



DECADE



DUNDEE AND ANGUS
COLLEGE

Jordan Watson

A D&A Spotlight Interview

Passion & Pastries: Jordan's Journey from School to Culinary Success

Meet Jordan Watson, Head Pastry Chef at The Old Course in St Andrews. Jordan's journey from restless student to constant learning in the pursuit of culinary excellence is an inspiring story.

When you were younger? What did you dream of doing as a job?

“When I was really young, I wanted to be an astronaut but as I got older, I realised that was not going to happen, so I settled for being a chef and that’s almost as exciting!”

Can you share a bit about yourself and what you were up to when you first came to D&A?

“My current role is Head Pastry Chef at The Old Course Hotel in St Andrews.

“I started as a Senior Phase student, which is what it is called now, back in my day it was called a School Link. This is where I met Lesley from the Hospitality Team and that sparked the initial interest. I cannot say that I was not very good at school, but I did not like to sit for any length of time and to be able to get in a kitchen and getting to run around was very exciting.

“I enjoyed the usual hanging out with my friends and partying when I was younger, perhaps a bit too young at the time but I would not say I was rebellious. I could have stayed on at school if I wanted to, but I never wanted to be an academic, so it did not matter to me to pursue that. It was better for me to get out and work, I come from a family of tradespeople, and they go out and they provide and that is what I wanted to do.”

Thinking about your time at D&A, what are some standout moments or experiences that you still carry with you?

“Oh, that would have to be Debbie Robson! Every time I do something, I think to myself about what Debbie would say about that. Debbie was straight out of industry; she was firm but fair and I had the want to impress her. We learned loads from her, and we all wanted to do the right thing and meet the standards that she expected. All of us who studied with Debbie that year to complete our level three have all gone on to work here at St Andrews.

“Having someone like Debbie to instil in you a standard is important coming into a career like this. She made you aware that there was a professional standard to be met, even at college because you are serving a guest.

If I didn't have Debbie for a lecturer, I would not have ended up where I have, she was so influential. I might not have noticed that at the time I was a student but looking back on it now from experience I know that I would not be the experienced professional that I am now without her.”



How did your experiences at D&A lay the pathway for your career? Are there any classes or staff that set you on your path?

“I would have to say that the mix of having Debbie and Lesley really impacted my way at the College. Debbie showed you how to be a professional, but Lesley showed you how to be human. She taught you to be kind, to have manners, and to be caring.

That is how she is through and through and the two of them together are absolutely invaluable to anyone's education journey.

"I have continued to work with them as they have given me so much and I want to give back to them, I owe them so much and it is only right that I give back to them for all of that."



What were the first steps that you took after finishing your course, and how did your time here shape your career choices?

"I worked, I have always worked, I worked throughout my time at college and that would sometimes cause friction between my working life and going to the College. At that time, I did not see the importance of actually attending classes when I could be out earning a wage. I still see this now when I am teaching part-time, students are not always prioritising their learning and the things that they are learning out in the industry are not always the right way of doing things."

"I took on my first full time job in my early career whilst I was still at college, I worked five days a week and came to college. It didn't always fit in, and something had to give but I was working in industry, and I thought that I knew best. I started working in the Carnoustie Golf Hotel and the staff at the College were so supportive of helping me to gain my qualifications when I was trying to work full time at the same time."

Where has your career taken you since those early days?

"I went down to work in London, and I hopped about a little, from place to place and I never really settled. Before I came to work here, I never really stayed anywhere for more than a year."

More because I thought, the more I moved, the more I would learn. It was more about the people and learning different things from different people. I did not want to stagnate or go stale through doing the same things over and over."

But I would not say that I have not learned anything from the nine years that I have been here, I have learned loads. We have been through some really good times and some really difficult times."

There has been a lot of self-development and growth since I came here too. The company has invested so heavily in me, and they have boosted my skill set and have allowed me to gain new skills."

Looking at your journey so far, what are some moments or accomplishments that make you particularly proud?

"When I first took over the pastry here, I was only 22 years old, and I felt and still feel very proud of that. When I look back, I do not think that I was ready for it, but I grew into it. I remember feeling really proud of that. We have done a lot of golf tournaments and catered for 1000 to 1500 people every day."

"Another thing that I am particularly proud of is my team retention, since I took over, I have six people in my team, and I have had them in the team for a long time now and we work so well together. We are not a very big team, there are six of us, but I take pride in developing high performing teams and every one of my team is a former Dundee & Angus College student."

“Coming back to showcase skills at the College is another thing that I am proud of, to be asked back is a huge thing to me. They instilled that passion and that standard of performance and to be asked back is an honour. It is almost like coming back full circle – a time to give back.”

If you could share a piece of advice with current students based on your experience, what would it be?

“I think, don’t be scared, don’t be apprehensive, don’t be worried. If you apply yourself, if you stick at what you are doing and take a proper interest in what you want to do, a proper interest then that is what’s important. Not just turning up three times out of five but giving it your all, that is when you will learn from the right people and then you can apply that to anywhere that you go, and you will achieve.”

“Don’t be scared of the ‘what ifs’ or the ‘what might be’ because you are never going to know unless you try.”

“Get out there and get experience, even if that means that you are working for free one day a week, those skills will set you up and you will use them down the line. You cannot just walk out of College with a level three and expect to know how industry works as an expert – that comes with experience. Apply all of that and you will be fine.”

“The only barrier between you and success is you.”

What are your hopes for the future?

“Short term we have exciting plans here and I am looking forward to that, I cannot give away the plans, but it is exciting.”

“Long term I would like to come full circle, standing in that kitchen at the Arbroath Campus and delivering the level three qualification would make me feel like I had completed and been able to give back to my community.”

