

To the uninitiated, milling technology will always begin and end with picturesque windmills – although the truth, of course, is that milling is now one of the most advanced of all food production industries, and its employees among the most highly skilled.

## Flour milling is a profession as misunderstood as it is ancient

Modern milling requires mastery of a range of disciplines, and achieving the necessary level of expertise requires access to industry-specific training.

For over a hundred years, UK Flour Millers – the trade association for the UK flour milling industry, previously known as nabim – has provided that training. And graduates of its courses continue to provide the backbone of the industry on a worldwide basis.

At the heart of the UK Flour Millers offering are the distance learning courses that provide millers with an essential understanding and underpinning knowledge of the milling industry. Taking the form of seven modules, these courses are studied by hundreds of students around the world and lead to the Advanced Certificate in Flour Milling.

“The modules cover wheat intake, flour milling and management, and each and every one is written with the aim of increasing our students’ understanding of the milling process,” says UK Flour Millers director general Alex Waugh.

“They are not going to get this level of industry-specific training anywhere else.”

The distance-learning programme offers a flexible approach to learning.

Modules can be studied in any order and in any combination, thereby allowing students to select the modules most relevant to their needs

“We allocate all students a tutor for each module that they are studying,” Mr Waugh says. “These are milling experts still working in the field, each with an unrivalled depth of specialist knowledge.”

While the concept of distance learning might seem analogue to some, the model is hugely effective – and has proved splendidly resilient over the last 18, Covid-disrupted months.

It is also supported by some very hi-tech learning tools, such as the Virtual Mill – which could have been designed specifically for the “new normal” of social distancing and remote working.

In fact, the initial stages of this state-of-the-art CGI system first appeared in 2017, providing a unique online training aid for the next generation of millers wherever they live in the world.

The 3D Virtual Mill contains an entire mill site, including wheat intake, laboratory, screenroom and mill building, packing line and warehouse, as well as training rooms dedicated to purifier, plansifter and roller mill, enabling students to see inside the closed milling process.

UK Flour Millers students have access to the Virtual Mill and each of the seven modules deliver three tutorials in the online mill, as well as training sessions for our course mentors.

And while the primary objective has been to provide a new training environment for millers, providing a medium where they can see inside the closed milling process, there is also potential for other uses and for individual companies to build their own 'project rooms' within the Virtual Mill.

The Virtual Mill runs through a dedicated website, where students also have access to other resources such as textbooks, e-learning and videos.

“Flour is a key element of the global food supply, with nearly 4 million tonnes produced in the UK alone every year,” says Mr Waugh. “Training the next generation of millers is a crucial part of what we do as an association, not only for the industry but for the world as a whole.”

