Valuable and worthwhile work experience opportunities aren’t just limited to the UK. By looking further afield, you have the chance to gain work experience with a difference.

Work experience can come in the form of paid internships, unpaid work experience, placements, voluntary work and general paid work. You could be looking to go abroad as part of a placement year or for a graduate role. However, this hand-out will focus on how to find extra-curricular work experience undertaken during the summer holidays whilst you’re still an undergraduate.

By exposing yourself to different environments, people, cultures and organisations, you are not only going to develop professional skills within the workplace, but you will also develop personal, transferable skills. Graduates who show passion, dedication, versatility, independence, initiative, responsibility and the ability to communicate well - which can all come from spending time abroad - are well sought after, and the right work experience opportunity abroad could give you that edge when applying for jobs.

**What this hand-out covers**

*Where shall I go and what shall I do?*

*Now that I’ve got a plan, how do I find opportunities?*

*What other things do I need to think about?*

*Can I get funding from the University to help me pay for this experience?*

*Does the University have any established internships I can apply for?*

*What difference can work experience abroad really make?*
Where shall I go and what shall I do?

Make your trip worthwhile. It is likely that this experience will cost you a fair amount of money so it is worth thinking of it as an investment. Try not to be drawn in to the sunny place with the nice beaches; think about where you could go that will actually make a difference to your future employability and skills set.

**Task**

Sit down with a piece of paper and brainstorm your interests and career aims. Take time to research different countries and opportunities and try not to let the amount of information overwhelm you. Keep focusing on what is important to you and the right opportunity will eventually present itself. Follow the arrows below to see how this works in practice:

1. **What job do I want in the future? What interests me?**
   - Have a look online at your ‘dream’ job(s) or careers that interest you.
   - What skills and experiences are employers looking for?
   - What skills do you already have and what skills are you missing?
   - What have you always wanted to try?
   - What sector interests you?
   - What part of the world have you always wanted to explore?
   - What would challenge you?

2. **What countries could I go to?**
   - What countries offer the kind of work experience that interests you?
   - What could you gain from going abroad that you couldn’t gain from a similar placement in the UK?
   - What kind of environment will you be exposed to?
   - Are you looking for a real culture shock or something more comfortable?
   - How much would it cost for you to get to this country?
   - Will you need a visa?
   - How much will insurance be?
   - What are the medical facilities like?

3. **What would it be like to actually do work experience in this country?**
   - Narrow down your top choices and really do some research into the country.
   - What are the main religions and languages of the country?
   - What is the culture and work ethic of the country?
   - What are the living costs like?
   - How accessible is transport?
   - How much support will you get when you are there?
   - What are the reviews like of the organisation?

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For this type of job, I need to be flexible, able to cope with stressful situations and a problem solver. Where can I get these skills and experiences?

I have found opportunities in Europe and Asia which will provide me with real responsibility and hands-on experience within the care sector which I wouldn’t be able to get in the UK.

The European flights are more affordable than the Asian ones. I particularly liked one Bulgarian organisation as they seem supportive and good value for money. They’ve had good reviews.

I think I’ll go to Bulgaria.
Now that I've got a plan, how do I find opportunities?

**Advertised positions**

Many organisations promote their opportunities via their websites. They may have their head or local offices in the UK and it is always important to try and speak to someone before committing to anything financially. Many of these organisations require you to make a payment. Please read the Careers Network advice on working with third parties for further information, before you commit to anything financially.

**Absolute Internship** Internships in Asia

AEISEC (based at The University of Birmingham) Speak to the AEISEC team to find out more about internships

**Any Work Any Where** A database providing search facilities for jobs across the globe

**British Council Internships** Highly sought after internships with the British Council

**British Council Work or Volunteer Overseas** A variety of work and voluntary opportunities through the British Council

**BUNAC** Work, internship and voluntary opportunities across the globe

**Camp America** Gain experience working with young people at American summer camps

**Careers Connect** Our very own Careers Connect has hundreds of opportunities, both in the UK and overseas

**CRCC Asia** Internships in China

**EURES - The European Jobs Network** Jobs in Europe

**Euro Brussels** Internships in EU Affairs

**Euro Graduate** Hints and tips for graduates looking for work abroad

**Euro Placement** Internships in Europe

**Global Brigades** Medical placements overseas

**Global Career Company** Jobs and conferences in Africa, Asia and Maghreb

**Go Abroad** A database of overseas opportunities

**International Association for the Exchange of students** Paid placements for Science, Engineering & Applied Art students

**International Volunteer HQ** Worldwide voluntary opportunities

**Next Step Connections** Work experience placements in Asia

**Operation Wallacea** Biodiversity and conservation research projects

**Otra Cosa** A Peruvian NGO with various volunteering opportunities

**Overseas Job Centre** Hints and information for overseas work

**Projects Abroad** Volunteer projects across the globe

**Prospects** Information about finding work overseas

**Sri Lanka Volunteers** Teaching and care placements in Sri Lanka

**STA Travel** Opportunities and information on this well-known travel site

**Target Jobs** More information on the benefits of overseas work experience

**Third Year Abroad** Information for students spending a year abroad
Equal Opportunity Work Experience Schemes:

EmployAbility

Civil Service Fast Stream Diversity Internship Programmes

National Bureau for Students with Disabilities

**Going It Alone**

Although there may be many benefits to doing your placement with an organisation, it is also possible to source your own opportunity. If you have friends, family or contacts in a country which interests you, get in touch with them to see if they have any advice or information about organisations you could approach. Use Linkedin and the internet to search for organisations and companies that interest you and send across a smart, tailored covering email and CV.

Think about:

- What experience you are actually seeking
- Why you want to work with the organisation you have chosen
- What skills and experiences you can bring
- Your availability

Use your Careers Network college team to provide you with further guidance and support. We offer a CV checking service, application advice and careers guidance. See our website for more details and to book an appointment.

**What other things do I need to think about?**

Before embarking on your trip, there will be lots to think about and lots to organise. The more research you do before you travel the better. Home-sickness can hit unexpectedly, but if you are well-equipped and prepared it will make the settling-in process easier and you will be able to make the most of your experience.

**Find out about the country you are going to**

Learn about the country and culture you will be entering. Do they have certain customs or religions? Will this have an impact on you? What is deemed to be polite behaviour? How should you greet someone? What is the food like? What clothes should you wear? What are the emergency numbers? Will you need a visa?

It may be useful to buy a travel guide and search the internet for information on the country you are visiting and the city/town you are staying in. Research may also inspire you with ideas for places to visit during your time off. Try the following websites to get you started:

- Careers Network: Country Profiles
- Prospects: Country Profiles
- Target Jobs: Country Profiles
Pop back to our [International Work Experience](#) page to get more information on the practicalities:

- **Passports**
- **Your ability to travel to the country**
- **Visas**
- **Risk Assessments**
- **Travel Insurance**
- **Medical Cards**
- **Language Skills and Cultural Awareness**
- **Third Parties**

**Further Information**

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**Consider your safety**

Your safety when travelling abroad must always be a priority. Keep up to date with travel advice from the [Foreign and Commonwealth Office](#).

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**Can I get funding from the University to help me pay for this experience?**

Funding is available from the University of Birmingham. If you secure a Career’s Network Work Experience bursary, you do not have to repay it; it really is there to help you out. The bursary money is available for University of Birmingham students who have found work experience which is unpaid or low paid. It can help towards your travel costs, accommodation, living costs and bills and travel vaccinations.

There are four strands for undergraduate students who have secured a summer experience placement (excluding final years):

- **UK Professional Bursary** For professional work experience in the UK. Up to £800 per person
- **Research Bursary** For research based work experience (UK or overseas). Up to £500 per person
- **International Bursary** For international opportunities. Up to £800 per person
- **Gateway Bursary** For students from certain priority groups. Up to £2000 per person

With the exception of the Gateway bursary, which is slightly more flexible, the bursaries are for students undertaking work experience over the summer period. It is possible to apply for more than one strand if you are eligible. Deadlines are at the end of March (mid-April for Gateway) and full details and application forms can be found on our [funding for internships](#) pages. Have a look at our general Internship and Work Experience pages [here](#).

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**Does the University have any established internships I can apply for?**

As well as the bursary strands, Careers Network also offer **Global Challenge** opportunities, which are fully funded international internships with top global companies such as the Chicago Shakespeare Theatre, British Consulate and GlaxoSmithKine. These opportunities are open to all undergraduates and the deadline is in February each year. For more information, view our [Global Challenge](#) pages.

If you have any questions about bursaries or Global Challenge, please email us on [internships@contacts.bham.ac.uk](mailto:internships@contacts.bham.ac.uk).
What difference can work experience abroad really make?

**Hannah Evans, Environmental Science, First Year.**

Over summer 2014, Hannah spent four weeks in South Africa, where she recorded bird species and completed habitat assessments at Thanda Game Reserve and qualified as an open water diver at Sodwana Bay. As an aspiring wildlife conservationist, Hannah’s experience abroad made the world of difference.

‘Having the opportunity to work alongside the animals I have had a deep love for for so many years was incredible...most days we were learning about the different species we encountered, their interactions with other species and how the conservation work we were doing would impact upon them.

I had the opportunity, whilst away, to discuss my ideas and queries concerning conservation, both specific to South Africa and worldwide, with staff who have worked in the fields for most of their lives. They were a wealth of knowledge, extraordinarily inspiring and have assured me that this is a career path I wish to pursue.

I believe that being put into an unusual environment, far from home, with people I had never met before was hugely beneficial in order for me to develop as an individual. There were so many life lessons to be learnt throughout the experience, aside from professional growth and that is something I am truly grateful for.’

**James Bell, Medicine, Fourth Year.**

Over summer 2014, James spent three weeks in the Bahamas within a hospital’s emergency department. James wanted more exposure of emergency care to patients with gunshot injuries. James contacted the hospital directly to arrange his placement.

‘Headlines such as “six gunned down in two hours” plagued the newspapers every weekend, and I managed to learn some invaluable first-hand tips and techniques from Bahamian doctors of how to deal with [gunshot] injuries. This is knowledge that I will be sure to carry forward with me into the NHS.

It’s always a thrill working abroad, and I think what I enjoyed most was the sheer variety of cases compared to what I have experienced in [UK] A&E departments; I've never seen a patient with a penetrating injury to the foot from sea urchin spines, or an exotic case of suspected chikungunya fever!

Finding out about how healthcare worked in the Bahamas was interesting since I am always looking to expand my knowledge of other healthcare systems to see if any aspects of these foreign models could be applied to help improve the NHS.’