

## **ICATS - Promoting Aroma Trades Studies**

*Dr Tony Curtis, Director of Studies for the International Centre for Aroma Trades Studies reveals the story behind the centre's highly successful diploma course and his vision for the future.*

### **Changing times**

I am often asked if perfumery is a science or an art. I use the cinema as my analogy. We now go to a digital multiplex to see high definition and 3D films. However, the technology must not get in the way of the art of telling a story, emotionally moving people and just plain simple entertainment. What is our industry about? Which people does it need and how are these people to be educated and trained?

Half a century ago the industry was very different, but the swinging sixties marked a change that continues into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Youth culture was being invented, jet travel brought foreign holidays to the masses and satellite TV shrunk the world. Fine fragrances moved to the forefront of fashion.

In the perfume industry, advances in analytical technology provided and ever-deepening insight into natural aroma materials, improving chemical processing technology resulted in a wave of new materials at competitive prices. Whole new categories of fragranced products were being developed, some with special challenges. Bleach fragrances are no pushover!

### **Perfumery qualifications - the early days**

How were the professionals for this industry in transition going to gain the range and depth of skills and knowledge needed? Some of us worked with David Williams, with his pioneering course run in the evenings at Downham College in South London. With support and encouragement from the International Federation of Essential Oils and Aroma Trades (IFEAT), this was developed in 1980 into the Perfumery Education Centre (PEC) IFEAT Perfumery Diploma programme by distance learning.

The next stage of development was the move in 1994 of the PEC programme to Plymouth University. This programme was developed by the industry for the industry and was largely aimed at people already employed in perfumery. This still left a gap. How could young people just entering university gain an industry-specific education? With support from the British Society of Perfumers, IFEAT and CPL Aromas, a BA in 'Business of Perfumer' was launched.

This was an interesting time, as outside the industry the degree was greeted with incredulity and ridicule. What did you need to know to stand behind a department counter in a department store and spray unsuspecting people with perfume at Christmas? Even the student body was critical and thought the degree was downgrading the standing of the university. Such is life with new ventures - in the fifties, marketing was often regarded as rather a suspect aspect of Applied Economics, but it is viewed somewhat differently now. This media hostility prompted a strong cohesion and identity for the pioneering class of 1994.

### **A growing reputation**

But things change rapidly in the university as students returned from one-year placements with blue-chip creative houses and started to get exciting job offers. As I travel round the world today and meet up with past students, I find they have fond memories of these frontier years when a new subject was established. Students not only went into creation

and evaluation, but also into other roles in the industry, such as production, marketing and quality assurance.

A new subject had been invented: "Aroma Trades Studies". Academia found that these students performed better on average in 'head-to-head' areas, for example in professional exams such as the Diploma in Marketing of the Chartered Institute of Marketing. The degree was now admired rather than ridiculed. The vocational content of the placement year enabled the graduates to hit the ground running, being academically and professionally prepared. The senior positions now occupied by past students are a testament to their commitment and to the value of Aroma Trades Studies.

### The future

Recently I received a new certificate for my office wall. It was from the RSC (Royal Society of Chemistry). It was to certify fifty years of senior professional membership. A paradox: a time for reflection about the future? What has 50 years taught me about future watch and prediction? It seems time for some quotations...

One of history's greatest military and political strategists stated '*Plans are nothing. planning is everything.*' More recently a strategist stated '*There are things we know. There are things we know we don't know. There are things we don't know we don't know.*' When I was operating as an internal Business Analyst, I got deeply interested in timeseries analysis. This is valuable in both marketing and process optimisation. I worked with a world-renowned consultant in this area. I never became even a competent mathematician! However, I was taught a major lesson for life. Do not attempt to do timeseries analysis unless you know the context, quality and nature of the figures [evidence]. The great financial crash of the early 21<sup>st</sup> century was partially the result of elegant mathematics - it was unfortunate that they forgot the business environment was changing: the past was not a good predictor of the future.

Enough of this philosophical rambling. There is a key question in business (whatever the context). It is not **how** do we get good evidence (even though this is vital). It is '*Are we asking the right questions in the first place?*' This is difficult when, from one of the above quotations, what is needed is the answer to '*There are things we don't know, we don't know? What are they? What are the answers and how do we get to them?*'

In one's career pathway there are a number of development stages. ICATS addresses two of these:

- On graduate entry most first degrees do not provide the industry context and additional capabilities. The full IFEAT / ICATS Postgraduate Diploma provides an MBA style sector specific solution.
- People who have established careers (including non-graduates with ability & experience) move on to greater and broader responsibilities. They may not need or want the full range of the complete IFEAT / ICATS Diploma but specific, cherry-picked modules to fill gaps in the capability profile demanded by the increased scope of additional responsibilities (e.g. a technical person moving into senior management may need better understanding of Marketing and the Business Environment). CPD (Continuing Professional Development - life-long learning) is key.

These developmental needs have to be met by the organisation against constraints:

- In the ever-more-competitive environment, companies no longer have time or resources for extended apprenticeships

- The use of senior staff in training has become more difficult, as their time is increasingly required for other things (for example, dealing with regulatory compliance activities)
- The time pressures on senior staff are also reflected down the line and organisations are finding it difficult to release staff for extended periods for 'off-line' full-time training courses.
- The globalisation of the entire industry value chain demands that staff must be highly competent and highly trained.

The IFEAT Executive are far sighted members of the Aroma Trades. Over 40 years ago as IFEAT was founded (an event celebrated in style in 2017 with a commemorative book and at the Athens Conference), they understood these issues. For most of IFEAT's existence, ICATS with its open learning, has been providing cost-effective solutions for the education and training of new entrants and developing professionals. CPD (Continuing Professional Development - life-long learning) is key and our programme content is continually evolving with material drawn from internationally renowned authors. ICATS has been and continues to be a cost-effective and effective cornerstone of Aroma Trades' provision of CPD for professionals in the industry.