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Jobless graduates are sent packing

A GOVERNMENT-funded scheme for 500 out of work graduates to spend 10 weeks on social projects in overseas countries is being matched by the private sector with the result that openings are being provided for 1,000 jobless former students.

Raleigh International is handling the Government programme, funded by Lord Mandelson's Business, Innovation and Skills department for 500 people under the age of 24 struggling to find jobs. They will undertake 10 week expeditions to Borneo, India, Nicaragua and Costa Rica to work on community and environmental projects.

Now Projects Abroad, the biggest commercial volunteer service organisation, is supporting the initiative by matching the number of public sector funded placements at a cost of £500,000, provided by British companies.

Peter Slowe, who founded the business in 1991 and burst into the limelight last week when as chairman of Labour's finance and industry group, called for Lord Mandelson to replace Gordon Brown as Prime Minister, says the graduates would only have to fund the cost of their flights.

He said: "The cost of the trip, normally around £2,000 is met by private companies after a 30pc discount has been applied by Projects Abroad. With 48 graduates chasing every job on offer this year, we all need to do our bit."

So far, businesses have agreed to provide support for 200 places. They include aAim Capital Finance, Charles Tyrwhitt, PropertyIndex.com, Martin Miller's Gin, Global Personals, The Coaching Academy, Old Park Lane Capital, KashFlow and Young Marmalade.

Projects Abroad has been focusing on attempting to place candidates in business and enterprise type openings in developing countries rather than expeditions. One of the enterprises being supported is a football academy in Ghana in West Africa.