

All in a Day's Work

Frank Clabby – Instruments Unit, Met Éireann

PROFILE

Frank Clabby works in the Instruments Unit in Met Éireann. While based in Dublin, work takes him throughout the country.



Photos courtesy of Robbie Murphy

What type of work do you do?

Simply put, I'm involved in the buying, installation and servicing of instrumentation used by Met Éireann (the Irish Meteorological Service). However, the bulk of my work is the installation and servicing of Automatic Weather Stations (AWSs). An AWS measures air and grass temperature, rainfall, humidity, wind speed and direction, soil temperatures at 5cm, 10cm and 20cm, earth temperatures 30cm, 50cm and 100cm and solar radiation. Recently we have been adding extra equipment to our AWSs to allow us to measure visibility and cloud height.

Have you always been interested in what you do?

Honestly – no. I joined Met Éireann, then called the Irish Meteorological Service, purely by chance. While coming from a farming background, weather was/is always important, but I had other ideas as to what I wanted to do.

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

When I first joined I trained as a Meteorological Observer and served at Claremorris, Dublin Airport and Casement Aerodrome. However, automation was taking over. I went to college by night and qualified in Electronic Engineering. I then transferred into my present location. Thereafter, it was/is on-the-job training. With technology changing all the time, the training and learning is never ending.

What is a day in your life like?

One could come into the office to discover that equipment had broken down and I would have to attend to that. On an installation, I would have to organise for the civil works, such as the telephone/electricity supply and foundations, to be carried out. It's likely that I would have to liaise with Eircom, to establish communications and with the ESB for power requirements. Local considerations

would also have to be taken into account, for example where to locate instruments. (Did you know that one of the hardest things to do is measure rainfall?) The wind is measured at 10m above the ground, which requires the installation of a mast. That requires planning permission from the local authority and occasionally that can be both tricky and a long drawn out process.

What is the best thing about your Job?

I would say the variety of work. AWSs are installed up and down the country. Each one is unique in some way and brings a different challenge. There is great satisfaction in entering a site and in about four weeks having an automatic weather station working there, recording meteorological data minute by minute. These data are then used by forecasters and climatologists both here in Ireland and throughout the world.

What is the worst thing about your job?

Working outdoors in Ireland can mean only one thing, having to work in the rain. It slows progress and it can be frustrating trying to keep equipment dry. I mentioned variety earlier, and being in a service division one often doesn't get enough time as one would like to work on a particular project before having to move onto another.

What advice would you give someone wanting to do your job?

It's a difficult one to answer! In Met Éireann, we all enter, when trained, as either Meteorologists or Meteorological Officers. The immediate needs of the Service usually dictate where you are stationed. However, a degree in engineering, preferably Electrical or Electronic, is desirable. And an enthusiasm for the variety and challenges that may occur in the Instruments Unit.



Below & top left: Installing the Automatic Weather Station, including the mast, rain gauge & thermometers, on Sherkin Island. *Bottom left:* The fully installed Station, which constantly sends weather data to Met Éireann.

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