

# Tim's gap year: why he's never felt more motivated

By KATE WALSH  
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Tim Randall took a year-long break from university to figure out what he wanted to do. Picture: CHRIS CHAN

Tim Randall was anything but lazy in the year-long break he took from his university degree.

After two years studying for a bachelor of nanotechnology at the University of Wollongong he was burnt out, unmotivated and keen for some time off.

But he didn't waste his time, instead using it to work out what he really wanted from life.

The 23-year-old, originally from Griffith, stayed in Wollongong and worked two jobs, joined a soccer team, did volunteer work with a church group and spent any free hours he had reading about young entrepreneurs and watching TED talks online to see if he could find some direction.

He has now been back at uni for 18 months studying in a new field, biology, and says his gap year made him a more dedicated student.

"It gave me a stronger sense of direction. I was motivated then to get into uni, keen to get back into study and some extra-curricular activities," he says.

"I found after my year off that I needed to choose carefully the paths I want to take."

A study by the University of Sydney found students who took a gap year between finishing high school and starting university achieved more highly than mature students and those who didn't.

Randall says he isn't surprised by the study. From his own experience, and the tales of several of his friends who have taken gap years to see the world, he believes taking time off to clear your head and set some life goals can only ever be a good thing.

Brian Horan, managing director and principal counsellor at Figtree-based eCareers Academy, says gap years give people a chance to think about what they want out of life, whether you work, travel, volunteer or just really think about the future.

"I think sometimes when you're studying you don't have time to put aside to say, 'What do I really want to do? What am I passionate about?'" he says.

"Some students who went straight from high school to uni are burning out because they haven't taken the time to rest, to recuperate and to really focus."

Horan says travel can help people see the world from a new perspective.

"I've seen the transformation in individuals when they get clarity for their careers. A lot of them do come back [from travel] overcoming certain fears in their lives or seeing the world with different eyes."

While gap years are increasingly popular as the pressure for students to cap their education with a university degree increases, they aren't a completely new phenomenon.

Dapto's Neill Porter took a year off from study several decades ago to tour with his band.

While he often didn't get paid and dinner frequently consisted of toast, he says he doesn't regret the time he took away from university one bit.

He says his experience shaped his future career, particularly because learning to play to a crowd helped his classroom skills when he started teaching chemistry at a TAFE in Sydney.