

In the second part of our Practice to Progress Fire profile of assessors, *FIRE* speaks to the assessors about what they will bring to the partnership, which provides a safe space to practice for promotion for every level within the service

Assessing the assessors II

Practice to Progress Fire (PtP Fire) – the unique partnership formed between the Asian Fire Service Association, Women in the Fire Service and *FIRE* publisher Fire Knowledge (see *FIRE* September 2022 and November 2022) – is an alliance which works together to design and deliver training to prepare candidates for initial selection and promotion assessment to every level within the fire and rescue sector. The AFSA and WFS are providing a bank of assessors (some of which are featured below) who will provide support to organisations and individuals who are seeking progression and each assessor will be of suitable rank and experience for sitting on selection/promotion boards.

The approach is designed to send a strong message to the sector about the commitment of P2P Fire to making a difference. In the second part of our profile, *FIRE* spoke to a tranche of diverse and experienced Fire and Rescue Service personnel who will be coaching and mentoring those seeking to develop.

***FIRE:* What interested you in the P2P Fire concept in the first place?**

Jo Dawson: It's a great opportunity to help develop others and to work with people inside and outside the sector.

Diane Dunlevey: Breadth of understanding and sector specific, practice not theory, when it comes to EDI.

Jagtar Singh: To make a difference.

Kate Sands: I was struggling with mentorship in my own career and felt that I could offer support and experience to others.

Sean Taylor: To assist and support individual learning.



Diane Dunlevey

Diane is an experienced strategic manager with over 20 years working within equality, diversity and inclusion who has a continuous drive for learning, self-reflection and innovation.

Diane's work ensures Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service meet its legislative duties and the expectations outlined within the Fire Service National Framework 2018. She does this through providing advice and guidance to service staff, all departments and utilising knowledge and expertise from external partners, organisations and stakeholders to enhance the service's interaction with the local community. This work ensures that the service supports equality, diversity and inclusion aims in conjunction with significant and ongoing cultural transformational work.

Diane was awarded the Most Influential Woman in Fire at the Excellence in Fire & Emergency Awards in December 2018.

***FIRE:* How important is mentoring and coaching to the development of FRS personnel?**

Kate Sands: I think it's extremely important, having someone who can support you through the different options and exposures available is hugely important.

Jo Dawson: It is massively important – access to coaches and mentors has had a huge impact on me and I would like to help others gain this opportunity.

Sean Taylor: Coaching and mentoring can play an important part in the development of staff, be it for progression or to ensure they can be the best they can be.

Diane Dunlevey: Targeted mentoring and coaching is essential.

“Targeted mentoring and coaching is essential”

Diane Dunlevey



Jagtar Singh

Jagtar joined the Fire service in 1977 in West Midlands and retired from the service in October 2006 as Deputy Chief Fire Officer in Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Service. During his service, Jagtar was one of the first UK EDI leads in the Fire Service and led nationally on EDI when seconded to the government office where he developed a number of projects including the business case for diversity, setting up the core values work and carrying out a thematic review of governance of EDI.

Jagtar is a very experienced board director and has delivered EDI training at all levels. Jagtar has won many accolades and awards and was named in The Queen's Birthday Honours in 2003, receiving an OBE.



Jo Dawson

Jo joined Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service (NFRS) in 2005 as an administrator at their training centre and after doing some 'ride-alongs' on fire engines, she realised being a firefighter was the career for her and she worked hard to transform herself from someone who could not run for a minute to someone who loved lifting weights, as she prepared hard for the selection process. She successfully applied to NFRS and completed her training in 2008.

Since joining, Jo has been seconded into the Organisational Development and Inclusion Team where her role focussed on issues affecting women in NFRS. From this moment she has not looked back and has received further promotion whilst championing female issues and currently chairs the NFRS Women's Network. Outside of the world of fire and rescue, Jo is a mum who likes rugby and running, but says her main passions are family holidays and cake!

FIRE: How do you envisage P2P Fire will make a difference?

Sean Taylor: P2P will be able to make a difference by having a consistent and credible approach to support people in their individual growth.

Kate Sands: I feel that it will give others who were in my position opportunities to really flourish within their careers and progress further.

Jo Dawson: It will give FRSs a way to develop staff and it will give individuals confidence and ability to move forward in their career.

Diane Dunlevey: Raising consistency and awareness.

FIRE: Why is P2P Fire important to FRS culture and improvement in performance around equality, diversity and inclusion?

Diane Dunlevey: The ethos is aligned to the Core Code of Ethics. It has engaged with the organisations whose sole purpose is around EDI.

Sean Taylor: Cultural growth and improvement is key for all organisations, having a number of support mechanisms in place can only be of benefit.

Jo Dawson: The work that P2P have done in the police has massively helped those from under-represented groups and I know that P2P Fire can replicate this. Embracing difference, changing the culture, will naturally improve the FRS sector's performance around EDI.

Kate Sands: I feel that P2P Fire gives opportunity to FRS staff to be supported and mentored, in turn giving them exposure to leadership and behavioural qualities and understanding of EDI and its importance.

“We have years of experience and we are confident that this program will make a difference”

Jagtar Singh

“It’s difficult to put into words how much of a difference coaching, mentoring and support from others has made to me”

Jo Dawson

FIRE: How much of a difference did mentoring/coaching/support make to you/is making to your career progression?

Jo Dawson: It’s difficult to put into words how much of a difference coaching, mentoring and support from others has made to me. Two years ago I was a Firefighter, now I am a (Temporary) Watch Manager. I wouldn’t be in this position if it hadn’t been for mentors and coaches, and the support of those who believed in me.

Kate Sands: Mentoring and coaching make a huge difference to me. This gives me opportunity to experience wider areas of my service and gain experience and knowledge from others that I would otherwise not be able to access.

Jagtar Singh: Nil! Back in my day it was not part of the formal process.

Sean Taylor: Mentoring was an incredibly important part for my growth and development, however the need to have more coaching is a key balance to be made.

Diane Dunlevey: I have not received any coaching or mentoring within fire. I did have some when I worked in a university, around 20 years ago, and it was supportive and enabled me to see my work in sections and not a whole.

FIRE: What do you bring to the role of P2P Fire assessor?

Jagtar Singh: Forty years of public sector experience, breaking barriers at every rank and grade and doing the same over the last 12 years in the NHS. I am recognised internationally in fire for my EDI work on making a difference and not advocating talking shops.

Diane Dunlevey: I have 18 years of experience across the sector in an EDI context. I am not an HR professional. I have a research degree founded in sociology and development. This gives me an ability to understand data, the politics, historical and economic context, inequality and risk.

Sean Taylor: I hope I can bring and share a wealth of experience that I have gained and to learn and listen from people around me.

Jo Dawson: I bring honesty, warmth, encouragement and a listening ear to this role.



Kate Sands

Kate joined East Sussex Fire and Rescue Service in 2007. Growing up, Kate’s dad was a firefighter in London and she always wanted to be a firefighter as a child. Going through her education, she realised there were not many female firefighters, which swayed her decision and she studied law instead. After the birth of her first daughter, Kate could not commit to the time needed for a career in law and she worked as a medical secretary for the NHS.

Although enjoying her work, Kate’s passion for the Fire Service never left her. Following in her father and older brother’s footsteps, Kate was shocked and surprised when told that she had been successful but soon realised this was the best decision she could have made. Promoted four times during her career to her current position as a Station Manager, Kate loves her job and would always encourage everybody to follow their dream.

Kate Sands: I bring learnt experience of needing and accessing a mentor to develop my career, often resulting in challenging circumstances and not always being successful. I also bring 15 years of operational knowledge and experience.

FIRE: What would you say to an FRS employee considering the development opportunity provided by P2P Fire?

Jo Dawson: Give it a try! It will have a positive impact on you as a person and in your career.

Kate Sands: I would definitely encourage them to go for it, it is an opportunity that could change their career path and direction and also to support and sign post them to achieve their full potential.

Jagtar Singh: Try it – we have years of experience and we are confident that this program will make a difference.

Diane Dunlevey: I would absolutely encourage it.

Sean Taylor: P2P can offer a range of skilled and experienced people who have a passion to assist and support the sector to grow. By using P2P it can create a safe place to develop staff and to gain a different perspective.