

The International Institute of Chocolate and Cacao Tasting (IICCP) has been building an international school and knowledge base for the understanding of chocolate and cacao flavor since 2014, based on the expertise and experience of our founding partners, Martin Christy (UK), Monica Meschini (Italy), and Dr. Maricel E. Presilla (US). The Institute's main curriculum stream, the Certificate in Chocolate Tasting, is now an accredited vocational qualification by the UK government awarding body OfQual and the Institute is an accredited learning center with FDQ in the UK. Over 500 students have passed at least one of our three-level program of courses, giving them a deeper understanding of chocolate flavor, including established and new chocolate makers, chocolatiers, sommeliers, baristas, independent tasters and enthusiasts.

Adapted versions of our courses have been presented throughout Europe, Asia, and the Americas including cacao-growing countries such as Peru, Nicaragua and Papua New Guinea, helping towards a better understanding of cacao flavor, improving quality, and meeting the demands of the fine chocolate market.

The Institute's understanding of flavor is based on neural sensory tasting and uses the latest of available research into cacao flavor to create a model of how the brain interprets chocolate taste. Our profiling system uses a principal component analysis from the output of our neural networking model of chocolate tasting. With this data we created a visual flavor map with representative flavor archetypes positioned according to their chemical relationships. The flavor map has a logical basis, but is also intuitive to use as it's based on the latest understanding of how the brain works when tasting. The flavor map is used online both as a reference for identifying flavor but also as an interactive tool that can record personal profiles and present these individually, or more powerfully, combined with other evaluations to create group profiles.

So far, the Institute system has been used for 10,000s of individual profiles, in class, for personal use and for evaluating cacao for institutions and cacao growers. With this data, we are creating a database allowing the system to be constantly refined and improved, while extending our understanding of cacao origins and chocolate processing methods. The profiles also include a quality score based on the flavor quality evaluation. This score creates a method to identify defective samples and to rate defect-free samples according to their appeal to the evaluator and their balance, complexity and distinctiveness. It is often forgotten when making technical evaluations that the reason for producing any chocolate is to give pleasure. The Institute's approach places the pleasure principle first and by removing the use of non-obvious evaluation criteria, we hope helps to demystify the understanding of cacao and chocolate flavor.