

Wharfers urged to test their skills abroad

By John Hill on April 21, 2009 1:51 PM | Tagged with: [Bank of Scotland](#), [Ghana](#), [Projects Abroad](#), [Scott McQuarrie](#), [volunteering](#), [World Cup](#)

It's hard to believe the world is open to you when you're sitting at your desk – or cleaning it out.

But there are amazing experiences to be found beyond the cream walls of your office.



Scott McQuarrie was on the verge of being made redundant from his job at Bank of Scotland when he traded in his suit for a coach's tracksuit in Ghana.

Now he is urging Wharfers and other professionals to embrace similar adventures as programme adviser for volunteering organisation Projects Abroad.

The group offers eye-opening experience in the developing world in fields such as teaching, business, medicine, journalism, sport and conservation.

He said: "A number of my friends and colleagues were made redundant, so I jumped ship.

"I studied sport and sociology at Edinburgh University and I wanted to do some volunteering in something sport-related in Africa.

"I took part in a sport development project for four months, working with three different age groups of kids ranging from 12 up to 18.

"My role was to bring a few of the European training methods to the project, as a sort of cultural exchange.

"I found myself coaching the kids on formations and spatial awareness. They were all very capable athletes – it was more about teaching the technical side."

The former semi-professional footballer was more used to the chilly climes of his native Edinburgh, so he found the heat a little out of the ordinary.

He said: "Having come from Scotland, to be submerged in 40 degree heat was the first thing I really noticed. And the different sights and sounds are a real assault on your senses.

"It's dramatic for the first week or so. You see poverty on a scale you've never seen before and people speak to you in a language you've never heard before."

While Scott was training the next generation of Ghanaian footballers, the current crop were enthralled by the nation at the 2006 World Cup, storming through the group stages before being knocked out by Brazil in the last 16.

Scott said: "I thought fans in the UK were passionate about the game, but the Ghanaians took celebration to a new level.

"They lost their first game and everybody was really depressed, but then they won their second and third games and there were processions for three to four hours. People were out on the streets with barbecues. It was very memorable for me."

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On his return to Edinburgh, he contacted Projects Abroad to provide feedback, and was working for them just months later. In his new role, he has seen a rise in applications in recent months from bankers, lawyers and graduates struggling to find work.

He said: "It's been quite a stark increase, especially in January and February.

"People who don't have a job and want practical work experience don't instantly make the connection to volunteering. But it gives them an edge.

"If anyone has ever worked in a developing country, they can work in any place in the UK.

"It really adds a skill sector, and it can give people coming back to the UK extra motivation and allow them to be more grateful for what they have.

"Even though I was 27 at the time, it was the first project in which I was leading. In terms of leadership, delegation and communication, it really helped my confidence.

"We've had accountants and economists, and a wide range of people from the financial and legal sector. But we can always find something for an individual."

Go to projectsabroad.co.uk, call 01903 708300 or email info@projects-abroad.co.uk

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