

# Edinburgh Reporter chats – Fraser Doherty of SuperJam

☒ You may have seen jars of SuperJam in some of the shops and supermarkets around Edinburgh. His story is one of meteoric rise to running his own business while still in his teens.

**So what is his own recipe for success?**

“I was helped initially by the Prince’s Trust – I got some advice from them and a loan of around £5,000 when I was about 16 or 17. Now I am an ambassador for [Prince’s Scottish Youth Business Trust](#) and I regularly attend events in that capacity.”

**How long has your business been going?**

“My business has been going for almost 8 years now – since I was about 14. I did go to university for a year, but then everything took off business-wise and it wasn’t really possible to continue studying. ”

**Why are you living in Edinburgh?**

“Well I was born here and so I didn’t have much choice in the matter! My parents and brother still live in Edinburgh but I have some family in Glasgow too. I have lived here all my life. I was born in a hospital here but don’t really know which one!” (Come on, Fraser’s mum – you might know?!)

**What about your jam – is it Scottish?**

“The jam is not made in Scotland. It was not possible at 16 to build my own jam factory so I had to find one which was willing to work with me. I had to convince them to work with me! There are only about four factories in the UK, and I use one which is situated in the North of England. They make the

jam according to my recipe.”

**How did it all start?**

“My gran taught me to make jam when I was 14 and that really started everything off. She inspired me to make jam, and also to work with the elderly which is a large part of what I do now. I have had a great deal of support from the local business community in Edinburgh – from those who have already been successful and have been willing to teach me some of the lessons they have learned, and perhaps some of the mistakes they have made.

It is a small business community in Scotland and everybody is well-connected and willing to help each other out.”

**How do you grow your own network of business contacts? Are you now the old man of young entrepreneurs?**

“Prince’s Trust is a great way of meeting other young people. I have actually made a lot of friends with people who are going through the same kind of thing as me in setting up a business over the years.

Something I spend a lot of time doing, is that I get invited to speak at events all over the world at universities and conferences. I kind of share the story of how I set up Super Jam and there are things people can learn from that and the way that I did things.

I go and speak in schools all over Scotland. I love sharing my story with the kids. Lots of the kids there have never met any entrepreneurs before.

I get emails from kids all the time saying that they have read my story or listened to me talking at school and they tell me about starting their own little businesses, maybe by making cakes or something like that.”

**How do you do your product research?**

“I get support and advice from quite a few people but mainly it is me playing around in the kitchen.

I wrote all the recipes in the SuperJam cookbook which I launched. It took a couple of years to come up with everything and to test all the recipes. I do really enjoy cooking. I like cooking cakes, puddings jam tarts and jam roly-poly and all those kind of things. It's not all jam however! I do enjoy cooking other things too!”

### **Why do you continue living here in Edinburgh?**

“I guess the entrepreneurial community is a big part of it for me. I have a huge amount of support from people living here, and all my friends who are here. Edinburgh is a fun place to live and quite safe.

I do have time for a social life. I really enjoy the festival which I think is great.”

### **Where are you on the life-work balance scale?**

“[My business](#) is not the most important thing in my life. I have lots of friends and family here. I enjoy travelling and the charity work that I do. I make time for all of that.

I do not work at weekends and I make sure I am doing things which I consider fun and which I enjoy.

Most of the people who work for me work are on contracts or part-time, so they are not actually working for the company every day. They could be designing packaging or designing our website. We don't have an office here as such, and so people who work for me do so on a flexible pattern.

For example the people who designed the brand in the first place I have been loyal to them.

I am particularly proud of Global Student Entrepreneur of the Year Award. There were 750 students from all over the world

who had to go to the US to do a pitch to a panel of about six billionaires. Most of the other students were Dot com and software companies and there I was making jam!

The book is what I am focussing on at the moment. It has gone on to be a best seller. It's doing really well and I am very pleased with that. I am also working on getting my jam into new countries and also developing lots of new flavours."

### **How did the tea dances come about?**

"It all began a couple of years ago. My gran always made jam and scones and then visited the elderly people in the area she lived. My brother and I always went with her and I used to tell stories! We were brought up doing this really, so we started running tea dances in Edinburgh in community centres and schools.

In the last year we have organised about 120 tea dances across the UK. They are fantastic events and I try to go to the biggest ones which can attract about 600 people.

The biggest ones we have in Edinburgh are at Meadowbank.

There are also lots of smaller events for example in care homes, or some that kids organise as a school project. But the big ones we try to run ourselves every other month at Meadowbank.

It is a registered charity. The events are free for everyone to come along to. The idea is that we try to encourage people to host tea parties in their school where possible, and especially in remote places that we could never have reached. There are some older people who might otherwise be a bit lonely."

**You appear to embrace social media and you have a lovely website. What do you think of Twitter?**

“I think what is exciting about social media is that it is possible for a grocery brand like Super Jam to have a conversation with its customers about new products, which would never have been possible before. People send us suggestions for little stores that we should try and introduce our jam to.

10,000 people are engaged with us online. It is an amazing way of reaching them all on the website or the blog.

I started off with Waitrose when they opened their first store in Edinburgh about 4 years ago. They had a ‘meet the buyer’ day when they wanted to meet local suppliers who might supply their stores. I went along and pitched SuperJam to them. Ultimately they put the product into their 240 stores across the country.

There was loads of media coverage particularly here in Edinburgh. They sold 1500 jars on the first day in Morningside, which is more than they had expected to sell in the first month!”

### **What are your favourite places in Edinburgh?**

“I often have people visiting from overseas and I like to take them for a walk up Arthur’s Seat. But, I also enjoy Stockbridge and Morningside where it is quite nice to take a walk.”

### **What do you think about the introduction of 20mph zones in certain parts of Edinburgh?**

“I am not often asked about this kind of thing! I am not sure the council has done a great job of the trams and I have friends who have shops which have suffered as a result of some of this stuff. Politics is not really my thing though!”

### **What does your future hold?**

"I enjoy what I do. I have a huge amount of fun doing this and I cannot imagine doing anything else. I have no plans to retire at the moment!"

### **Which books would you recommend?**

"I am interested in all kinds of things but I do read about business. I also like to take an interest in and am inspired by all kinds of things. I try to open my mind up to all kinds of things that might not initially appeal. I used to want to work for Greenpeace or some other big charity. I have always been concerned about the environment and the food industry. I think there is a lot of stuff we are not getting right.

It is worrying the way that there is a disconnect between what people buy in the supermarket and where it has come from.

I have been lucky enough to travel all over the world. Beijing, Puerto Rico, US, Canada, The Caribbean. I find it amazing that people have heard of my story."

Fraser did not admit to travelling business class or limos. He has a VW camper van which he goes camping in and drives around at the weekend. He said:-"It is not really my thing to travel business class!

I employ my brother from time to time, and my parents helped at the beginning. Everybody pitches in at times like The Royal Highland Show."

### **Are you a normal 22 year-old?**

"I have managed to find a way to make a career out of doing something that I love.

I get up every day knowing that I am doing what I exactly want to do. I was born to do this."

