

All in a Day's Work

Susan Steele – Fisheries Training Instructor



PROFILE

Susan Steele works as a training executive for Bord Iascaigh Mhara (BIM) – the Irish Fisheries Board, running aquaculture and business training courses around the coast. She also works with primary and secondary schools as part of her job and is based in Castletownbere, Co. Cork.

Photos: © Susan Steele

you feed him for a day, train him how to grow a fish and you feed him for a lifetime'. I firmly believe in this and also in educating young people about the importance of protecting our marine environment.

What is the best thing about your job?

I have the privilege of teaching many incredible people who work around our coast most days of the week. I have learnt so much from them. Working with children is great as they excite you about the sea. Every day is a great adventure at work. I also have a small recirculation unit in my office and get to hatch out dogfish eggs, teach octopus tricks and learn about feeding different animals.

A Day in the Life of Susan Steele

Have you always been interested in the sea?

I decided at the age of three that all I wanted to be was a marine biologist. I grew up on the Beara peninsula in West Cork. It is a spectacularly beautiful part of the world and I spent every minute that I could down at the shore looking at rock pools and in the sea to catch a glimpse of the life that was there. I was very lucky to have parents who were willing to support me and who didn't mind the drying seaweed, aquariums and the odious smell of fish around the house. When I was 11 years old, I managed to get a job working in a local salmon hatchery. I saved up money from this and went on a Marine Ecology course when they ran them at Sherkin Island Marine Station, years ago.

What training did you do to get where you are today?

By the time that I was 17, I had worked on mussel farms, oyster farms and in Trinity College Dublin as a research assistant. I did a degree in Marine Biology in Bangor and learnt to dive. I won an environmental scientist of the year and then did a PhD in UCC. I got a postdoctoral position in London in the Royal Holloway and then started lecturing and working as a tutor for the Open University. I had a mad notion to work on every aspect of Marine Animals from ecology (study of animals in their environment) through microscopes, electron microscopes (to the cell) and molecular biology (to the genes). I did manage to work and write scientific papers on all of these things, which have all helped me get to where I am today!

What is your main aim as a trainer with BIM?

In aquaculture training BIM's logo is 'give a man a fish and

What is the worst thing about your job?

Time! I find it hard to say "No" and I am always trying to do too much. Still, I do manage to get things done and try to make a difference.

What is a day in your life like?

I have four brilliant children Emma, Lizzie, Martin and Molly. Days start with the usual chaos of getting ready for school. I cycle into work with Martin on the back of the bike. It is nearly five miles and we get to argue about dinosaurs on the way in. Martin is four and at playschool. He is convinced that dinosaurs still exist. I arrive in and usually teach for the day. I have become a "jack of all trades" and teach first aid, personal survival techniques, boat handling, radio courses, manual handling, and all of the marine biology and fish farming courses. Days vary from taking 20-30 school children out to the shore and showing them how life survives to teaching shellfish farming. Imagine that you can hang rope in our waters and grow mussels! I try and inspire people doing the courses so we spend a lot of time eating the produce of the sea such as seaweed (no wonder, I need to cycle). I go with my husband and two smallest children to the beach for our lunch, sometimes collecting seaweed for the garden. At the end of the day, I cycle home and eat. My husband has a farm and we have great vegetables (probably due to the seaweed)! Then I try and fit in time to study. I believe that we should never stop learning. I am just finishing a Masters in Business Administration (MBA) and will have finished a Masters in Education by next October as well.

