

A gap year is a wonderful opportunity to broaden your horizons, reflect and grow in confidence and maturity. Enjoying yourself is important, but so too is building up your CV to impress future employers. Finding a job during your gap year can be done through speculative applications, local advertisements or links through family or friends. There are also numerous useful websites offering gap year opportunities.

**Sandwich placements**

A recent National Council for Work Experience (NCWE) survey found that sandwich placements were the most popular type of work experience. Sandwich courses are available in subjects as diverse as engineering and law. Tutors generally comment that students return for their final year with a real sense of purpose, and perform better in their final year than they would otherwise have done.



The University of Manchester

# Why working is good for you

Getting a job while you are at university will help build your confidence, look good on your CV, provide you with an income and increase your employability when you leave, advises **VERONICA PATRICK**

Some universities tend to have more of a tradition of placements than others. Bath encourages placements; over 60 per cent of students across the university do one, generally a year between their second and final years.

Universities continue to benefit from government funding while students are on their sandwich year, receiving 50 per cent of the usual tuition fee, including student contribution if liable. Most departments at Bath have a placement tutor who will keep in touch with the students on placement, students from most departments are expected to complete an assignment during their placement, and most departments seek employer feedback.

**Vacation work**

The NCWE survey also showed that

vacation work was the second most popular type of work experience opportunity offered by employers. Once at university, you could use the same methods to get some work experience as for a gap year; in addition, you should find that the university has resources to help you. For instance Oxford University Careers Service organises a Work Experience

“Sandwich placements are the most popular type of work experience”

Fair with representatives from around 50 firms offering vacation work.

One of the firms attending the most recent Work Experience Fair was Procter & Gamble which takes on 100 interns each year for a 12-week period. This is a very competitive scheme, with around 3,000 applicants. The company describe their intern

scheme as “a mutual trial”; it gives them an opportunity to observe interns and to assess their ability to complete real work in the firm, and allows interns to assess whether they would like to work for P&G. About 60-

Leah studied for a four-year BSc in International Business at Loughborough University, spending her third year working for Land



Rover, Marketing, Sales and Service, in Warwick. She chose a sandwich course as she felt it would be useful to put into practice what she learned in her first two years. Her main focus during the year was a project setting up a new sales initiative. She worked full time and found her work varied and fulfilling.

70 per cent of their graduate vacancies are filled from internships.

### Getting work experience

It can take initiative and persistence to organise work experience; you need to persuade a company that taking you on will benefit them. Send application letters either direct, locally, or through head office for large organisations. Use any links with family or friends, and don't be afraid to contact firms you would really like to work for. If you'd love to spend the summer working in Harrods, then contact them; you have nothing to lose!

If you are doing work experience as part of a degree course, you can expect a lot of help and support from your institution. At Bath, for instance, most departments have good industrial links and offer substantial help in getting a placement.

### Benefits of work experience

- It will enhance your employment prospects, particularly in helping you develop key skills needed by employers. In the 2004 "Go Wales Student Employment Survey", teamwork and communication were the most common skills students felt they'd gained through work. In today's job market, employers want more than academic brilliance: evidence of work experience and, more importantly, evidence of gaining skills through it, can often give you an advantage over other candidates.

*"If you'd love to spend the summer working in Harrods, then contact them; you have nothing to lose!"*

- Work experience gives you a taste of what work in a particular career area is really like. It gives you an opportunity for self-assessment; you'll probably discover talents and skills you didn't know you had. A successful period of work experience can often pave the way to a job with that employer.
- In some cases, a sandwich year can give you an extra qualification. For Leah, completing her placement and writing a dissertation on it gained her a



University of Plymouth

The Adam Smith Institute (ASI) employs one or two gap year students each year, generally those with an interest in politics or economics. Luke is one of its current gap year students.



He wasn't happy with the university courses he had chosen, and felt it would be helpful to have some "breathing space" where he could further his career and really

achieve something. Luke applied to the ASI by sending his CV plus 250 words on his favourite books and films, and was then interviewed. Luke feels that studying politics in depth and reading up on the ASI's recent work were the main reasons for his success at interview.

Luke is thoroughly enjoying his gap year so far. In addition to running the ASI project to build a monument to Adam Smith in Edinburgh, he helps to organise seminars for sixth-formers and hosts regular meetings with MPs and other public figures.

Diploma in Professional Studies in addition to her degree.

- A period of work experience can significantly boost your confidence, often by forcing you to cope with a new and daunting environment. You are meeting new people, often older than you, and doing new things, eg speaking to customers by telephone.
- Last but not least, there are financial benefits to any paid period of work experience. Leah and Luke both earned salaries giving them more than enough to live on. Doing vacation work or part-time work during a course is a good way to cut down the expense of full-time study.

Most potential problems can be avoided by good preparation. If you are doing work experience as a placement through your university, your department is likely to know, through its links, more about what the placement is likely to involve so you can be more prepared.

Work experience can be a valuable element in your career planning process. Carefully planned and selected, it can contribute to your personal development, aid you in funding studies or travel, and help you find your optimum career path. And it is usually enjoyable!

**For more information see National Council for Work Experience [www.work-experience.org](http://www.work-experience.org).**