



# The Next Wave

BIM Skills Strategy for  
a Sustainable Seafood  
Sector 2023-2028



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## Executive Summary

**This document outlines the strategic approach of Bord Iascaigh Mhara (BIM), Ireland's Seafood Development Agency, to meet the challenges and opportunities facing the Irish seafood sector by the provision of modern, professional training, upskilling and education.**

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### The role of BIM

BIM is the State Agency that supports and develops the Irish seafood sector, providing training, technical expertise, business support and funding.

### BIM's role in developing industry talent and skills

As the Irish seafood industry continues to evolve, it is the role of BIM to provide the support and services to upskill those who work in in, or may enter, the Irish seafood industry. This includes fishermen and women, aquaculture operators, seafood processors, retailers and food service businesses. Our key commitments under this strategy are:

- To provide the skills required to support a modern, safe, professional, sustainable and profitable Irish seafood sector.
- To identify and support companies, and advise businesses how to recruit, develop and retain their employees.
- To provide training and support to family members who are an essential but often unseen part of family seafood businesses.

The skills needed by the Irish seafood sector are evolving significantly. Although traditional skills remain extremely important and are at the core of the training which BIM provides, automation across the sector is increasing. As a result, new skills are required that reflect new technology, regulations and market demands.

Attracting new entrants into the sector is a key priority. It is our intention to increase the number of new entrants across the sector, by highlighting the opportunities that exist for an exciting and fulfilling career, from fishing and aquaculture, to engineering and marketing.

### Creating rewarding career paths

The creation and communication of career paths is critical to maintain and develop new entrants so that they can continue their practical and professional development and have a life-long rewarding career in the seafood sector.

The skills programmes that BIM provides must continue to be delivered in a manner that best suits learners. In addition, new programmes of upskilling as well as personal and business development are needed to grow businesses of all sizes and provide them with the skills needed to be successful.

This strategy reflects the key objectives of the national skills and education policies in the National Skills Strategy 2023 - 2028, with particular reference to Priority 1 which states, to better secure a balance in skills, Ireland should:

- Improve information and guidance for individuals on learning and career pathways.
- Strengthen learning and career pathways over the life course.
- Make education and training provision more responsive to changing skills needs.

The development of a broader, national approach to training will deliver benefits to both learners and employers. BIM will continue to develop its role as a well-established, professional maritime training provider, and enable the growth of all components of the seafood sector.



## BIM Mission

‘To support and enable an increase in value of an Irish sustainable seafood sector, across the supply chain, from catch to consumer.’

The BIM ‘Turning the Tide’ Strategy 2022 to 2026 aims to deliver the agency’s mission and vision in the context of particularly challenging times for the sector.

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## Context

The Irish seafood sector is an important and valuable contributor to the national economy. The process of catching, growing and adding product value through seafood processing, retail and foodservice plays a key role in the cultural, social and economic fabric of coastal communities. The sustainability and evolution of this industry is made possible by a modern, professional and skilled workforce.



In 2022, the Irish seafood sector was valued at €1.3 billion. The industry has 1,993 registered fishing vessels, 101 approved and active seafood processors and 296 aquaculture sites. The sector directly and indirectly accounts for almost 16,000 employees, many of whom are based in coastal communities.

## The Changing Nature of the Seafood Sector

The Irish seafood sector has faced several challenging years. The impact of Brexit prompted the establishment of the Government Seafood Task Force by the Minister for Agriculture, Food & the Marine, Charlie McConalogue, T.D., to consider measures to mitigate these impacts. The group recommended a wide range of schemes which have been implemented through the Brexit Adjustment Reserve. Schemes include fleet restructuring supports for the catching sector, significant capital investment for the processing and aquaculture sectors, as well as blue economy supports to strengthen and enhance coastal communities, who are especially dependent on the seafood industry.

Alongside the challenges there are significant opportunities. Global demand for seafood is increasing and will continue to rise for the next decade, in tandem with the growth in global population. Seafood has an extremely low carbon footprint and is both healthy and sustainable. BIM's role is to anticipate, develop and deliver the skills that the sector needs both today - and into the future - to withstand the challenges, avail of the opportunities and remain sustainable.

This strategy seeks to address a number of challenges. These include increased competition for labour, a perceived lack of industry career progression and the requirement for new entrants and new skills to address the opportunities for sustainable seafood. These new skills include technical skills, supply chain management, innovation and business skills.





## Future growth of the industry

Developing the leadership skills of current and the next generation of business leaders in our sector is a critical ingredient for the future growth of these companies. We will provide responsive, modern and accessible training for these leaders at pace. Research has shown that some roles within the seafood industry may be an unattractive career choice for potential new entrants. This strategy seeks to address these issues.

Across the seafood sector, employees may work in diverse roles including managing cutting edge processing technology, development of new markets, adding value through innovation, addressing complex logistics and mastering food safety systems.

A mix of practical and digital skills are required for seafood companies to survive and prosper in the modern environment.

Transferable skills and digital literacy are key enablers to the development of an agile sector -

fishers may choose to fish seasonally and work in the wider marine sector at other times. Providing the sector with a broader range of skills so that they may have a diverse career within the maritime sector will be key to people having a sustainable livelihood whilst living and contributing to our coastal communities.

## Skills to drive a Sustainable Irish Seafood Sector

BIM will support and equip our clients with the appropriate skills to enable them to effectively contribute to a sustainable seafood industry. The development of the skills to both protect our natural environment, while operating a sustainable and profitable business model are key to the continued growth and success of the sector.

We will develop a range of sustainability programmes and modules across BIM's training and client services, to promote the development of sustainability skills, knowledge, and insights.

## Demand for BIM Training

Each year, BIM delivers over 1,000 formal training places to students.

Upskilling is delivered through a wide range of courses, subjects and locations. This includes programmes in safety at sea, radio communications, certificates of competency, navigation, passenger boat proficiency, commercial diving, fishmonger skills and leadership programmes. These programmes range from short programmes to longer programmes lasting several months.

The BIM training facilities and staff are a particularly important, highly visible, and recognisable support for the sector. Many students return to BIM to further their skills and careers. This creates strong links and relationships between BIM and our clients.

A large part of the formal, accredited BIM training programmes is delivered on behalf of the Marine Survey Office (MSO), within the Department of Transport.

Fishers are required to undertake a range of training to be legally qualified to go to sea and carry out essential roles on fishing vessels in a safe manner. These programmes may be mandatory training required to initially work at sea or progressing through longer, more advanced programmes to develop their skills and career.

A number of programmes including diving, fishmonger skills and fishing vessel engineering are validated by QQI (Quality and Qualifications Ireland) leading to awards on the National Framework of Qualifications.

In addition, BIM also offers non-accredited programmes where learners receive a BIM Certificate of Attendance.

Many fishers return to BIM to further their skills and careers. This creates strong links and relationships between BIM and our clients.

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## A Cross Organisation Skills Strategy

This strategy considers the full range of training and upskilling that is delivered across BIM. All of BIM's formal, accredited training is currently delivered by the organisation's Skills Unit.

In addition, other training, business support and knowledge transfer is delivered to clients across all fishing, aquaculture and processing, retail, and foodservice sectors.

These services are delivered across BIM's business units, maximising the breadth of seafood expertise and knowledge within the organisation.

## Quality Assured Training

The high standard of training delivered by BIM is underpinned by our Quality Assurance system, which has been approved by QQI.

The BIM Skills Development Services (SDS) Unit continues to develop this system, which has led to improved governance and ensures that programmes remain fit for purpose.

As a QQI approved training provider, BIM can develop and deliver programmes of education that will lead to NFQ (National Framework of Qualifications) Awards. This is key to developing programmes that will professionalise the sector and provide learners with qualifications that are transferrable, recognised internationally and support career progression.

The quality manual management system for delivery of maritime training and education in both BIM National Fisheries Colleges of Ireland (NFCI) complies with the requirements of ISO 9001:2015. This system brings a consistent approach to learning, ensuring that students receive the same high standard of training programmes across all BIM training sites.



The BIM Training and Development Committee was established in 2020 as a subcommittee of the BIM Board. The group advise on and support the advancement of BIM's Training and Development Strategy. This includes the Colleges and Coastal Training Units, as well as training delivered to clients across BIM, along with the setting of appropriate strategic priorities.

BIM has also established a separate academic council with responsibility for all academic governance matters in the SDS unit including curriculum development, assessment of students, quality assurance and maintenance of academic standards. The academic council acts as a “critical friend” to the SDS unit in relation to quality assurance, education matters, programme development and learner interests.

## Supporting Inclusion and Accessibility

BIM is committed to supporting increased diversity, accessibility and inclusion in the seafood sector, by ensuring our supports are inclusive and meet the needs of a diverse range of learners. We are committed to adhering to best practice so that all students and clients are treated equally, and with respect, at all stages of engagement with BIM.

We will provide financial supports for learners, and we will deliver training in accessible formats aimed at increasing the diversity of our learners. BIM will provide reasonable accommodation within programmes for all students, so that they have an equal opportunity to successfully complete a BIM training programme.

## How BIM deliver's training

Our values underpin and inform the way we work together, with our learners and stakeholders.

### 1. Learner-Focused

We are learner-centred and responsive. We aim to always act in the best interests of our learners. We place the learner at the centre of our work and encourage stakeholder feedback.

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### 2. Industry-Focused

We have a responsibility to meet the training needs of the industry sectors we serve. This responsibility includes working with clients to identify these future training requirements, and delivering programmes and services in a flexible manner, which is responsive to the prevailing market conditions and client needs.

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### 3. Quality-Oriented

As a learning organisation, BIM is committed to continuously evaluating and improving the quality of their programmes and services to meet the evolving needs of their stakeholders. BIM strive for new ideas, best solutions and the acquisition and dissemination of new knowledge. This underpins our approach to assuring quality in our training provision.

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### 4. Collaborative

BIM seeks collaborations with other training providers and strategic partners to expand and develop our offering and extend our reach for the benefit of our learners and the industry.

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### 5. Professional

BIM work to the highest standards of public service regarding accountability, effectiveness, responsiveness and efficiency. We aim to achieve excellence in all that we do. We treat all persons with respect, dignity and courtesy. We act and take decisions in a transparent manner that is open to scrutiny.

## Strategic objectives

BIM has identified four key strategic objectives to support our mission over the lifetime of this plan. These will meet the needs of our clients and ensure that the industry is positioned to meet the challenges and opportunities of the future.

#### Objective 1

Attracting new entrants to the seafood sector.

#### Objective 2

Creating and promoting career paths in the seafood sector.

#### Objective 3

Delivering the right courses, to the right people, in the right way.

#### Objective 4

Building strategic partnerships for growth.



## Objective 1 - Attracting new entrants to the seafood sector

Research has shown that job seekers, students, parents, students, and career advisors are not fully aware of the variety of careers which the seafood sector can offer. BIM will undertake clear actions to address this, such as increasing awareness of the diversity of roles that the seafood sector can offer to new entrants.

We will promote the high-tech, fast-paced and high value nature of the sector and the significant career opportunities this brings. We will deliver a communications campaign to improve the perception of the seafood sector as a dynamic, exciting one in which to build a career.

Short Term Focus (Year 1)

Action	Performance Indicator
Assess how other sectors in Ireland and abroad have addressed the challenge of attracting entrants to their respective sector.	Assessment Report complete.
Create a BIM seafood careers promotion framework covering all training provided by BIM. This will set out how we will promote training and will define our target audience.	Training Communication Framework developed.
Develop a Transition Year Seafood Careers Model.	Suitable model assessed and options presented to stakeholders.
Investigate opportunities to develop a seafood sector wide promotional platform and vehicle, similar to the BIM Aquaculture Remote Classroom (ARC), to visit schools and career events. This can promote both online and face-to-face training and career opportunities within the broader seafood sector.	Investigate funding and delivery models for vehicle and platform.

### Medium Term Focus (Years 2 and 3)

Action	Performance Indicator
Implement the BIM seafood careers promotion framework covering all skills provision by BIM.	Increased knowledge of and demand for training.
Transition Year Seafood Careers Model operational.	Model in place and operational.
Enter into a partnership with other public sector entities who are seeking to recruit a more diverse workforce.	Appropriate partnership agreements in place with strategic partners.
Launch a seafood sector wide promotional vehicle, similar to the BIM Aquaculture Remote Classroom (ARC), to visit schools and career events.	Promotional vehicle in operation.

### Long Term Focus (Years 4 and 5)

Action	Performance Indicator
Participate in a stakeholder group to agree an approach and plan to attract more entrants into maritime careers, including onshore and offshore, across all service providers.	Broad, cross - stakeholder approach to maritime careers.

## Objective 2 - Creating and promoting career paths in the seafood sector

There is a significant opportunity for BIM to create and promote clear, progressive career paths for those within the seafood sector.

One of the current challenges in the sector is that pathways to entering and developing a career across the seafood industry are not clear. This is particularly true in the fishing sector. Whilst it is appropriate that sea time and additional training is required to progress and undertake greater responsibilities onboard vessels, this career path should be clearly communicated.

Where possible, incremental stages of training and experience should be created and facilitated. There are opportunities for seagoing workers transitioning to both offshore and shore roles, and we will ensure that these are clearly set out and accessible.





### Short Term Focus (Year 1)

Action	Performance Indicator
Map the skills of those in the seafood sector. Consider transferable skills and potential roles in seafood and other marine sectors.	Mapping exercise undertaken and data analysed.
Map the existing skills and skill gaps in the catching sector and match them to available courses or learning opportunities.	Mapping exercise undertaken and data analysed.
Investigate the possibility of a 'passport' for the fishing sector in Ireland to track an individual's employment history, skills and qualifications in the sector.	Assessment Report undertaken.
Assess funding models available to support participants undertaking BIM training programmes.	Assessment undertaken and options presented.
Undertake a feasibility study of the development of a seafood industry apprenticeship, or fishing skills programmes.	Feasibility study commenced.
Investigate opportunities for BIM-awarded 'micro credential' delivery across BIM skills services.	Feasibility study commenced.
Strategic communications programme aimed at existing sector employees highlighting career opportunities.	Strategic communications programme developed.

### Medium Term Focus (Years 2 and 3)

Action	Performance Indicator
Work with partners to support a transfer of qualifications model. This would support the transition and transferability of individuals to the fishing sector, and other sectors in the wider maritime economy.	Model progressed and industry skills transferability facilitated.
Create a training model for a series of short, pier side practical training to fishers e.g. net mending, seafood quality etc.	Assessment undertaken and programme operational.
Explore the potential of introducing additional qualifications, such as a watchkeepers ticket, to enable crew to assume additional responsibilities in their roles.	Assessment and potential solutions outlined.
Support a 'passport' for the fishing sector in Ireland which would track an individual's employment history, skills and qualifications in the sector.	Passport developed and operational.
Progress the development of a seafood industry apprenticeship and /or advanced deckhand programme.	Programme designed, resourced and operational as appropriate.
Implement BIM micro credential awards across BIM skills services.	BIM micro credential awards operational.
Continue to implement the strategic communications programme promoting the full suite of BIM training programmes.	Increase in awareness of career paths; increase in demand for training.

Long Term Focus (Years 4 and 5)

Action	Performance Indicator
Put in place a long-term strategic communications programme in partnership with key stakeholders, to consistently highlight and promote marine training and careers.	Increase in awareness of career paths; increase in demand for training; improved retention rates.
Develop a BIM staff capability model to deliver training which would support standardisation of training delivery. This would include qualifications and Continuing Professional Development (CPD), to support BIM staff delivering upskilling programmes.	Capability model agreed, resourced and operational.

### Objective 3 - Delivering the right training, to the right people in the right way

BIM will deliver appropriate training programmes to reinforce the professionalism and ambition of the seafood sector. This will require a blend of existing and new training to ensure a safe, sustainable and highly developed industry. There are significant challenges in the recruitment and retention of staff across all seafood business. In addition to delivering skills that are currently required, BIM has an important role in determining and planning for future skills requirements, so that we can enable the sector to be at the leading edge of seafood business and technical skills. We will work with our clients to help them develop and implement tools that will enable them to recruit and retain the staff that they need.

Clients will be provided with the skills to thrive in an increasingly digital world, with BIM providing high-quality training to meet learners needs in the classroom and in the wider sector.

There is a significant opportunity to digitise programme offerings under this strategy. This will enable efficient delivery; however, this must be balanced with the type of content offered as well as the learner profile. New training programmes will be provided, and students will be offered a mix of in-person and online content.

### Short Term Focus (Year 1)

Action	Performance Indicator
Establish a cross organisational framework to assess and report on training delivered by BIM.	Cross organisational framework.
Investigate opportunities to track and assess all BIM 'training' to clients via CRM (Customer Relationship Management) system.	Assessment undertaken internally in BIM of CRM system capability.
Investigate the feasibility of the development of 'bridging courses' to enable transferable marine skills of fishers into other maritime sectors.	Initial discussions undertaken to discuss options.
Design and undertake a human capacity plan for the Irish aquaculture industry.	Human Capacity & Resourcing plan for Irish aquaculture complete.
Analyse training and skills benchmarking data provided to BIM to inform future development of training.	Development needs report undertaken.
Develop a suite of complementary skills training for families supporting seafood businesses.	Complementary skills training course in place.
Provision of an advisory service to clients providing them with practical tools to optimise their recruitment and retention of staff.	Recruitment and retention advisory service.
Development of a tailor-made training programme for clients that delivers the training they need, in the most efficient and effective manner for their business.	Pilot programme for the processing sector.



### Medium Term Focus (Years 2 and 3)

Action	Performance Indicator
Implement a cross organisational framework to assess and report on training delivered by BIM, including the use of CRM.	Framework designed and operational.
Implement any recommendations arising from the feasibility study for bridging courses.	Recommendations operational.
Create blended and online courses that meet the needs of our learners as appropriate.	Suite of blended and online courses offered to industry.
Design new learning content with flexible design tools that facilitate modern engaging experiences for students.	New content developed and delivered.
Develop a range of tailored business management, talent development and leadership programmes to current and future industry leaders.	Review of skills mapping exercise and a range of programmes in place to address these gaps.
Complete a Human Capacity and Resourcing plan for the aquaculture sector.	Human capacity plan for aquaculture reviewed, resourced and implemented.
Roll out of a full suite of recruitment and retention tools to clients.	Recruitment and retention toolkit.
Development of tailor-made training programmes to all client business.	Tailor-made training programmes.

Long Term Focus (Years 4 and 5)

Action	Performance Indicator
Integration and alignment of training and skills offering with BIM innovation services, following the implementation of BIM innovation services review.	Review undertaken and measures implemented.

## Objective 4 - Building strategic partnerships for growth

BIM has professional training facilities, considerable experience and a strong, well-established reputation for the delivery of training. We work as part of a wide national network of training providers and stakeholders, from government agencies to private industry and other marine based training organisations.

This network and the impact of BIM's training provision can be further enhanced by building and developing strategic partnerships with the wider skills and education sector, both nationally and internationally, to position BIM as a professional resource and expert in the maritime training sector.

These strategic partnerships will ensure that BIM maximises its resources, enhances its impact on the industry and delivers its services to a wide range of clients.

BIM will also be able to engage in, and progress strategic discussions and initiatives related to maritime training in Ireland.

### Short Term Focus (Year 1)

Action	Performance Indicator
Review, categorise and formalise existing partnerships as appropriate.	Memorandums of Understanding and Service Level Agreements updated.
Development of appropriate funding schemes with opportunities to support students and skills development in the sector.	Appropriate training and capacity building scheme in place.
Mapping of the Irish maritime training & development ecosystem.	Initial mapping process underway with appropriate partners.

### Medium Term Focus (Years 2 and 3)

Action	Performance Indicator
Continue to formalise existing partnerships through Memorandums of Understanding (MOU's) and Service Level Agreements (SLA's).	MOUs and SLAs in place.
Develop additional strategic partnerships to deliver collaborative training programmes and client services.	Partnerships investigated and operational.
Expand BIM's participation in EU and international maritime education and training.	Increased participation with measurable impacts.

Long Term Focus (Years 4 and 5)

Action	Performance Indicator
Work with national maritime sector stakeholders to support and develop a national approach to maritime education and training.	Stakeholder group in place and operational.
Develop formal collaboration both nationally and internationally.	Appropriate SLAs and MOUs in place.
Work collaboratively with other maritime skills training providers to agree a joined-up approach to national maritime education and training.	Collaborative group in place.





## Measurement and Impact of the Strategy

A range of measures will be used to track our progress in achieving the ambitions and goals of this strategy.

These will be:

- **Quantifiable results** – objective and fact based.
- **Clear messaging** – to all our stakeholders.
- **Actionable** – measures that BIM deliver, with impact, for industry.

## Conclusion

The ambitions and goals of this strategy will support the Irish seafood sector to navigate the challenges and opportunities of future years.

The vision is of a sector that is widely recognised and appealing, offering a diverse and rewarding career path, supported by a modern, safe and professional talent pool.





