



HANNAH CAULFIELD

WATCH MANAGER, CHESHIRE FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

Advice for applicants:

- keep trying
- don't be too proud to take advice
- make it happen

I wasn't born with the ambition to be a firefighter. In fact, I had aspirations in my early years to be a vet, doctor or paramedic. It's funny how life takes you on different journeys, and I'm very grateful that this is the one mine took.

At the time of joining the fire service my life was very uncertain. I was 22 and had just left university where I studied Linguistics and Japanese. I didn't know what I wanted to do.

I was quite happy working in a laboratory, wondering what to do next, when I bumped into an on-call firefighter from my home town.

"There's a job going at the station - how 'bout it?" he said in his broad Somerset accent.

That was the moment the idea of being a firefighter entered my mind. Why not? I thought, and found myself preparing for some of the entrance tests.

I wasn't particularly fit and after failing the Chester Step test I thought I best step my efforts up a gear. I knew I could pass it. I just needed a bit of preparation. When I resat the fitness test I passed and, after a few other tests I got in.

I gave up my full time job so I could provide the much-needed daytime cover for the station - and took on an array of other jobs to make up the rest of my salary. These ranged from cleaning, to a dental receptionist, chiropodist receptionist, bar staff, waitress and a sales assistant. Anything I could do, no matter how unglamorous just so I could be a firefighter. Why? Because it's by far the best job I could ever have.

I spent 4 years working as an on-call firefighter in Somerset, working with a fantastic group of people. I enjoyed every aspect of the role - operational incidents, fire safety and community events - and was sure I should pursue a career in the fire service.

One day I got a letter through the post from Cheshire fire and rescue service, inviting me to attend the written tests. A few train journeys later and there I was, sitting in Cheshire fire and rescue HQ completing the tests. I got another letter shortly after - I had been successful at this stage and was invited to go back to attend the practical tests. They went ok - the role-related tests made me puff a bit but I grit my teeth and got on with it, hoping for the best. I guess I was at an advantage here since the tests are job specific so I'd done them in my role in Somerset. When I left



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my interview though I was convinced I'd not done enough to be offered the job. I returned to Somerset feeling deflated and disappointed in myself. But, a few days later I opened an envelope containing the best letter I have received to date. The job offer to be a firefighter. I was elated – the effort had paid off and at last I would have a job I could make a career of.

I've been with Cheshire fire and rescue service for 11 years now, moving my way through the ranks from firefighter, to crew manager, to watch manager. During that time I've set up a new life, met my husband and had two children. I know my family are proud of me and I am too when I think about the hurdles I've jumped to get me where I am today.

I'm not super intelligent or super athletic or anything – I just have grit, determination and ambition.

I would recommend the fire service to anyone. It's so diverse and no two days are the same. We respond to emergencies, train with the equipment, help people in need, give safety talks to the young and old, engage with our communities, help business and prepare for the risks of our station footprint. I myself am extremely lucky to be able to work a shift that allows me to spend 6 days out of 8 with my children. I earn a good wage and the sky is the limit in terms of my development and career aspirations. I know that Cheshire fire and rescue service will invest in me to become the leader I wish to become.