60 Seconds with ... Jane Fenn



Jane is a Chartered Engineer and Fellow of both the Institute of Engineering and Technology, (IET), and the Safety and Reliability Society, (SaRS). Jane has worked for BAE Systems for 33 years, as a Safety Engineer and an Engineering Manager, focussing predominantly on collaborative research programmes that developed new approaches and processes for safety engineering.

Jane was awarded an MSc in Safety Critical Systems Engineering from University of York in 2004 and has published a number of papers around safety engineering and software architectures.

Jane is an Engineering Fellow within BAE Systems, providing internal safety consultancy and is responsible for the processes, competency and Safety Engineering training within the company. As a Technologist for Safety Engineering for Robotics and Autonomy, Jane advises the company whilst also pursuing a PhD on 'Linking the design and in-service Safety Case for Autonomous Systems' as part of the Assuring Autonomy International Programme (AAIP) at the University of York.

Jane is an active member of the SCSC Working Groups on Assurance Cases and the Safety of Autonomous Systems. She is also a Diversity and Inclusion Champion.

What first attracted you to working in the field of System Safety?

I was asked to manage a programme to correct a fault which had been detected during rig testing of a particular variant of a system, where earlier variants were already deployed with seven different international customers. The bug was observed to have potentially safety critical impact, under certain circumstances, which were temporarily controlled by operating limitations, until I could get the fix rolled out across all users. Being at the 'sharp end', considering the scale of the potential risk, the investigation into the root cause and the work to recover the situation as well as putting the lessons learned into the development of a replacement system all whetted my appetite to understand how not to be there again!

What aspect of your career are you most proud of?

I hope and I believe that inspiring others is the most profound legacy one can have. What I can achieve on my own is necessarily limited, but by inspiring others, our collective effects are magnified.

Tell us one interesting unusual fact about yourself!

I'm as passionate about Diversity and Inclusion as I am about Safety! I co-developed and co-present a training course on 'Gender Identity Awareness' for BAE Systems which we've collectively delivered to almost 1000 people, from 1st year apprentices through to company directors.

What advice would you give to yourself age 12?

Recognise earlier that being 'different' is a strength. Don't torture yourself with doubt over whether you are 'good enough' or by trying to please everybody. Decide to ride a motorcycle earlier!

What future changes would you like to see in the field of System Safety?

Enough with the obsession with failure rates – they give false comfort when it comes to complex systems! Compliance is necessary but not sufficient. It is possible to give safety advice as soon as an idea can be sketched 'on the back of a fag packet'/'on a table napkin' (choose your own generational context), so why wait until design is chilled/frozen/the end of the programme to engage meaningfully with designers, by which time it's far too late to influence design?

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What's your most favourite quote or motto?

"Safety isn't expensive, it's priceless"

If you could learn to do anything, what would it be?

Be tidier.....

If you could be any fictional character, who would you choose?

I have to choose just one???? Jack Reacher/Robert Hunter/Jack West Jnr/Cotton Mallone/Jonathan Payne/Painter Crowe..... flip a coin!

Tell us about the parrot!

My 'other half' is an Eclectus parrot called Henry. He's 33 this year and he's owned me for about 25 of those years. I also have 3 smaller rescued parrots and they all keep me very busy indeed! They loved me working from home during lockdown and are very unhappy with the amount of time I'm spending away from home again now!