

Matt Foote

Senior Financial Sector Specialist

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Advancing geography
and geographical learning

Job title: Senior Financial Sector Specialist in
Crisis and Disaster Risk Finance
Organisation: The World Bank
Location: London, UK

How did you get to where you are now?

I was originally a cartographer and remote sensing/GIS specialist in UK government, where I did a part-time degree in geography at Birkbeck. I then moved into reinsurance broking and catastrophe modelling as a geospatial specialist. I worked in various insurance and reinsurance roles over the last 20 years, ranging from pure analytical and consulting and remote sensing, to GIS and model development, regulatory affairs, and catastrophe modelling and exposure management.

I have recently moved into a role at The World Bank, focussed on Disaster Risk Financing, where I am applying all my geographical experience and knowledge to help increase resilience to natural and non-natural catastrophe shocks. I am a Chartered Geographer, CGeog Final Assessor, and a council member of the Remote Sensing and Photogrammetry Society. I was also a joint author of a recent Wiley textbook on Catastrophe Modelling. I am also part way through a part time PhD in beach hydro- and morpho-dynamic measurement.

Was there anything particularly useful that helped you get into this role?

Being trained originally as cartographer has given me a deep understanding of geospatial data provenance, and the importance of accuracy over precision. Being a Chartered Geographer also enables me to interact with others in complementary sectors, such as infrastructure and engineering, and has added a professionalism to my role which is extremely useful.

What do you do as part of your role?


As a Senior Financial Sector Specialist, I am one member of a team of experts in The World Bank who are focussed on advising, designing and funding crisis and disaster risk financing strategies, to help countries ensure that their populations are financially protected in the event of a disaster. My role involves regular meetings with client officials, donors, consultants and other partners, across many parts of the world and on a wide range of themes and projects. Travel is therefore an important aspect, but also the ability to collaborate effectively on projects through remote means. Typically, I can be undertaking analysis, presenting to clients or donors, writing and reviewing project proposals, selecting and managing consultants on projects, and ultimately managing disaster risk financing projects to successful conclusion for the client and donor.

What skills and characteristics do you need for this role, apart from geographical knowledge?

The ability to assimilate and critically evaluate disparate sources of data, whether geographical or other is of great importance. Being able to look across a problem and identify innovative or less obvious solutions is also important. Finally, the ability to communicate complex issues to non-specialist and decision makers, whether graphically, orally or through statistical sources, is essential.

What is the most interesting or enjoyable project you've worked on, and why?

Far too many interesting projects over the years to list! But recently, helping to develop new risk financing solutions for client countries to support their fiscal resilience has been of particular interest. I am also getting to visit some amazing places.



What are the opportunities for career progression? What might you be doing in five years' time?

My career path is 'well-trodden', and I have been lucky enough to find a very successful progression across a number of sectors and roles, through Government, the international reinsurance and insurance markets, and now at a multi-lateral development bank. My current role is one which I see as a perfect consolidation of everything I have experienced, and learnt, as a geographer, over the previous years. However, both insurance (in many roles, both analytical and business focussed including underwriting and broking) and development provide a diverse and exciting range of opportunities for geographers within the risk management arena, and it really is possible to create your own, very successful career, though your specialism as a geographer.

What advice would you give to someone wanting to go in to this career?

As well as the day job, I also cycle a lot, both for leisure but also to race (Cyclo-cross) and I have had great fun helping to design and map race courses using my knowledge of terrain and GIS. Cyclo-cross really is a geomorphological sport! How do you maintain your knowledge and interest in geography outside of work?

As a geographer, nothing you are taught, or research will be unrelated to risk management, so even whether you specialise in physical, human or other, remember that having a broad understanding of how geography integrates everything is uniquely valuable. Equally, having strong quantitative, geo-statistical and geospatial knowledge is very useful given the focus on analytics and risk quantification. Also be sure to retain the enthusiasm which is natural to geographers for learning new ideas and concepts, as well as in understanding how diverse things can really be. 'Risk' is complex and uncertain, and geographers are ideally suited to help manage it.