

Reading 1

Should I take a gap year?

For many British students, deciding whether to take a year out to work or travel, or whether to go straight to university from school instead can be a tough decision. On the one hand, a gap year is useful for students who can't decide which course they want to do at university. Not only does it give them more time to consider their options, but the experience can help them to see things in different ways. It's also a chance to make some money and save up for the university years ahead. On the other hand, it seems a waste of time and money to some to delay their studies when they could be learning the skills required to get the career of their dreams.

These days, the decision about whether to take a gap year or not is complicated by the fact that getting, and paying for, a place at university is not as easy as it once was. In Britain, tuition fees are higher than ever before, and the competition for places at university has never been tougher. A lot of students believe that they have to start university sooner rather than later as the costs can only go up. As a direct result of all this, for a majority of students, having a year out does not seem as practical or sensible an option as it once was and, as a result, numbers of gap-year students are falling.

In the UK, there are travel companies which specialise in organising student gap-year trips, many of which, to my mind, have considerably improved the gap-year experience for young people over the years. These companies have started offering 'mini-gap' trips, which last only three or four months, thus taking advantage of that short window between leaving school in June and starting university in October. They are also offering year-long gap trips which are more vocational than in the past, as well as more courses to train young people to learn a skill.

A recent survey tried to discover how supportive of the gap-year experience future employers might be, and found that young people who had spent a year doing voluntary work or learning a new skill had a clear advantage when it came to job seeking after university. This was because they had done something to make their job applications stand out. Although there can be no career advantage in just travelling around the world and hanging out on beaches, choosing to spend time working with disadvantaged kids in the developing world, or on work placements in offices and factories closer to home, will help young people get a job in the future.

Read the text. Choose the correct answers.

- 1 Which of the following reasons for taking a gap year is not mentioned in the text?
 - A It is an opportunity for students to try out aspects of the course they have already chosen to study.
 - B It is a way of gaining some of the necessary funding for the time they will spend in higher education in the future.
 - C It is a means of discovering whether they really want to take one course or another.
 - D It is potentially a period of reflection, which will help them make good decisions later.
- 2 Which of the following does the writer express as an opinion held by some people rather than as a fact?
 - A The cost of going to university is at an all-time high.
 - B Never has it been so hard to get into university.
 - C future rise in tuition fees is inevitable.
 - D Fewer students are choosing to take a gap year.
- 3 Which of the following is expressed as a fact by the writer?
 - A Gap-year trips have improved over the years.
 - B The number of specialist gap-year organisers has increased in recent years.
 - C The range of gap-year trips on offer has changed recently.
 - D Longer gap-year trips of up to a year have been discontinued.
- 4 Which of the following is described as a recent innovation by gap-year travel companies?
 - A Much longer gap-year trips are being organised.
 - B Gap-year trips are more likely to involve doing some work.
 - C Skills training on gap-year trips has been introduced for the first time.
 - D Gap-year students can now earn money, which they couldn't before.
- 5 Which of the following gap-year choices should young people make if they wish to influence employers?
 - A They should go abroad rather than stay in their own countries.
 - B They ought to go on shorter trips rather than take a whole year.
 - C They should help others rather than just gain personal experiences.
 - D They ought to consider learning skills rather than just getting a job.

Reading 2

Read the text. Match sentences A–F with gaps 1–5. There is one extra sentence.

Victims of fame?

Everybody thinks being a teenage celebrity is glamorous, and, to a large extent, it is. Stardom brings fortune as well as fame, and experiences that average kids can only dream of.¹ So, how can teenage celebrities avoid becoming victims of fame?

When the lives of teenage stars go out of control, the press are quick to blame their employers and their pushy parents, and they have a point. Often it is the pressure that other people put on celebrities that causes most stress.² As the leading actor, she had felt the strain of carrying the show, knowing that if she had put in a bad performance, the careers of other people would have been affected. It is a responsibility few teenagers have to face.

Teenage stars have to work hard at keeping their true friends, who may feel jealous of their success.³ The presence of a well-known celebrity can have a strange effect on other people. They turn and stare, and ask for autographs. Imagine how that can affect an insecure teenager. It can easily make any individual vain and self-important, with a false idea of how important they are.⁴ It's a big ask, and no wonder that so many find it difficult.

The quality of the support network behind any young star is vital. It's no surprise that big Hollywood stars like Jodie Foster and Daniel Radcliffe, who started out as child actors, came from families who considered the well-being of their kids more important than being in a film. This isn't always the case.⁵ They allow their famous offspring to do whatever he or she wants, and, even worse, they help them spend the money they earn instead of investing it wisely.

- A In a recent interview, American sitcom star Tia Mowry described how she had found being on a hit show emotionally and physically exhausting.
- B Teenage celebrities need to be well-balanced enough to realise that fame is not likely to last, and thick-skinned enough not to get upset by criticism or negative attention.
- C However, there is, of course, a downside to being in the public eye, and there are many high-profile cases of youngsters whose lives have gone seriously wrong.
- D They also need to be shrewd enough to recognise when a new acquaintance is not to be trusted.
- E Although the negative side of fame as just described can weigh heavily on an individual, it is worth noting that there are many success stories.
- F A lot of parents are star struck, enjoying their children's success to the point that they encourage them to be vain and badly behaved.

Listening

You will hear three texts. Choose the correct answers.

Text 1

- 1 Which of the following general reasons for going to live abroad is not mentioned by the speaker?
 - A to go to a good school, college, or university
 - B to meet a range of people from different cultures
 - C to find a place which suits the sort of person you are
- 2 What was the main factor that persuaded Elliot to live in Spain?
 - A The lifestyle of those he met.
 - B The cultural traditions of the country.
 - C The chance to find good work opportunities.

Text 2

- 3 What does Tony say about his parents' expectations of him?
 - A They expected him to have done better at school.
 - B They hoped he might go on to higher education.
 - C They didn't want him to go and live in a foreign country.
- 4 In the interview, which of the following does Tony do?
 - A Deny having any problems when he first arrived in Milan.
 - B Express regret that he didn't go back to England.
 - C Express pride that he has done well since going to Milan.

Text 3

- 5 What is the speaker doing?
 - A Introducing a group of well-known writers on a programme about travel literature.
 - B Presenting a group of people with experience who can advise young people about travel opportunities.
 - C Introducing a group of specialists who will answer quiz questions about their chosen subjects.