

Voluntary Work and Gap Years

Employers value experience more than any other thing you can offer. If you are a graduate job seeker lacking in relevant practical experience, it is worth investigating voluntary opportunities. Voluntary work can be an essential prerequisite for entering careers such as social work where you are required to have detailed knowledge of work activities, proof of particular skills and empathy with clients, but can also count a great deal in the creative industries. Helping mount exhibitions, being a 'runner' in a graphics studio, a photographic assistant, or taking part in unpaid theatrical performances will be seen as hugely beneficial in career development. Arranging foreign travel, teaching English as a foreign language and developing small hand-craft industries will give you new skills that will serve you for life and enhance your career prospects. For further information go to the [public and voluntary sector community](#) or look at [Do-it](#).

The practical experience that can be gained through voluntary work will not only help you get a job but may also help you choose a career if you are undecided about occupations. If you are registered unemployed, check before you begin voluntary work that your eligibility for benefits won't change. If you are in employment, it is important to remember that gaining experience of a particular type of work does not have to be done on a full-time basis. A few hours a week of voluntary work will help you to gain the skills you need and to provide the necessary evidence.

Voluntary work abroad



Voluntary work in India and Kenya

There are many organisations and agencies offering voluntary work opportunities abroad. However you must not assume that just because you are arranging your work through an organisation, everything will be in order. Check out the organisation fully before you commit yourself, particularly issues such as health insurance, return travel, payment for accommodation and food, as well as your actual activities. Confirm all arrangements in writing and try to talk to someone who has been to the same location with the same, or a similar, organisation.

Before going abroad, make sure that you have a plan of action for your return, including timings of any course application clearing houses, likely dates of

advertisement for vacancies, and a CV that will just need updating. It may be possible to organise a job to begin on your return, but many employers are not willing to offer deferred entry and graduates frequently change their minds about career direction as a result of taking time out.

Gap year

Postgraduate Gap Years are becoming more common than they were, fulfilling the need for adventure and travel before committing to employment or sole trading. The range of opportunities is huge and it pays to spend plenty of time planning and reading about what really is on offer.

You can break your year up into a number of activities that include foreign travel, part-time work and voluntary work with particular aims in mind: to see other cultures, experience adventure or engage in social or environmental projects in third world countries. Be wary of jumping at the first exciting project that comes your way as some are not all they are cracked up to be.

Gapyear.com

Have a look at this very comprehensive site to get an idea of what is on offer. It lists information for almost every country in the world that you might want to travel to (and a few that you currently probably wouldn't!)

[Trek Force Worldwide](#)

Assisting in well organised conservation and teaching help in remote parts of the world as part of gap or pre-career years.



Trek Force boardwalk project in Belize

If you're heading off overseas to volunteer, what are the questions you should ask beforehand?

- Will you be given a defined role and purpose?
- Do you get to meet face to face with the provider and attend a selection day briefing to assess your suitability for the project? Is there clear information about the structure of your placement?
- How much does it all cost? What are you actually paying for?
- Is there support training before and during your placement?

- How is the work linked to long term community partnerships? Will it have a lasting impact?
- Are there overseas and local offices of the organisation that work with the community?
- Is your health, safety and security guaranteed 24 hours a day by the organisation?
- Is there a commitment to diversity in the organisation?
- How are the long-term developmental issues handles?
- Is your work monitored and evaluated so others can build on it in the future?

The average expenditure for a 'gapper' is around £4,800 so it pays not to be lazy in your planning. You can't change the world on your own but you might change the world for one person – teaching a youngster to pronounce English words correctly might get them a job in a hotel to fund their family out of poverty in a third world country.

If charitable work appeals or doing crazy things to get you round the world and raise money for good causes at the same time then check out some of the links below.

[180 degrees](#)

Exploring Pole to Pole in a 22,000 mile climate change trek

[Tuk to the road](#)

Raising £50,000 for charity by running a Thai tuk tuk from Brighton to Bangkok