

Profile: British School of Leather Technology

Building on a 600-year heritage

The British School of Leather Technology (BSLT) was formed in 1978 by the merging of two dedicated colleges. One was the National Leathersellers College in London, with a heritage dating back almost 600 years, the other being the Leather Department of Nene College, Northampton where teaching in leather technology can be traced back almost 100 years. The School was renamed the British School of Leather Technology in 1991, and is now part of University College Northampton (UCN).

The School is housed in a purpose built and self-contained centre within the Park campus of the UCN, located about 70 miles north of London. It has a well-equipped pilot scale tannery—suited for producing many types of leathers from raw materials to the finished state, chemistry and materials testing laboratories and lecture rooms.

Study at the School provides the advantage of entering a broad educational environment and community. Moreover, living on campus means meeting similarly well educated students from a wide range of backgrounds, both economic and cultural, and with a wide range of interests, which extend beyond leather sciences.

Other benefits arising from being part of a modern British university include an extensive range of facilities and support, such as access to information technology, a comprehensive library and



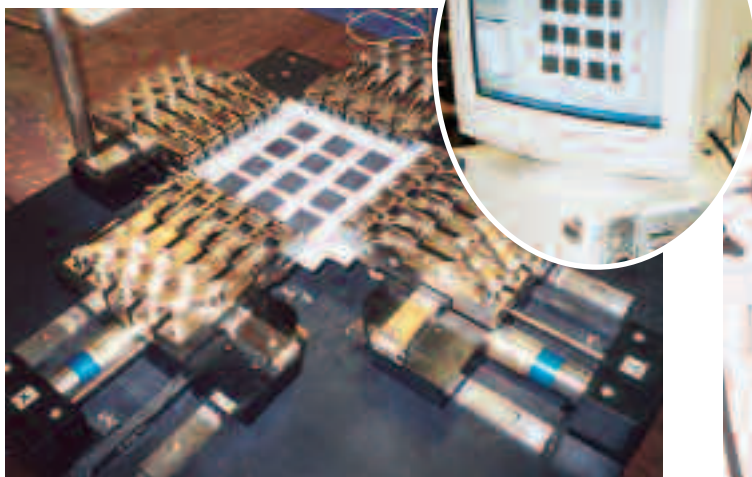
Design in Leather. Part of the collection by fashion students from UCN: PielEspaña, Barcelona February 2004.

accommodation blocks. In addition, there is an international student support office. UCN also offer a popular range of English language courses.

Developments in research

Research was introduced in the early 1990's and the BSLT now has one of the most comprehensive and thorough research programmes to be found anywhere, and one that is attracting considerable support and sponsorship from both within and without the industry.

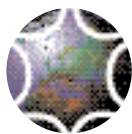
Research is seen as an important activity that enriches and enhances teaching. The current research group consists of six staff and nine research students working towards PhDs. The research programme includes projects on area yield, tanning science and the development of novel organic tannages, new approaches to finishing, investigations of leather biodegradability, and the application of computerised image analysis to the characterisation of leather. Pioneering research is also taking place on non-leather applications of collagen, and to develop and characterise new biomaterials based on reformed collagen.



The biaxial testing apparatus can be used in conjunction with computer image-analysis to investigate the deformation of leathers stressed under different conditions.



Infra-red and Ultra-violet curing equipment used for development work with powder-based finishing systems.



Ann Tate, Rector of UCN. "In the near future BSLT will be able to offer a programme of education which is much more integrated with the other strengths at UCN."



Full time residential distance learning and short courses

BTEC Certificate of Achievement in Leather Technology

This course is designed as a foundation course for students who wish to proceed to the BSc Materials Technology (Leather) degree. It is a one-year full-time course and is a recognised qualification in its own right. On completion students can either enter the industry directly as technicians or progress to higher education.

BSc Materials Technology (Leather)

This degree consists of eighteen compulsory modules, which are studied over three years. The central theme is leather technology and science. Other themes include leather testing, which covers process control and advanced analytical techniques, tannery and chemical engineering and health, safety and environmental issues.

MSc Leather Technology

This one-year full-time course is designed for those with an appropriate science degree or diploma with relevant experience who wish to develop their theoretical and practical knowledge of leather technology.

Leathersellers Certificate

This one year course focuses on students from a wide variety of backgrounds. The entry criteria are to a great extent based on experiential qualifications. The curriculum is designed to benefit individuals who have had substantial, if narrow, experience in leather manufacturing and who now seek to improve their technical background.

Distance learning

With awareness that some students may find it difficult to be able to study in the UK for an extended period of time, the already established distance learning provision is being extended. The first new courses being provided are the postgraduate certificate, postgraduate diploma and MSc and MBA in Leather Technology.

The Leather Technology Short Course

For those who wish to study in England, and within a three-month time-scale, this course is aimed to develop the theoretical and practical understanding of the science and technology of leather manufacture. In addition to tannery staff, this course is also designed for those who need to understand the fundamentals of leather technology, but not directly within manufacturing. These might, for example, include those within sales and marketing, leather purchasing and specification, and within the leather goods, components and retail sectors. The course, which commences in September, spans manufacture from raw materials to the finished state, including an introduction to Chemical and Physical Testing. It is also possible to combine this course with English Language tuition by specialists within UCN.

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Investment continues in equipment and infrastructure. In recent years there have been purchases of state of the art instruments, including variable pressure scanning electron microscopy, differential scanning calorimetry, biaxial testing apparatus, computerised image analysis, gel permeation chromatography, electrostatic spraying and UV curing equipment. Further investment will include X-ray microanalysis, dynamic mechanical thermal analysis and Fourier Transform Infrared Spectroscopy.

New subject combinations

The School is now entering a new phase of development where it intends to integrate more closely within the structure of UCN. This will open exciting prospects for courses which combine leather technology with other subjects. This includes a postgraduate course combining Leather Technology with Management Studies, and combinations with design and fashion. Structured studies are possible with other technologies within the campus including Environmental Science, and Engineering and Computing.

The existence of the Leather School within the University creates a number of special opportunities for both the University and the wider leather and leather using industries. The work going on in the automobile industry, particularly related to 3D interior design, in foot health and comfort in the School of Podiatry, in Conservation at the Leather Conservation Centre, and in footwear design only hint at the potential for teaching and collaborative research.



Part of the tannery pilot plant for practical training under guidance, and where students are given the freedom to learn by self-investigation.

The future

Former students from BSLT are to be found in senior positions throughout the leather industry. The changes taking place will both continue and extend this involvement into new areas of scientific, fashion and industrial development. The alumni organisation—known appropriately as the Corium Club—has been revitalised with more meetings, lectures and a new newsletter. 