

All in a Day's Work

Oisín Foden, Education Development Officer, Irish Water Safety

My name is Oisín Foden, I'm the Education Development officer for Irish Water Safety (IWS), the statutory, voluntary body that promotes drowning prevention education in Ireland.

Oisín Foden



Images courtesy of IWS

swimming, safety on the farm, safety at home and safety on open water and inland waterways.

Do students learn about the importance of Ringbuoys?

Yes, students are also taught simulated rescues on land, such as the use of the red ringbuoy that we designed and that is housed in yellow boxes at waterways nationwide. These ringbuoys are used every year to save lives from drowning and although they are regularly vandalised, I am hopeful that by instilling in children at a young age, a respect for these essential lifesaving devices, we will see a reduction in the number of ringbuoys reported missing or vandalised. In short, we are equipping children with the skills that will keep them safe at our wonderful aquatic environments.

What do you enjoy about your job?

I really enjoy working with an organisation that has such an important role, one that is also a registered charity with nearly 5,000 members around the country, many of whom giving their time, energy and knowledge back to their communities.

What is the most important part of your job?

Tragically we lose an average of eleven people to drowning every month in Ireland and in just ten years, thirty children aged fourteen and under drowned nationwide. Every minute of my working day is filled with tasks that aim to reduce these figures and as much as I rely on so many volunteers to help, we can only succeed in reducing these tragic figures when we see an increase in the number of parents, guardians and schoolteachers taking the time to teach children how to be safe.

How can we help?

Your first stop is our one-stop-shop to water safety – iws.ie. Together, Let's Bring Drownings Down.



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How long have you been involved with Irish Water Safety?

I'm based in Galway and have been involved with IWS since I was twelve years old when I participated in water safety lessons in Salthill. I have been a volunteer with IWS - Galway, one of thirty committees nationwide, since I was sixteen and have also been an active member of the Galway Surf Lifesaving team. As a volunteer I have taught water safety and coached surf life saving to children and adults interested in becoming a pool, river or beach lifeguard or indeed have the skills in water survival, self rescue and the skills to save others from drowning.

What do you work at now?

In 2014 I became the IWS National Education Development Officer. I work with national schools and swimming pools to increase the number of children participating in the PAWS (Primary Aquatics Water Safety) programme.

Can you tell us more about PAWS?

We developed this course to incorporate all aspects of the aquatics strand that is a part of the physical education component of the primary school syllabus. This programme, developed with the input of practising school teachers who are also members of IWS, is specifically tailored for primary school pupils and is exclusive to primary schools. Teachers receive resources that give them the knowledge to teach and certify their pupils with nationally recognised awards that are recommended by the Department of Education and Skills.

Can the students learn some of this information in the classroom?

Part of the programme includes a detailed classroom element so that children learn all about staying safe around water – before they even leave the classroom. National school teachers bring the pupils through a number of online resources that are designed to change the children's attitudes and behaviours around water. Subject matter includes safe

