



Simon Doherty

Veterinarian

What advice would you give your 16-year-old self?

Strive to be the best you can be, but maintain balance, seek what you think is important at a particular point in your life without losing sight of what is actually really important in the big picture. Ensure that looking after your family, friends and yourself are prioritised in the big picture.

Introduce yourself, where do you work? What is your job role?

I am Dr Simon Doherty – I'm a vet, now working four days a week at the Institute of Global Food Security, Queen's University Belfast. One day a week, I do other things, I chair the Food Safety & Sustainability Working Group of the Federation of Veterinarians of Europe (FVE) and I'm an ad hoc expert on One Health for the World Veterinary Association (WVA). I am also an advisor to the UK government on trade & investment related to animal health & welfare.

What does your job entail?

In my Queens University Belfast (QUB) role, I teach undergraduate and postgraduate students about animal health & welfare. In my FVE and WVA roles, I use my professional training, experience, expertise and networks to influence the development of new policies to maximise human and animal health and welfare and food safety. In my Department of International Trade role, I work with government and companies to maximise opportunities to add value to the economy.

How did you get into this line of work?

I always wanted to be a farm vet from a young age but, after an injury to my back early in my career (2005), I headed off in a different direction and since then, one thing has led to another! I have always been involved in veterinary politics, ever since I was a student. I was appointed as an Honorary Lecturer at QUB about 10 years ago, so I'm now combining all my interests in a 'portfolio career'.

Outline your career to date

I qualified as a vet in 2000, 5 years in general farm animal & equine practice, 2 years setting up VetNI, 7 years in veterinary research & diagnostics at AFBI Stormont, 1 year in a biotech company at Catalyst Inc, 3 years with the UK Department for International Trade, overlapping with 3 years as an officer of the British Veterinary Association (I was BVA president in 2018/19). I'm now mainly based in QUB Northern Ireland and in my own business, Blackwater Consultancy Ltd, feeding expertise into other organisations and companies.

Tell us about your qualifications and training

I graduated with my veterinary degree (BVMS) in 2000 after 5 years at vet school in Glasgow. I became a Fellow of the Royal Society of Biology (FRSB) in 2015 and a Chartered Biologist (CBIOL) in 2016. I also became a Certified Aquaculture Veterinarian (CertAqV) in 2016. In 2020, I was awarded Fellowship of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (FRCVS) and appointed as an Associate of the Royal Agricultural Societies (ARAgS).

What qualities are required for your job – personal and professional?

Communication skills and the ability to strike up relationships and connect & collaborate with people are all really important to what I do, teaching & mentoring students, delivering evidence to a parliamentary session in Westminster, talking to the media or presenting at an international conference. You do need good grades & the ability to work with animals to get into vet school, but the most important skills are problem-solving and communication!

Tell us an interesting fact about yourself

I re-sat my 'A'-Levels and did a year of Dentistry at the University of Glasgow before FINALLY gaining a place at veterinary school. Some of my school friends were finishing their 3 year degrees when I was finishing my first year at vet school, it felt like a big thing at the time, but it has completely paled into insignificance, perseverance pays off!

Who has inspired you most in your life?

From a young age, my Dad (now retired biology teacher and high school principal) inspired my interest in science. During my professional career, I've been inspired by some fantastic career mentors. I've also been very fortunate to have met some of my 'inspirational heroes', including Prof Temple Grandin and Nobel Prize Winner, Prof Peter Doherty (no relation).

What's the best advice you have ever received?

- Find a way to accept whatever life throws at you; adapt and learn throughout life
- Build a strong network; use social media responsibly and make good contacts
- Pay it forward; help others the way you would like to have been helped
- Don't be afraid to ask for help
- When opportunities appear before you, grab them with both hands!