows you to move money between accounts in one online transaction, and would allow you to have money transferred from your parent/guardian in the UK in an emergency.

Exploratory questions to ask yourself:

- How much money do I need for the length of time I want to travel for and for the activities I want to undertake?
- How will I raise the money?
- Do I need to raise money for any other commitments such as university or for UK costs during my gap year? If so, how much? Do I have any money saved for these already?
- Does the need to raise money dictate when I can leave for my gap experience? Will I need to work for a while first?
- Are there cash machines in the locations I intend to visit? Will my card be accepted in the country or countries I am travelling to? In what form should I take my money (e.g. cash, traveller's cheques, credit card)?

- How will I access money in an emergency such as if my money/cards get stolen? Are there facilities in the countries I am travelling to for emergency access to cash if my money gets stolen or my card fails (e.g. Western Union points)?
- What security precautions do I need to take to safeguard my money whilst travelling?
- How will I budget and keep track of my spending whilst away?

Example budget template

Below is one example of how to put together a budget sheet but it's important that you use a method that will work best for you.

Phase/dates	Activity	Logistics/explanation of activity or costs	Accomm. Costs	Transport costs	Food costs	Equipment /excursion /other costs	Total cost per phase of trip	Notes
23/09/2014	Fly to India	Met by project rep. Transfer at destination by <u>prebooked</u> taxi to project site	£0.00	£650.00	£5.00	£0.00	£655.00	Open return flight with ##### airline to (city name, destination country). Flight - £630 plus £20 for taxi.
24/09/2014 - 03/12/2014	Internship in Delhi	Accommodation roughly £7 per night. Bus to office roughly £2 per day. Food roughly £5 per day.	£490.00	£140.00	£350.00	£0.00	£980.00	Accomm. address, tel. no. and name of main contact
04/12/2014 - 14/01/2015	Independent travel around India.	Accommodation roughly £7 per night. Food roughly £5 per day. Miscellaneous amount added for tours and activities	£440.00	£200.00	£350.00	£200.00	£1,190.00	Will use ##### website to find accommodation.
15/01/2015	Travel day to get to volunteering project	Sight-seeing and final preparation during day then travel from ##### to ##### by overnight train (takes 8 hrs, leaves at 2000hrs, arrives)	£0.00	£15.00	£5.00	£0.00	£20.00	Travel by ##### train. Main office address and <u>telephone</u> number.
16/01/2016 - 13/02/2015	Volunteering for 'India's Orphans'	Includes accommodation, food and local travel. 4 weeks of volunteering	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£800.00	£800.00	Accomm. address, tel. no. and name of main contact
Unknown but during independent travel phase	3 day Elephant Safari with 'Love Elephants'	Costs include tent, food, water, guide and <u>elephant(!)</u>	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£300.00	£300.00	Contact numbers for organisation and where you'll meet them.
14/02/2015	Fly back to UK	Get <u>tuk tuk</u> to Delhi airport 3 hours before flight.	£0.00	£2.00	£5.00	£0.00	£7.00	
							£0.00	
							£0.00	
							£0.00	
							£0.00	
Other one-off Costs to think about								
Insurance							£150.00	
Visa							£60.00	
Contingency money							£270.00	
Equipment costs (e.g. rucksack, sleeping bag liner etc)							£200.00	
Total Costs							£4,632.00	

8. Health precautions

It is very important that you research the health issues associated with the country/countries and specific regions and environments you may be travelling in, so that you can fully prepare for these before departure. For example, some regions are high risk malaria zones and you will need to take precautions such as specialist medication, kit and/or clothing. You may require vaccination against diseases such as Hepatitis, Yellow Fever, Cholera or Rabies. If you plan to work or volunteer in a certain environment, such as in health care, or in remote or less developed areas additional measures to protect yourself against infection and disease may also be wise. It is important to take precautions against the risk of infection from HIV in all countries. Above all, you should seek expert medical advice from your GP or travel clinic before embarking on an overseas trip so you can be prepared for the health risks associated with your chosen destination.

If you have the time and budget and are planning to undertake some independent travel, you may also wish to consider completing a basic first aid course. This will give you both the skills and confidence to cope with any minor medical emergencies whilst you're overseas and is a valuable life skill in itself anyway.

Pre-existing medical conditions

- If you have suffered or are currently suffering from an existing illness, you will need to talk to your doctor about the implications that this may have for your travels.
- You will need to declare these existing medical conditions when you apply for insurance. Not to do so may invalidate any insurance claim later.
- If you need to take personal medication, ensure you obtain sufficient supplies for the duration of your stay abroad. Inhalers and other common prescriptions and over-the-counter medicines are banned in some countries so check with the embassy of the country you are travelling to, that your medication will be legal in that country. If you need to take medication you should ensure that you have a note from your doctor and that the medicine is in its original packaging.
- If you have an allergy or a particular medical condition that could have serious implications if it suddenly worsens or that is hard for someone to recognise (such as diabetes or epilepsy, for instance), make sure you wear a medical ID tag or carry a card (preferably written in the language of the country you're going to). If you are incapacitated for any reason, this will alert anyone who tries to help you to your condition.
- Similarly, if you are travelling with others let them know how they can help, should your medical condition worsen.

Resources

Where to get travel health advice:

- Department of Health Advice for Travellers: www.nhs.uk/Healthcareabroad - advice for travellers about planning ahead, staying healthy and getting treatment elsewhere in the world. Also in this area is information about the EHIC, UK citizens' passport to free or reduced-cost emergency care in most other European countries.
- www.fitfortravel.nhs.uk - an NHS Scotland website on travel issues worldwide.
- www.iamat.org - English-speaking doctors around the world.
- www.interhealth.org.uk - a medical charity providing specialist healthcare to people working primarily in the aid, development, mission and voluntary sectors both in the UK and overseas. They act as medical, travel health and occupational health advisors and also provide Psychological Health services.
<http://www.masta-travel-health.com/> - provides travel health advice on anti-malarials, vaccinations and disease prevention for the public travelling abroad. MASTA Travel Clinics are private travel clinics in the UK. They provide immunisations and medical advice on malaria, yellow fever and a host of other travel health related issues for travellers.

- www.travelhealth.co.uk Travelhealth provides information and practical advice for people who are travelling abroad. They also provide information about where your nearest travel clinic is.
- www.nomadtravel.co.uk Nomad Travel clinics can be found in many major cities in the UK. They also have travel stores where useful kit and equipment can be bought for overseas trips.

Medical risk assessment

- Use the resources above to identify the key health risks that affect travellers in the places you are hoping to visit.
- You will then need to decide what precautions you are going to take to avoid them.
- If health risks are significant, you might like to find an alternative location where you can carry out a similar activity, but where the health risks are reduced.

Health precautions

- Visit the dentist before you leave for a check-up and to have any remedial work done.
- Visit your GP surgery or a Travel Health clinic to discuss what vaccinations you need and plan your vaccination programme - you may be required to start treatment several months before you depart. For travel clinics see www.nomadtravel.co.uk/clinics or for a list in your area see www.travelhealth.co.uk/travelclinics
- Ensure that you have got all the medications you will need whilst you are away. Always take spares in case you lose your bag or it is stolen.
- Check what you need to help protect yourself against Malaria e.g. mosquito nets, repellents, cover up, and which particular anti-malarial medication to take, if needed.
- Take a well-stocked first aid/medical kit. Nomad Travel Clinics provide advice on adventure travel health and can provide advice on first aid kits. www.nomadtravel.co.uk.
- If you feel unwell when you get back, get checked out by your GP and tell them which countries you have been travelling in.

Planning for medical emergencies

- Buy a pocket guide to travel health and take it with you to help you cope with common problems such as 'traveller's diarrhea', sun stroke, heat or cold-related illnesses or altitude-related illnesses if you're travelling to high altitude regions.
- Be aware of the symptoms and treatment for other, less common illnesses. In particular, make sure you're aware of the actions you need to take if you suspect you have been exposed to the rabies virus and remember that even if you have had the vaccination, you are not protected and will still need further post-exposure vaccines if infected. Research whether the country you're travelling to is likely to have these available or where you'll have to go to access them.
- Know your Blood Group.
- Know how to access medical help when travelling. Note the name and contact details of the nearest doctor/hospital for your destinations.
- Medical insurance is ESSENTIAL. Check what you need to do if you need help and in particular keep safe the telephone numbers you need to call to get help.
- For travelling in Europe, it is essential to carry a European Health Insurance Card. These are free to order and can be obtained easily from www.ehic.org.uk

Exploratory questions to ask yourself:

- What are the health risks to consider in the countries/environments I want to travel to, (for example: dirty drinking water, diseases such as malaria, high prevalence of HIV, high altitude or extreme environments).
- What can I do to protect myself against these health risks?
- Do I need to undertake any training to ensure my personal fitness and ability is suitable for my chosen activity? How will I do this if so?
- Do I need any specific vaccinations for travel to these regions? When do I need to start having them or taking the medication?

- Do I have any pre-existing medical conditions and do they limit where I should travel, the activities I may be able to undertake or environments I could travel in? Would I require any special travel arrangements?
- Will I need to take personal medication with me and is it legal in the countries I want to travel to?
- Have I informed my insurance company and the organisation or companions I'm travelling with about my medical condition and suitable treatment in the event of a medical incident?
- What is the procedure if I need to see a doctor whilst travelling in the country?
- What is the name and location of the nearest hospital for each area I plan to visit? How far will it be from my place of accommodation and how will I get there if needed?

9. Travel safety

Your safety is paramount – prepare for the worst and expect the best. Remember, gap year activities are often by their very nature challenging, and overcoming unexpected difficulties is part of that challenge.

Good preparation and planning is the first step to keeping safe and being able to cope with the unexpected. It is important to learn as much as you can about the risks associated with travelling and the risks specifically relating to the areas in which you are travelling.

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) website www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice has handy hints and travel tips for gap year travellers. It is recommended that you:

- Buy insurance
- Have local knowledge
- Check visa requirements
- Be health aware
- Do not take drugs
- Be careful with alcohol
- Be vigilant
- Take care of your belongings
- Take enough money and several means to access it
- Keep in touch with contacts at home
- Keep abreast of what is happening in the country you're visiting from a political, social and environmental point of view

The FCO website has travel advice and individual country profiles, including details of any common scams or crimes and any particular areas to avoid.

Supplement this with other information from sites such as Journeywatch www.journeywatch.com a travel network that keeps you updated about the country you are going to or travelling in; travel forums such as www.lonelyplanet.com/thorntree where travelers exchange travel information, advice, hints and tips; and on the 'Safety net' in www.objectivegapyear.com designed to give travellers safety tips and advice from the road.

Use the information on individual country profiles, guidebooks, and other sources, to find out:

- How the safety of your destination country is rated by the FCO
- Whether or not it is politically stable
- Whether there any particular risks or dangers you need to consider whilst travelling in the country, for example weather/climate, particular areas of the country and common scams or crime
- What precautions you can take against these, for example specific equipment or kit, changing your timings or altering your travel route.

There are many things that you can do to keep both your personal possessions and yourself as safe as possible when you are travelling. Advice can be found on many of the gap year websites and the FCO website. Some of the basic advice will recommend NOT taking expensive or valuable items with you and being careful not to advertise possessions such as cameras or personal money. Keeping spare copies of personal documents such as your passport, visa, insurance details etc is also highly recommended.

If you are travelling independently or feel that you would like additional assistance to that provided by the company with which you are travelling, you may wish to attend a specific travel safety course. RGS-IBG can supply you with a list of these.

If you want local advice, one option is to use a company called Tripbod www.tripbod.com. This site links travellers to local people all over the world which means you have access to local advice before you leave, when you get there, and throughout your trip. Tripbod local contacts can provide local knowledge of hidden places, help you make the most of your time and save money, help you travel safely, make sure you spend money locally and link you to volunteering opportunities and home stays.

Placement safety

If you are using a gap year provider they should also be giving you advice on preparation and training either in the UK or in-country, and should be able to supply you with a Risk Assessment and Safety Management Plan, either for the venture or the activity that you are going to do. The section on 'Choosing a Provider' goes in to more detail on this.

In the event of an emergency

Even on the best-planned gap years, things can and do often go wrong. You need to have a plan for both minor and major incidents. This involves knowing who can help and how to contact them. Often you will need to get yourself to a place where there is someone to assist you, so you also need to plan how you might get there. This is your Emergency Response Plan.

UK Embassies and High Commissions overseas can help travellers who get into trouble overseas but there are strict limitations on what they can and cannot do. For more information and to find the website of the British embassy in the country you're going to, see: www.gov.uk/government/world/organisations. Remember that emergencies can also happen at home, so it is important that your family know how and when they can contact you.

Before you depart, sign up for Foreign Office country-specific travel advice updates via email www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice and follow the FCO on Twitter @foreignoffice and Facebook www.facebook.com/foreignoffice to keep updated with the latest information and advice on what you should do if you need help in the event of a crisis.

Exploratory questions to ask yourself:

- What are my apprehensions or safety concerns about my gap experience?
- Are there any particular safety issues I need to be aware of in the country/countries or particular regions I'm travelling in (for example weather/climate, remote/hostile environment, any common scams or crimes)?
- What precautions could I take against these (for example specific equipment or kit, timing or route of travel, behaving in a certain way)?
- How will I ensure the security of my luggage during travel?
- What are local attitudes to women in the country? How would a lone female traveller be viewed? Are there any behavioural aspects I should consider whilst travelling (for example not going to bars alone, keeping knees and shoulders covered)?

10. Travel arrangements

In order to be as prepared as possible for your gap experience, you should think ahead about how you will get to your chosen destination, how you will travel around once you're overseas and what information will be useful to know in advance.

Consider the following:

- Gather as much information as you can about transport options and where to buy tickets before you leave. This will also help with your budgeting and planning your itinerary, and enable you to pre-book tickets where possible.
- Multi-trip tickets for flights, buses and other forms of transport can be cheaper than individual journey tickets. Research the options for your chosen destination(s).
- Research your planned routes and check what regions they go through. Some countries have acknowledged 'no-go' areas which must be avoided.
- It is generally not advisable to travel at night though in some countries the night buses and roads are of good quality and overnight travel is considered relatively safe. Know before you go which category your destination fits into by checking FCO and other country-specific information: www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice.
- It is advisable to have the contact details of nearby accommodation for any transport terminal in case your transport link is delayed or cancelled. If you are arriving at a destination late at night, it is also advisable to have pre-booked accommodation and additional transport organised to take you there.
- Be aware that many hostels/hotels offer an airport pick-up as part of their service so always ask this in advance. Airport taxis tend to be very expensive and drivers take advantage of the fact that people are arriving who may not be aware that there are cheaper ways to get to town.
- To keep your personal possessions as safe as possible keep your luggage with you at all times in transport terminals and transfer any valuables to a day sack that you can keep with you if other luggage is put in a hold. If your luggage is in a hold or on the roof, it is recommended to get out and check your luggage is not being removed before you reach your destination.

More tips about travel around and between countries are available from:

- Guidebooks
- Travel magazines
- Online travel forums e.g. www.lonelyplanet.com/thorntree or www.tripbod.com
- Travel Agents e.g. Trailfinders www.trailfinders.com and STA Travel www.statravel.co.uk
- You can also talk to other travellers for recommendations

Exploratory questions to ask yourself:

- What modes of transport will I use to travel around and between countries?
- What can be pre-booked before departure from the UK?
- Do I have to organise my own transport or is it organised for me?
- Do I want to use tourist transport or local transport networks when travelling within countries? What are the pros and cons of each?
- What transport operators would be available to me?
- Are they reliable and do they take me to the particular places I want to visit?
- Do the ticket costs fit with my budget?
- Can I pre-book tickets or shall I buy during travel?
- Will I need accommodation near to my arrival location for the first night? Can this be pre-booked?
- How will I get to my departure location in the UK and back home on my return?

11. Accommodation

Always have a list of several accommodation options, their addresses and contact numbers when you arrive in a new place in case your first choice is full or you find it unsuitable when you get there. Guidebooks will always have details of accommodation options.

You can check out the quality of different accommodation and the value-for-money they give through:

- Guidebooks
- Travel magazines
- Booking websites with accommodation reviews: e.g. www.hostelworld.com www.tripadvisor.co.uk or www.hostelbookers.com
- Online travel forums such as Thorntree: www.lonelyplanet.com/thorntree

When arriving in a new destination and finding accommodation, it can be useful to have a check list of criteria for choosing where to stay. This might include a proximity to a local activity; the offer of free airport transfers; a criteria based on cost and your budget; the opportunity to rent bicycles; breakfast included etc.

It is also important to consider safety and security risks when choosing your accommodation. Check whether your chosen accommodation has smoke alarms and fire escapes (and find out where they are when you arrive); suitable safe storage for baggage should you need to leave it during the day; a night time guard or someone to call in an emergency; whether it is in a safe area and if it has a friendly and welcoming atmosphere.

If your accommodation is arranged through a gap provider, ask them about the type and quality of the accommodation, how much host families will be paid (if applicable), and talk to previous programme participants about their experiences of the accommodation in which they were placed.

Exploratory questions to ask yourself:

- Where will I stay during each phase of my gap experience? Will accommodation be organised by me or by a gap provider?
- Would I prefer to stay in a hostel with the opportunity of meeting other travellers, with a local family to experience the local culture, or with friends in the area?
- What would be the pros and cons of the types of accommodation that I have chosen?
- Does it fit in with my budget?
- What is included in the cost of the accommodation (e.g. food, a towel, transfers from airport)?
- Is this accommodation convenient for the places I want to visit (e.g. location, proximity to good transport links)?
- Is the accommodation safe?
- What alternative accommodation options are there if I am unhappy with where I am staying?

12. Documentation and insurance

The documentation you are likely to need when travelling abroad includes:

- Credit card(s)
- Emergency numbers
- Immunisation record
- Insurance details
- Passport
- Tickets
- Relevant maps, guidebooks & phrasebooks
- An itinerary for your trip
- ID cards e.g. student ID card, driving licence etc.

The documentation that you need for different countries will vary so it is important to check carefully what you will need to enter each country you plan to visit. Some countries require visas, proof of return flight ticket or proof of adequate funds to buy one, proof of accommodation, vaccination certificates or in some cases an existing contact within the country. For example, under the US Visa Waiver Programme (<https://esta.cbp.dhs.gov/esta/>), it is now essential for travellers to register their details online at least 72 hours before intended entry or travel through the country. If you are using a gap provider, they should provide you with the details of the required documentation.

You can look at these websites for critical information:

- **UK Embassies overseas:** www.gov.uk/government/world/organisations
- **Foreign Embassies and High Commissions in London:** Contact these for visa arrangements for UK citizens going abroad:
www.gov.uk/government/publications/foreign-embassies-in-the-uk
- **FCO Travel Advice:** Essential information to ensure that British travellers are well prepared before departure. www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice
- **UK Passport Service:** Providing information and online facilities for all aspects of application, renewal and amendments of passports for British nationals resident in the UK. www.gov.uk/browse/citizenship/passports

Your credit/debit cards, insurance policy details, immunisation record, passport, visa(s), and ID cards should all be scanned or photocopied. Leave a copy with your parents or guardian, take two copies with you (and carry separate from the original documents), and email a copy to yourself to ensure you always have access to them.

If you lose your passport whilst away you will need to contact the UK embassy/high commission overseas.

Insurance

It is important that your travel insurance includes as a minimum, medical and repatriation insurance (cover for returning you back to the UK on medical grounds). Other forms of insurance you might want to purchase are for dental emergencies, loss or theft of money and possessions and cancellation of your trip. You will need to inform your insurers of any information, particularly relating to any pre-existing medical conditions, which may affect the policy.

When deciding which policy would best suit your needs, examine the insurance policy wording carefully to make sure that it covers the activities that you are doing:

- Check exclusions to the policy e.g. activities (such as riding a moped, bungee jumping etc), security of your belongings (some policies may not accept claims for belongings that vanish from a beach hut or a shared hostel room).

- Check the number of countries covered by a policy. Some policies will offer cover for set areas only, which is cheaper if you know you are only going to one or two countries.
- Check the length of policy: does it cover all the time you are away from the UK?
- Check any excess you would have to pay on any claim made.
- Check the policy not only covers medical bills, but that it also covers repatriation.
- If you are planning to take expensive items such as a laptop, camera or jewellery, you should check the amount covered for a single item. You may have to take out additional cover for such items. If you cannot afford to lose an item, leave it at home!
- If you are using a gap provider, check what insurance is included in your fee and what it covers, and most importantly what it does not cover.
- Make note of the travel insurance 24-hour assistance helpline.

Examples of insurance companies that specialise in gap year insurance include:

- Mind the Gap Year www.mindthegapyear.com
- Endsleigh Insurance Brokers www.endsleigh.co.uk/personal/travel-insurance/gap-year-insurance/
- STA Travel www.statravel.co.uk/travel-insurance-hub.htm

Exploratory questions to ask yourself:

- Do I hold a British passport or other? This may affect which countries you can visit and the visas you require.
- What is the expiry date of my passport? Is it valid for 6 months after I plan to return to the UK? If not, where can I renew it and how much will it cost?
- Do I need a visa for any of the countries I intend to visit and the activities I plan to do there (i.e. paid work, volunteering, travelling)? How long will the visa allow me to stay in the country?
- How much does the visa cost and do I need to obtain it in advance? Where can I get it from?
- Is there any other documentation that I will need for entry into each country (e.g. Yellow Fever certificate, proof of accommodation/sufficient funds/return ticket out of country, local currency for airport tax on arrival).
- What steps can I take to protect my documentation whilst travelling, and what will I do if I lose any important documents?
- Do I need to organise my insurance or will my gap provider do it?
- What do I need my insurance to cover? If I book insurance through a gap provider, does the policy cover everything I need it to or do I need additional cover?
- Do I want possessions insurance? What will be the cost of covering certain items I'm planning to take (e.g. camera or laptop)? Would it be better to leave them at home and take a cheaper version? Some providers will not insure possession against theft if you are staying in a beach hut or shared accommodation.
- Have I informed my insurance provider of any pre-existing medical conditions that could affect the policy?
- What is the procedure if I need medical treatment whilst away or if I need to make a claim on my insurance?

13. Equipment and clothing

Many travel books, gap year websites and gap providers have suggested kit lists for travel. You will need clothing suitable for the culture, climate and type of activities you plan to undertake. In hot countries, you will want to wear light coloured, loose clothing to try and keep cool. If you are undertaking wildlife-related volunteering in a hot country, however, it may be more suitable to take clothing that will help you blend into your surroundings better so you don't startle the wildlife.

Below are suggestions for some essential items to take on your trip:

- Security: Money belt, padlock, watch, rape alarm.
- Sleeping: Alarm clock, mosquito net, pillow, sleeping bag/liner and torch/headtorch.
- Eating and drinking: Cup and spoon, water bottle and water purification tablets/system.
- Medication: any medication you usually take (plus spares), contraceptives.
- Toiletries: Hand sanitiser gel, sanitary products, toilet paper, towel, washing line, soap, wet wipes and no-water washes, earplugs and sunscreen.
- Travel planning/recording: Address book, travel journal and pens, camera, guidebooks, maps and phrasebooks
- Ancillaries: Batteries, phone/camera/solar charger, calculator, compass.
- Miscellaneous, useful items: First aid kit, travel medical handbook, lighter/matches, gaffer tape, glue, sewing kit, penknife, book to read, games and small gifts.
- Communications/entertainment: Mobile phone (and local SIM card) – check it works when you arrive in-country, ipod/MP3 player.

It is important to take a well-stocked medical kit with you on your travels. Check with your GP and gap provider if applicable and see if they advise you to take particular medical treatments or equipment for the country or environment you will be travelling in. If travelling in less developed areas it is a good idea to carry sterilised needles that hospital staff can use if you need an injection whilst abroad. Rehydration salts are also advisable for travel.

Specialist equipment for trekking, snorkelling, skiing, and other activities can be very expensive. Websites such as www.ebay.co.uk and www.gumtree.com have a huge collection of second hand and discount equipment. This is often much better than buying new equipment as it makes you less of a target for theft and can save you a lot of money.

With limited space in backpacks and luggage, choosing the right footwear to take with you is important. A good pair of walking shoes, whether for forest/mountain environments or for walking in cities, is essential to making your trip enjoyable and pain free.

Exploratory questions to ask yourself:

- Do I need any specialist clothing or equipment for the activities I plan to undertake and the countries/environments/cultures in which I plan to travel?
- Do I need to get all the equipment for the activities I plan to undertake myself or is some provided for me?
- Does this fit in with my budget?
- Where could I get this clothing/equipment from? Do I need to get specialist advice before buying?
- Do I have access to a suggested kit list for the activities I plan to do?
- Does the culture of the country in which I am travelling require particular clothing? E.g. Long-sleeved tops or trousers.

14. Communication

Keeping in touch with your friends, family and fellow travellers is easier nowadays than ever before. But be cautious, many places still have little or no mobile phone reception, and not all mobile phones will work outside the UK. It is best not to rely on just one form of communication.

Regular communication

Family and friends will be glad to hear how you are getting on during your gap experience. Here are a few ways you can keep in touch:

The Internet/email

- Get a free email address that you can use all over the world. E.g. from www.msn.com, www.yahoo.co.uk or www.gmail.com
- You can use internet cafes at a small cost whilst abroad - see www.cybercafe.com for locations. Some accommodation may also provide free wifi or internet access.
- You can also use the Internet as a phone facility. It is a good idea to set up an account with a company like Skype, which will let you make free calls to other Skype users and low cost calls abroad. www.skype.com. If you are a Facebook user you can also use 'Facetime'.

Mobile phones

- These are useful in an emergency. If your phone is unlocked, you can buy a local sim card or even buy a local sim card before you go e.g. www.worldsim.com. This will allow you to contact friends and in-country contacts very cheaply too.

Normal phones

- Think about pre-paid phone cards and look at charge cards e.g. www.ekit.com

Web journals/blogs

An interactive online journal which allows you to write a diary, upload photos and voice messages, map your journey, send safety alerts etc can keep you in touch with friends, families and colleagues as you travel the world. For examples of blog sites see:

- www.blogger.com
- www.wordpress.com

However don't be too ambitious in your planning - in many places the internet is slow and uploading images may be problematic.

Emergency communication

If travelling independently it is helpful to contact family and friends regularly to let them know your location and next destination.

Ensure your parent/guardian in the UK and any friends you are travelling with have the contact details for the British embassy in-country for use in an emergency. You should also give your travelling partner(s) the contact details of your family/friends in the UK.

Keep copies of key telephone numbers with you whilst travelling and email them to yourself before departure so that they are accessible even if your phone gets stolen. These should include:

- The British embassy in the countries you are travelling to
- Family and friends in the UK and in-country
- Nearest hospital/doctor to your accommodation
- Your bank

- Your airline
- Your insurance company
- Your provider(s) (if applicable)

Ask your parents/guardians before you leave if they will accept a reverse charge call if you find yourself in a situation where you need to contact home and have no money. Note the operator number for each country you are travelling in to use for a reverse charge call.

Exploratory questions to ask yourself:

- How will I keep in contact with family and friends during my gap experience?
- How often will I be able to contact home?
- Do I have any contacts in-country? Will they be contactable at all times?
- Who would I contact in an emergency? How could I contact them?

15. Documenting your gap experience

Whilst you're away you may wish to keep your friends and family updated on your travels by documenting or recording your experience. This might also be important for your own use in terms of reflecting on how your gap year is meeting (or surpassing!) your original aims and objectives and/or providing unexpected outcomes and can provide you with material to use in your CV and when applying for future courses and jobs. Documenting your experience can also provide an opportunity for you to develop another skill or hobby through your gap year.

You might choose to document your experience in several ways. Some ideas include:

Research project

You may wish to investigate an area of geographical interest during your gap year and write up a report on your topic of interest. You might want to do this independently or it could be part of a placement where you may be collecting and analysing data which you can write up in a report.

Photography

You may wish to use photographs which can be uploaded to sites which your friends and family can look at and, if good enough, you could even look at getting published!

For examples of sites you can use, see:

- www.instagram.com
- www.facebook.com
- www.twitter.com
- www.flickr.com
- www.photobucket.com
- www.fotki.com

Blogs

Many gap travellers choose to write a blog - an interactive online journal which allows you to write a diary, upload photos and voice messages, map your journey etc. You can then also access this once you have returned from your gap year.

For examples of blog sites, see:

- www.blogger.com
- www.wordpress.com/

Video Blogs

Many travellers now choose to start a 'vlog' or 'video blog' of their trip using You Tube. To find out more about how to do this, see here: <http://www.vlognation.com/how-to-start-a-vlog/>

Journals

You may prefer to keep a hand written diary or journal which can also double as a scrap book. This is especially valuable in areas where internet access is difficult to find and is an excellent way of recording all the details of your travels.

Articles

You may wish to write an article about your gap experience or a particular aspect of it. Perhaps you have contacts with your local newspaper, your old school or other organisations who may be interested in you writing a piece for them.

16. Responsible travel

When planning your travel it is important to consider its potential effects on local communities, the need to respect local customs and cultures and the sustainability and effect on the environment of the projects or activities you may be involved in.

Some countries may require a certain kind of dress (e.g. covering your head or not wearing revealing clothes) and adherence to particular manners, behaviour or customs when going about your daily life. You should read up on these before you go. Information can often be found in guidebooks and on the FCO individual country profiles at: www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice.

You should always ask people's permission if you wish to take their photograph.

For further information on the ethical issues associated with your planned travel, or to find out more about how to travel responsibly and ethically, consult:

- www.tourismconcern.org.uk
- www.ethicalvolunteering.org
- www.stuffyourrucksack.com/

Exploratory questions to ask yourself:

- What are the ethical issues involved in travelling responsibly in my destination(s)? Consider:
 - the effect on local communities
 - respecting local customs and cultures
 - the impact on the environment
- What actions will I undertake to ensure I travel responsibly (e.g. using water purification treatment instead of buying lots of bottled water and therefore contributing to waste; not using a precious and perhaps unreliable water supply for long showers so the local people might go without; being responsible when disposing of general waste, sanitary waste and unwanted food)
- Apart from you, will anyone benefit from the activities you undertake whilst travelling?
- If participating in a project, will it continue after you have left?

Note on culture shock

The first few days or even weeks abroad can be a shock to the system, especially if you have never travelled independently before. Don't think there is something wrong with you! It is quite normal to feel that you want to go home and for things to feel great one moment and possibly awful the next. In a country which might have a very different climate or even local diet to the UK it is also quite common to feel physically unwell as your body takes time to adjust to new temperatures, humidity or food. To deal with these effects try to:

- Accept that your feelings are normal
- Learn as much about your surroundings as possible
- Respect the views and attitudes of local people
- Find out the cultural dos and don'ts - e.g. about dress, hospitality, religion, attitudes to the opposite sex, taking photos
- Not be critical
- Share your feelings
- Create a routine for eating well and exercising
- Set targets, taking each day or week at a time
- Find time for laughter and fun.

17. Before you go: actions and guidance

Once you have planned and finalised your trip, carry out the following actions to make sure you are as ready and prepared for your travels as you can be.

1. Pre-departure arrangements and preparation

Activity

- Read the provider terms and conditions again and make sure that you understand everything and are happy with the details
- If provisional, confirm your place with your chosen provider/s, after reading **Section 5** of the **Gap Experience Planning Toolkit**
- Attend briefing event of provider if applicable
- Do any training you may need to prepare for activities you plan to participate in

Travel arrangements

- Book flights for travel from/to UK and between countries
- Book airport transfers if needed and accommodation for your arrival
- Get any other tickets for internal travel if necessary

Finance and budgeting

- Get a credit card or other that will work in the country/countries you are going to.
- Buy foreign currency, traveller's cheques and/or pre-paid cash cards.
- Tell your bank where you are going and whether you plan to use your card.
- Note the telephone number of your bank.
- Give copies of your bank, card and traveller's cheques details to parents or guardian.
- Raise any additional funds needed.

Health

- Have any remaining vaccinations you need.
- Get any other medication you may need to take (e.g. anti-malarials).
- Get sufficient supplies of personal medication if needed (and a note from your doctor if illegal/unusual in the country you are going to).
- Inform your insurer and provider if applicable of any pre-existing medical conditions

Safety

- Note the British embassy telephone number for the country/countries you are travelling to and leave a copy with your parents/guardians.
- Monitor the countries you are planning to travel to on the FCO website and seek advice if the safety situation changes. Sign up for Foreign Office country-specific travel advice updates via email www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice, follow the FCO on Twitter @foreignoffice and Facebook www.facebook.com/foreignoffice to keep updated with the latest information and advice on what you should do if you need help in the event of a crisis

Documentation – passports, visas and other

- Renew your passport if required.
- Get any visas and other documentation needed for entry.
- Make copies of all your documentation for a parent/guardian and email them to yourself.

Insurance

- Buy a suitable insurance policy that you have checked out using the questions in **Section 12** of the **Gap Experience Planning Toolkit**. Take a copy of the policy with you and leave one with family/friends.

Accommodation

- Pre-book accommodation where possible, especially for any late-night arrivals.
- Create a list of accommodation options for each location.

Equipment and clothing

- Buy or borrow any equipment and clothing you need including kit for protection against malaria where necessary.
- Ensure you have a complete medical kit. Get advice from your GP, travel clinic or travel health and safety provider about what to put in the kit

Communication

- Let family and friends know you are going away: give them your itinerary and contact details for when you are abroad.
- Note the contact details of family and friends in the UK, any pre-booked provider, and any contacts in-country.
- Set up a blog or website page, or buy a travel diary if you intend to use any of these to record your experiences whilst travelling.

2. Plans for your return

Plan your return in advance

Before you leave for your gap year, just take a little while to think about what you will be doing for the first few weeks when you return.

If you are going with a provider find out what the debriefing arrangements are:

- What contact will the organisation have with you on your return?
- Will you be encouraged to contact other returned participants?
- Will your experience be used in briefings for future participants?
- What certification, reference or testimonial will the organisation provide?
- Will you be debriefed?

Reverse culture shock

Coming home after overseas travel is usually an exciting time: you've had a great trip and are really happy to see friends and relatives. Often, however it can be tricky or can become tricky once the excitement of being home has faded and the reality that your trip is over hits. Sometimes people find themselves constantly reflecting on their overseas experiences (whether happy or stressful) and find adjusting to life at home very difficult. This is very common and often sorts itself out given a period of time for adjustment. If you are finding it very hard to adjust, however, you may wish to look at online forums advising on how to cope or to seek professional support.

Contact with your gap friends

Keep in touch with the friends you make when travelling. For those who hail from your home country, a reunion could be fun. For those based overseas, small presents from the UK will mean a lot. On your return, you might wish to support an organisation overseas through fundraising.

Perspective

Reflect on your experiences and put them into context by asking yourself questions like:

- What did I learn about myself during my trip?
- What did I learn about the places I visited, the people I met and about travelling in general?
- What, if anything, would I do differently if I made the trip again?
- Do I need to now adjust my education and career plans?

Personal development

You will have undergone many demanding experiences and will undoubtedly have learnt new skills, developed and probably matured a significant amount. Take advantage of this and write down your personal development whilst your memory is fresh. You may wish to recall your learning in a CV or future job application.