

“Ultimately, the plan is to scale nationally.”

COLIN MAC ANDRIAS

First Swim



Colin Mac Andrias, who is from Rathcoole in Dublin left Ireland for London to seek work after studying Biomedical Science at Dundalk Institute of Technology in 1993.

“It was pre-Celtic tiger and a time when prospects were quite grim. Even when I tried to get voluntary work in a laboratory, just to have something on my cv, I was told to join the queue,” he says.

Colin swiftly found that there was no shortage of lab work in London, but his interest in it soon took a back seat to scuba diving, and he spent six years working as a dive instructor in Dahab in Egypt, where he met his wife, before returning to London to run a dive school – The London School of Diving in Chiswick, which he co-owned with a business partner.

Finding that their pool was often lying idle during daytime on weekdays, because dive classes tend to be an evening or weekend activity, the business partners started to look for other revenue streams and Colin was particularly struck by the amount of interest that came from swim schools for babies.

Colin and his business partner didn’t go down that route at the time, but the interest stuck with him and eventually became

the business he launched on his return to Dublin years later.

“The seed was planted there though Ireland wasn’t even an option at the time,” he says. “Then during Covid, we had time on our hands because we were in lockdown and we were thinking about what we would do, because my wife’s from Dublin too. We decided it was time to give Ireland a shot.”

The couple and their children returned in 2021, and the move has been a great success.

“I was blown away by just how much I forgot I missed it,” he says, “and the kids transitioned so quickly into Irish life despite leaving all their friends behind, it was just lovely.”

Getting the business started, however, was not quite so seamless. Colin struggled to find investors willing to get behind Ireland’s first baby swim school, so the couple decided to invest all the proceeds from the sale of their house in London and go it alone.

Colin secured a 15-year lease on a premises at Beacon South Quarter in Sandyford, Dublin, and set about fitting it out with a raised swimming pool and café.

They opened their doors in September 2023, having launched online bookings in advance. That first term was sold out within 48 hours, and they are now on their 11th sold out term.

Colin is proud that First Swim has won numerous awards, but maintains the best accolades are glowing Google reviews from delighted parents. “Our main focus is for children to learn how to swim but we also recognise the importance of the whole experience from the moment you walk in the door,” he says.

He says being accepted onto the Back for Business programme was a vote of confidence in the business. “It happened at the right time when I needed that support to get the business off the ground, and it was invaluable,” he says.

First Swim currently has 13 employees and Colin is set to open a second school later this year in Santry on Dublin’s northside. “Ultimately, the plan is to scale nationally. When I was living in London, I had a map of Ireland with pins in different places around the country where I was going to open swim schools, and the plan is still that we’re going to become a national brand,” he says.

POSITION

Founder

WHAT WE DO

First Swim is Ireland’s only purpose-built baby and toddler swim school.

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