CAREER PROFILES:

NAME: PROFESSOR LOUISE ALLCOCK

Position Title Professor of Zoology



AN OVERVIEW OF YOUR JOB:

I work at a university and my job has three main strands: research, teaching, and service. I research the biology of our oceans, particularly the biology of the sea floor between about 1000m and 3000m depth.

Off Ireland, this area is particularly rich in deep-sea corals. I also research the evolution of cephalopods – that's octopuses, cuttlefishes and squids. I teach both Marine Science and Zoology to university students.

I support the government, the EU and the UN through service on various committees. For example, I recently chaired the Marine Protected Area Advisory Group, advising Government on Marine Protected Areas; I am a member of a European group that advises the EU on cephalopod fisheries; and I am a member of a UN working group advising on how to make the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development a success.





A TYPICAL DAY...



My typical working day depends on the time of year, and this variation is one of the things I like most about my job. In term time, I may have lectures to deliver and teaching can take quite a lot of planning, so my day may be full of teaching activities, and I may meet with lots of students.

I manage a small team of researchers, and I do a lot of paperwork associated with their projects. I have to do boring mundane jobs like sign off on expenses claims, but also really interesting jobs like helping them analyse data. I do a lot of writing – of scientific papers, reports and books, and I give quite a lot of public talks. The month I spend at sea each year, and indeed all my research projects, can take a huge amount of planning. Consequently I spend a lot of time in online meetings and sending emails. Thus every day is very different.

WHAT'S YOUR Favourite Part of your job?



My favourite part of the job is going to sea.

WHAT'S THE MOST CHALLENGING PART OF YOUR JOB?

The most challenging parts of my job are the parts that I did not expect to do when dreaming of becoming a scientist – for example, ordering chemicals for my lab. Although essential, these tasks bore me and I always find it challenging to knuckle down and do jobs that bore me.

WHERE ARE YOU USUALLY BASED?

I'm usually based in my office on the University of Galway campus, although I teach in various rooms and lecture theatres across the university campus. In addition, I try to spend at least a month a year on a research vessel gathering data for my research.



HOW DID YOU Get into this Career?



I took a degree in marine biology and then just followed opportunities as they arose.

BESIDES FORMAL QUALIFICATIONS, WHAT SKILLS OR TRAITS ARE MOST USEFUL FOR YOUR TYPE OF WORK?

I'm very practical, and I'm good at problem solving. If things break or don't work as expected when you're in the middle of the ocean, you need to make them work.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO A YOUNG PERSON INTERESTED IN THIS CAREER PATH?

Work hard to get to college and then get as much experience as possible while studying.

HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN IN THIS LINE OF WORK?

My first science job, obtained in the late 1990s after completing a degree in marine biology and then a higher degree researching octopuses, was in the National Museums of Scotland in Edinburgh researching and looking after the mollusc collection. I got my first university job just over 20 years ago, and I've been at the University of Galway for nearly 15 years.

WHAT WORK EXPERIENCE, QUALIFICATIONS OR TRAINING WOULD YOU RECOMMEND FOR GETTING INTO THIS CAREER?

Any work experience you can get while in school is great for helping you know whether you really want to be a marine scientist. If you decide that yes, you do, then I recommend taking a degree in Marine Science. Once you are at college, any additional work experience really helps you gain hands-on experience that is helpful when applying for jobs.

