



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.



Above: Dr Tony Curtis, Director of Studies at ICATS.

Below: An ICATS study pack.



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 21st 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 an 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

The current aim of the IFEAT-ICATS programme is to provide Aroma Trades professionals with a firm grounding of knowledge and skills to develop their careers and their contribution to the industry. The objectives are:

- To provide students with the theory, subject knowledge and skills to enhance their professional performance in the Aroma Trades industry.
- To provide this professional development support in the context of both the flavour and fragrance aspects of the Aroma Trades industry.
- To provide this support on a global basis.
- To provide an integrative treatment to young professionals in a variety of roles in all levels of the industry value chain, from manufacture of aroma materials to the marketing of flavoured/fragranced products.



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 Perfumery' 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 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 a rather 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 changed 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.

Top right: Participants in a 2013 weekend workshop run jointly by ICATS and the British Society of Perfumers, which is sponsored by IFEAT.



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

Unfortunately the BA in Business of Perfumery is not currently being offered at Plymouth, but the need for relevant training and education on a flexible basis is increasing for the following reasons:

- In the ever-more competitive environment, companies no longer have time 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' training courses. Flexible delivery of training, which can be built around the business demands, is required.
- The globalisation of the entire industry value chain demands that staff must be highly competent and highly trained.

The Perfumery Education Centre (PEC) rebranded as the International Centre for Aroma Trades Studies (ICATS) in 2008 to meet this global need.



Above: Alin Bosilcov, Brüder Unterweger (Austria) receives the ICATS student award for 2011.

Top: Fragrance evaluation facilities at Singapore School of Chemical and Life Sciences.