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Lee Paterson

A D&A Spotlight Interview

Determination & Duty: Lee's Journey from College to Firefighting

Meet Lee Paterson, Firefighter. Lee's journey is proof that you can get your dream job through resilience, adaptability and the power of never giving up on your goals!

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

"From being at primary school, I have always wanted to be a Firefighter!!"



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

"My name is Lee, I am 23 years old, and I have been in the Fire Service for 3 years now."

"I joined Dundee and Angus College in 2019 from secondary school. I knew then that it was very unlikely that I would get a job in the Fire Service at such a young age, however, I applied anyway and was knocked back."

I then decided that I would go to the College to do HND Sports Coaching at the Saltire in Arbroath. I was not quite sure at first if this was going to be the right

thing to do but I knew there was nothing else I wanted to do.

"I really wanted to go travelling so the idea was to continue part-time work while studying at college so that I could save some money and when I finished college I could go travelling."

"As I said, at first was not sure if I was going to like college however, it only took me a matter of weeks to get to know everyone and I really did enjoy my time at Dundee & Angus College."

"During my time at the College, I saw a position in the Students' Association as an Assistant and I went for the part-time role. This was something well out of my comfort zone, but again thinking of skills I could gain and earning a little bit more money when studying I applied. I did not quite make it the first time around but when the position came up again, I was successful."

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

"A standout moment for me is when I joined the Students' Association. My eyes were opened to a lot throughout my time working with the team. I made some amazing lifelong friends, and as part of that I was able to help and support other students within the College."

"Working in the Students' Association allowed me to gain some really important key life skills, it allowed me to become more adaptable and work with a diverse group of people. Skills that I have been able to carry forward since then."

“Throughout my time, my College class and my team at the Students’ Association have been standout moments – the friends you meet are incredible.

“The amount you put into your time at College, you will definitely reap the rewards, and to have such a good core of people around me was a great experience.”

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 always knew when I left school, what I wanted to do. College was a life experience for me.

“I think being in a class where the age group was mixed and when working with the Students’ Association, it has given me the opportunity to gain experiences in working with a large range of age groups and that has 100% supported me to get to where I am today.

“Studying sports coaching and learning about anatomy gave me a good start in my career in the Fire Service where we can come across all sorts of people being involved in an incident or accident.

“I think that staff within the Sports and Fitness Department and the Students’ Association allowed me to come out of my shell and really use my personality within my time at the College.”

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

“When I finished the course, it was actually during COVID. I had planned to go travelling when I finished, I had sorted my visa and was on my way to start booking flights but due to COVID, I had to hold off.

“The Fire Service applications opened again, and I had no expectations that I would get in again, but I wanted to show that I was keen, and I would keep on applying.

“I got through a number of stages and then went on to complete my interview. I was told a week later that I was successful and that I would be starting in a few months’ time.

“I think for me, my time at college really matured me and I personally think that will have shown in the second time I applied for the Fire Service.

“During my course, I was writing reports and essays which was something I was never good at in school.



But studying something I enjoyed doing week in and week out was definitely helpful.

“The experiences I had at college, I actually used in most of my interview questions because they suited them so well.

“College made me realise that not everything you do works the first time, but it is about how you work and improve for next time. Everyone is different and has different strengths and weaknesses but being able to work together to come up with solutions to different problems is the ideal way in every situation.”

Where has your career taken you since those early days?

“I am 3 years into the Fire Service now and I have just completed my probation. Being in a job you love doing, time flies.

“Every day is different and that keeps me motivated, plus I get to do a job that I love and enjoy doing.

“I would say I have been lucky; some may disagree depending on how you look at it, but I have had a large range of experiences since joining the Fire Service. From car crashes to going into multiple burning buildings.

"I am currently going through the driving pathway, which will allow me to drive the fire engines in a few months' time."

"I have been involved in some really scary moments; however, it is these moments that make me realise that you are there to support someone on what could be the worst day of their lives."

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

"I am living my dream job! I am very proud of that."

"Meeting all of the people that I have met and having the connections I have over the last seven to eight years is also something that I am particularly proud of."

"Another thing that I am really proud of, is getting to work in a job with my father before he retired. This is an experience that not everyone gets to have, and I did not take this for granted in the slightest."

"He is a huge role model of mine."



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

"Enjoy every minute of it. There is always something for everyone, it is about how you adapt and motivate yourself to go and reach your goals and dreams."

"Reach out and use all the support mechanisms out there. You may not feel like you need support, but you will be surprised on what other folk can do to help you get to where you want to be."

What are your hopes for the future?

"I hope to take a gap year from the service to go travelling. Again, something I wanted to do before joining the service however the way things worked with COVID, it was not possible."

"I want to return from travelling, pick up where I left off, and continue my career in the Fire Service. I hope I might be able to adapt my lifestyle and move to a bigger city within Scotland and progress in my career from then."