



Industry Insight

with Tony Curtis

Tony Curtis, senior lecturer, aroma trades studies, at the University of Plymouth's business school and faculty of science (Plymouth, Devon, UK) recently sat down with *Perfumer & Flavorist* magazine to discuss the institution's aroma and formulation science program, the role of perfumery education in the industry at large, and his thoughts on the current state and future of the industry.

P&F: Please give us a general outline of Plymouth's program.

Curtis: The B.Sc. *aroma and formulation science* has been developed in close consultation with the perfumery industry's professional societies, and addresses the need for graduates with a strong chemistry background, focusing on the aroma field. The program has applied chemistry at its core (including modules on natural product chemistry and a research project in the perfumery field), while aroma trades studies and an introduction to business studies provide the commercial backdrop. Together with the BA marketing with aroma trades electives, these two undergraduate programs now provide chemistry- and marketing-based entry routes into the aroma trades industry. The students spend a considerable amount of time developing their laboratory skills in organic chemistry through laboratory assignments in the first two years, while industry theory is reinforced with practical understanding through a one-year industrial placement. B.Sc. *aroma and formulation science* is in its first year, and there are 80 students progressing through the full-time undergraduate programs.

P&F: When was the program conceived and how has it evolved since its inception?

Curtis: The program was conceived in 1992, two years after I moved into university education after 25 years in the industry with Bush Boake Allen (BBA). I had worked on a number of training initiatives with David Williams (founder of the IFEAT diploma course) at BBA. We maintained an interest in aroma trades education, and with IFEAT support founded the professional development residential program. Talking with industry members, we identified the need for a meaningful entry point for young graduates into perfumery. With the support of Michael Boudjouk (International Federation of Essential Oils & Aroma Trades) and Ken Shipp

(British Society of Perfumers [BSP]), the BA business of perfumery program was established with accreditation by both organizations (in addition to the Chartered Institute of Marketing). However, it was always recognized that a science entry route was keenly desired by the industry, and, having established the marketing-based route, work was started to provide the new applied chemistry-based B.Sc. aroma and formulation science program. Plymouth was specifically chosen by the perfumery professional bodies to develop and deliver this program because of its internationally recognized reputation in applied and analytical chemistry.

These four-year full-time undergraduate courses match the two-year postgraduate ISIPCA degree (in association with the Universities of Versailles, Padova and Barcelona), the one-year IFEAT diploma distance learning program (which is 20 years young) and the International Professional Development Residential Program.

P&F: What separates your program — a four-year degree course — from other perfume industry-related educational programs?

Curtis: A number of key features I believe make the University of Plymouth programs unique. They have been constructed through detailed discussions with the relevant learned societies (International Federation of Essential Oils

& Aroma Trades, BSP, Society of Cosmetic Scientists (SCS) and Chartered Institute of Marketing). The B.Sc. *aroma and formulation science* is the first chemistry-based program to be developed specifically for entry into the perfumery and aroma trades industry. Thus, graduates of the program will be skilled in the techniques necessary to participate in the creation of perfumery products, rather than just the marketing side. As with all the chemistry programs, B.Sc. *aroma and formulation science*



provides rigorous academic content and a level of attainment. Furthermore, students on completion of a successful project, examined by an IFEAT appointed examiner, gain the internationally recognized IFEAT diploma in perfumery. The course has intimate links with the industry, including CPL Aromas (in sponsorship and placements), and placements in Quest, Firmenich, Mane, IFF, Robertet, Avon, Boots and others. This industrial linkage provides graduates with practical and relevant knowledge and with a skill base to hit the ground running upon entry into the industry. With students from all parts of the world and the active support of IFEAT, a truly global perspective is maintained at all levels.

P&F: After completing the Plymouth program, what can graduates expect in regard to placement and acceptance in the industry?

Curtis: Students have gained ready acceptance in blue chip fragrance organizations, with recent graduates now moving into management positions after just a few years in the industry. The new chemistry-based graduates will also have an ideal knowledge and skill base for the aroma trades' client organizations manufacturing consumer products. In addition, recent discussions have started with Proctor & Gamble about possible placement collaboration.

P&F: How has the industry responded to the Plymouth program?

Curtis: The program has been developed by the industry for the industry in collaboration with the learned societies. Our students have received continual support from around the industry on a global basis. A common theme from some of the most senior people in the industry is: "I was helped on my way up, and now is my chance to do the same for a new generation of professionals. I hope they have as much love for, and get as much satisfactions from, this wonderful industry as I have." The course would not be possible without the active support of the industry and the industry's learned bodies.

Michael Boudjouk and the International Federation of Essential Oils & Aroma Trades have been unwavering in their active support of educational initiatives for our industry's young professionals and aspiring professionals prior to entry. IFEAT has provided prize medals and sponsorship for students to attend IFEAT meetings around the world. They have generously provided charitable donations (last year £10,000) to support student projects with materials, travel and accommodation expenses. Industry experts such as Michael Boudjouk, Richard Pisano, Ron Neal, David Pybus, Brian Lawrence and many others have

visited the University to bring the industry into the lecture room. The BSP sponsors students to the annual New Materials for the Perfumer symposium and the bi-annual Young Perfumers Master-Class Weekend. Students are invited to become student members of the BSP. CPL Aromas provide the range of aroma materials to maintain a sensory laboratory and also provide financial support for

student projects. Major companies such as Quest, Firmenich, Mane, IFF, Robertet, CPL, Avon and Boots have supported the program with placement opportunities.

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P&F: Why should flavor and fragrance companies be interested in Plymouth graduates?

Curtis: Students have a unique academic education in topic areas that are relevant to the current needs of the industry. Last year, the fourth-year project was supported with the release to students of a paper presented at the November IFEAT conference in Buenos Aires prior to publication of the proceedings. With invitations to attend industry conferences and industrial placements, students are prepared for the industry of the 21st century. They come with a depth of understanding and industry knowledge that gives them a two-year head start on new graduates entering with traditional qualifications in applied chemistry or marketing.

P&F: Since the beginning of the Plymouth program, how have both your students and the industry changed?

Curtis: I am proud of the students who graduated from the first few years' intake some eight years ago. They were the pioneers who had to survive ill-informed criticism by the ignorant mass press about the relevance of aroma trades studies as an academic subject. They also had to prove themselves as worthy contributing employees to blue chip companies. It is a great pleasure to see these pioneers now progressing into management roles. The students are no longer pioneers; they are worthy settlers and we now have a proven academic and industrial framework.

A big question is how the industry differs in the 21st century from the industry I left for university life in 1990. In the second half of the 20th century, there was a continual movement towards an increasingly competitive environment with decreasing margins; the implication being that individuals in the industry have had to become increasingly professional with a truly multi-disciplinary and international multi-cultural outlook. The role of the medium-sized creative house has become increasingly difficult. The clear economies of scale relative to the larger organizations have resulted in yet another period of consolidation (IFF's

acquisition of BBA and more recently discussions about H&R). Consumer concerns and regulatory forces have increased the pressures on companies to demonstrate that products are safe and environmentally benign to a knowledgeable public and, sometimes, critical pressure groups. Finally, technological advances, from instrumental analysis to the Internet, have radically changed how business is conducted in this global industry.

P&F: What predictions do you have for the future of the program and the industry?

Curtis: In the short term, with the launch of the B.Sc. aroma and formulation science degree and Versailles postgraduate program, I see one or two years of consolidation. These are big steps to support the industry with a relevant new source of highly skilled young professionals. Clearly, the existing marketing-based route, the IFEAT diploma in distance learning and professional development residential courses will also

continue to have their place in assisting the industry with the enhancement of the competitive skill base of young professional employees. Attention will be needed to continue to develop the content and presentation style, but they will continue to be relevant. What is clearly needed is a parallel initiative in flavors. IFEAT has established some links and has an initiative in place with Reading University

in the UK. My earnest hope is that the University of Plymouth, in collaboration with our range of partners, can provide a similar framework of support to that already developed in the perfumery area for the flavor side of the industry

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competitive, with margins only being maintained by increasing levels of efficiency. This will result in an even greater demand for rounded professional staff with depth of specialist knowledge and a breadth of outlook. Consumer and regulatory pressure will further increase, while

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e-commerce and the Internet will continue to affect all players in the industry. Our challenge is to prepare professionals who will thrive and achieve success for themselves and their organizations in this environment.

P&F: You've been quoted by mainstream news organizations, such as ABC News, on consumer trends. How—and how closely—do you follow the commercial market? What role does this information have in what you teach your students? Or do you try to ignore trends in the classroom?

Curtis: We wish to teach chemistry, aroma trades, business and marketing that is highly relevant to today's industry and marketplace. The industry does not want students who can write nice essays on the industry's history — it wants (and needs) people who can create new products, manage projects and deliver a competitive performance.

At Plymouth, we ensure that our teaching is right up with the leading edge of trends. In the aroma trades, we are greatly helped by IFEAT and BSP, who make material available after conference presentations in electronic format, even before the publication in hard copy is available. Parallel links with the world of marketing are maintained through the University of Plymouth being an accredited center of postgraduate education for marketers working

towards the postgraduate diploma in marketing of the Chartered Institute of Marketing (a program with some 3,000 students in some 300 centers around the world). In Plymouth, we are also lucky that Procter & Gamble uses Plymouth as a test market so students can have a ringside seat on bringing new consumer products to market.

P&F: Any last thoughts that you would like to share with the readers of *Perfumer & Flavorist* magazine?

Curtis: I would like to make several acknowledgments. The B.Sc. aroma and formulation science would not have been possible without the active help and assistance of the learned societies (IFEAT, BSP, CIM and SCS), the sponsoring companies mentioned above and the inspirational contributions of many key figures in the industry. There are too many to mention all of them — it would fill a page — but special mention must be made of the late Ken Shipp (BSP) for his vision in developing the original program 10 years ago, Michael Boudjouk (IFEAT) without whose continual enthusiastic support these programs would not have gotten off the ground, and David Williams, who for 25 years has been the leading architect of aroma trades education and the founder of the original IFEAT diploma program. ■