



## Scents appeal

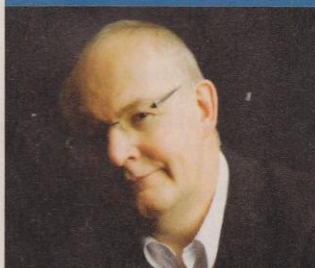
A chemistry career in the perfume industry

THE INSIDER

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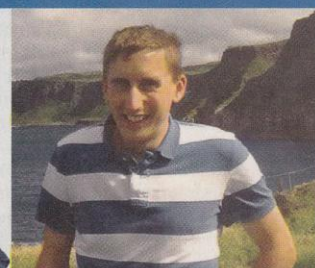
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## Who's who

# Studying fragrances and flavours

Sarah Houlton tries to entice us into a career in the flavourings and fragrances industry

Fragrances and flavours pervade our lives. There's so much more to perfume than those expensive, heavily marketed bottles of scent – fragrances are added to all manner of products, from cosmetics and toiletries to household products such as laundry detergents and cleaners. And one aroma chemical definitely doesn't fit all – what works perfectly in an alcohol-based fragrance might be rapidly destroyed in the harsh environment of, say, toilet bleach.

This may be a specialist and niche part of the chemical industry, but it offers a wide range of potential careers for people with a chemistry background, says Tony Curtis, who runs the International Centre for Aroma Trades Studies distance learning diploma course. Designed to give a broad overview of the fragrance industry, from science to business, a new version for people working in flavourings is being launched later on this year.

## Learning about fragrances

The majority of people who take the course tend to be trainee perfumers and evaluators, Curtis says. 'An evaluator is someone who knows the market, and talks with the customer to find out exactly what is wanted,' he says. 'They then work with the perfumer to select the most appropriate fragrance to meet those needs.' It's slightly different on the flavourings side – flavourists tend to work directly with the customer, without an evaluator in between the two.

Most students also have a background in chemistry, usually a degree. 'You need the chemistry knowledge to understand the complexity of things like how aroma materials interact with their bases,' he says. 'Perfumery is a very specialist job, requiring a lot of creative ability, but also plenty of technical capability.'

The course is 'hosted' by the University of Plymouth, UK, but is entirely distance-learning based. This was important to the course's main sponsor, the International Federation of the Essential Oils and Aroma

Trades (IFEAT), which set up the original course 30 years ago – Curtis explains that they wanted people to be able to start at any time and study anywhere, without being tied to exam dates or locations. It's also sponsored by the British Society of Perfumers.

The course itself has been completely revamped in the past couple of years. It is now CD-based, giving a lot more flexibility to the format of the course materials, which are written by numerous specialists with many years' practical experience in the field. Although most students have that chemistry background, it assumes no prior knowledge as it is open to anyone.

'There's a basic module of science for the industry, which teaches topics like standard deviations, organic chemistry and terpene chemistry,' Curtis says. 'Then we go into essential oils and aroma chemicals,

fragrance creation, fragrance applications, and topics as diverse as quality assurance analysis, product safety, finance, marketing and new product development. It's a little like an MBA in perfumes.'

## Moving into flavours

The flavours diploma seemed an obvious extension, bearing in mind the degree of overlap between flavours and fragrances, and includes modules on flavour creation and applications in place of those specific to fragrances. 'A lot of ingredients are common to both flavours and fragrances – for example, pepper is mostly a flavour, but it's also in many men's fragrances,' he says. 'Another is bergamot – it's most familiar as the flavour in Earl Grey tea, but it's also a key component of many fine fragrances. For essential oils, it's almost a total overlap.'

For a non-member of IFEAT the total cost of the course is £5500, which includes all learning materials and email tutorial support. Most people take two-and-a-half years to complete the course, he says, although it can be done more quickly. The first two years are spent working through the taught modules, and then the final six months working on a research dissertation. 'The students select their subject with the support of their tutors, and then go off and research and write it,' he says.

It's not a formal degree, as the diploma is awarded by IFEAT rather than the university – similar to the professional qualifications from organisations like the Chartered Institute of Marketing. 'The best student gets to collect their diploma at IFEAT's annual conference,' he says. 'This year it's in Barcelona, last year it was in Marrakech, and before that Shanghai and Montreal. That's a lovely way to finish off your course of study.'

*Sarah Houlton is a freelance writer based in Boston, US*



**Tony Curtis runs a flavours and fragrances diploma course**

## Further reading

International Centre for Aroma Trades Studies  
www.icatsaromaeducation.com