

DISTILLERY OPERATIONS COURSE CURRICULUM

Every section of this course comes as its own workbook, backed by hours of video. Work through the workbook at your own pace, or press play and learn the way you would in a classroom, seminar or lecture.

Each workbook is built around what facts and insights you need to know to make better decisions and improve your distillery operations. As individuals, as teams and as brand builders. Every fact leads to an action. It is written for craft operations that tend to be lean teams of fewer than 8 people, working with a lot of manual processes, looking to improve, scale and increase volumes and efficiency. It assumes equipment and volumes that would top out at an output of around 250-300 casks a year.

You work through the theory, then how to put it into practice against your own operation.

How long it takes: roughly 30 hours to work through the material as reading, and a further half day per workbook to apply it to your operation and begin implementing the plan.

There is around 10 hours of video that covers most of the ground in the workbooks to help you fast forward the reading and comprehension, presented by Olivier Ward.

Every workbook is active, so implementing what you've learned isn't a once only job. This course is built to be revisited as you put it into practice, not finished once and shelved.

Nine of these workbooks apply to any spirit you make. Two go deep on a specific category: gin and whisky. Brandy, rum and vodka don't have dedicated workbooks yet, but extensive video based learning of all three is already part of the course.

CORE OPERATIONS: APPLIES TO ANY SPIRIT YOU MAKE

Mindset and Leadership in Craft Distilling

The workbook is split into four parts: the psychology of the job, the systems that build a strong operational culture, leadership at every level, and a full action plan for putting it into practice. It's written for the junior operator building good habits from the ground up just, as much as the owner setting the tone from the top, with real case studies and reflection prompts throughout.

What you'll gain: A clearer sense of how you influence quality, culture and performance every day, whatever your role happens to be right now.

Health & Safety for Distillery Operators

Starts with the mindset and risk-thinking that underpins everything else: the hazards you'll meet day to day, and how to build safety into the plan from the first step rather than bolting it on at the end.

From there it maps the regulatory picture, DSEAR, ATEX and hazardous area zoning, and works through a self-audit checklist alongside the environmental aids (bundling, ventilation, detection, ignition control) that manage those hazards in practice. Beyond DSEAR it covers COSHH and a chemical register, manual handling, confined spaces, noise, lone working, contractor approval and your RIDDOR reporting duty.

The operator toolkit section gives you worked-up risk assessment examples plus templates for your own, near-miss logs, toolbox talks, training records and a compliance calendar. There's a dedicated part for new distillers setting up the legal foundations before they're operational, and a separate part for owners on building safety into a system that scales with the business rather than living in one person's head.

What you'll gain: Implement this and safety stops being a folder you check when someone asks. Or that you need to pull out once the worst has already happened. You'll know exactly which regulations apply to your specific hazards, have a working system, with audits and risk registers you can point to, as well as a day-one induction ready for anyone new on the floor. For an owner, it's the difference between safety depending on you being in the room vs living in a compliant system the whole team can run without you.

The Business of Distilling

Opens with the cost of getting forecasting wrong, then gives you a blank forecasting template, a capacity reality check and a three-scenario stress test. It covers working lead times backwards, reading demand signals and tracking your own forecast accuracy. From there it moves into real unit economics: what a bottle costs you, why not all sales are equal, and where forecasting and cashflow collide.

It follows the cash impact of a single cask through to bottling, and makes the case for why inventory is cash you can't spend. It closes with your own seat at the table, a self-assessment of your commercial voice, a duty and compliance record-keeping checklist, and a review rhythm to keep all of it current.

What you'll gain: Production sits at the commercial heart of a distillery whether or not you're the one making the sale, choosing the supplier or setting the price. This workbook connects what you do on the floor to what happens upstream in sourcing and downstream in sales, so you understand exactly where your decisions land in the wider business. You'll get a working sense of the whole ecosystem around you, production, brand, supply and cost, upstream and downstream, beyond cost and cashflow literacy on its own. It's what makes you a better operator, a better colleague, and a better person to have on the team.

Raw Materials

Covers the long view of climate, geopolitics and what they mean for your supply chain, then how to build your own specification and read a Certificate of Analysis properly rather than filing it. It gives you a universal intake checklist, sampling and testing discipline, storage principles and how to manage a supplier relationship so a bad batch doesn't slip through.

From there it goes material by material: grain, grape, molasses, botanicals, base and bulk spirit, and a section on yeast. It closes by comparing across materials and building your own combined action plan and review calendar.

What you'll gain: Implement this and every raw material becomes something you specify and verify, not just something you accept off the delivery van. You'll catch a problem at intake instead of a day into fermentation, and your supplier relationships will run on numbers rather than just goodwill.

Fermentation

Starts with the fundamentals: what's happening in the tank, the role yeast plays, substrates and sugar profiles, and the four things an efficient fermentation needs. From there it covers yeast selection and handling in depth, cultured against wild, matching strain to style, storage discipline, water's effect on yeast, nutrition, and pitching rate and timing.

It walks the fermentation curve phase by phase, what's forming at each stage and why, then covers the bacteria you want and the ones you don't, and how to tell the difference. The monitoring and troubleshooting sections turn that into something you can diagnose, and it closes by building your own fermentation specification and improvement plan.

What you'll gain: Implement this and you stop treating fermentation as the gap between mashing and distilling, and start treating it as where your spirit's actual character gets decided. You'll be able to diagnose a sluggish or off fermentation instead of guessing, and know exactly what you're trading off before you change a strain, timings, temperature or pitching rate.

Water, Effluent & Cleaning

Covers where your water comes from and what your source means for you, the quality parameters that affect your spirit, treating water for consistency, and closing the loop through recirculation and reuse. On the use side, it covers why cleaning is a commercial issue rather than a chore, specifying kit that's easy to clean, and choosing between CIP and manual cleaning at craft scale.

On the way out, it covers what effluent is at your scale, the parameters you can control day to day, understanding your discharge consent, and finding real value in stillage and by-products rather than treating them as waste. It closes with treatment options for when you outgrow the sewer, and a full audit, plan and review rhythm.

What you'll gain: Implement this and you stop managing water, cleaning and effluent as three separate headaches and start managing one system. You'll know what your discharge consent requires of you, how to bring your effluent load down before you ever spend money on treatment, and where you're currently paying to dispose of something with real value.

Process Control & Quality

Covers what being in control of a process really means, where variation comes from, and how to write a specification with a tolerance that means something. It shows you how to watch a process with a run chart and calibrated instruments, and how to run quality control and assurance without a dedicated department, including handling a deviation, costing it properly, and finding its real cause.

It covers food safety and critical control points, the part most craft operations have never formally done, and sensory assessment treated as a measuring instrument rather than a tasting note. It closes by assembling all of it into one system, with a short, direct section each for the owner and for whoever's running the day-to-day.

What you'll gain: Implement this and you move from making a good batch to proving, to yourself and anyone else, that you can make it again next month and the month after. You'll catch a deviation while it's still a half-shift of labour instead of a recall conversation, and you'll have language that lets you hold your own with a contract bottler, an auditor or a retailer's technical manager.

Sustainability in Distilling

Covers why sustainability matters at craft scale beyond the eco-label, and where craft distilleries have real leverage that bigger operations don't. It covers sustaining your own people and building resilience into a small team, then mapping your actual footprint honestly, with a hard look at packaging and logistics, alongside energy, water and waste.

It covers the frameworks and the business case: B Corp as a thinking tool whether or not you certify, what certification costs at your scale, and the tax and investment angle. It closes with running your own audit, building a plan, and deciding what you can credibly claim.

What you'll gain: Implement this and you'll have a sustainability position you can defend under real questioning, not a set of claims copied from a bigger brand and applied badly at craft scale. You'll know which single lever will move your numbers furthest, and you'll have a plan you can act on this year.

Structure, Systems and Workflow

Covers knowing your equipment properly, tanks, pumps and hoses, an optimisation strategy for your hardware, and tank maintenance with the safety considerations around it. It covers the maintenance skillset your team needs and, at its centre, mapping how production flows through your site day to day.

It closes with a light-touch look at space and layout, the engineering fundamentals worth knowing, and choosing between predictive, preventative and reactive maintenance, with scheduling worksheets to run whichever you choose.

What you'll gain: Implement this and you'll be able to see exactly where work backs up or doubles back on itself on your own site, instead of just sensing something's inefficient. You'll have a maintenance approach chosen on purpose rather than by habit, and a concrete plan for turning what you've mapped into action.

Distillery Tourism

Starts with whether you should open at all, defining the actual purpose of tourism for your business, a readiness assessment, a capacity and opportunity-cost check, and an honest go or no-go decision. It covers making the site visitor-ready: mapping the visitor journey, a proper risk assessment, insurance and licensing, accessibility, responsible service policy, and scheduling tours around production rather than against it.

It covers designing the experience itself, defining your visitor audiences, building tiered tour products, the narrative and sensory moments that make a tour memorable, and training hosts. It closes by making

tourism commercially useful: pricing and costing each format, designing the retail and data-capture moment, and using tourism for product development and customer research.

What you'll gain: Implement this and a tour stops being a nice-to-have that costs you production time without anyone deciding it should, and becomes something costed and designed on purpose. You'll know what a visitor is worth to you, not just what they paid for the ticket, and you'll have the planning in place to open your doors without it becoming a liability.

CATEGORY DEEP-DIVES

Making Better Gin

Covers the category properly understood: what London Dry requires versus what the shelf implies, how the rules differ around the world, and where classic, contemporary and flavoured gin sit today.

It covers distilling it well: treating your base spirit as an ingredient rather than a solvent, sourcing juniper and botanicals, the chemistry of charge, maceration and extraction, vapour infusion, cold distillation, cuts and tempo, one-shot against multi-shot, and reduction.

It covers the distiller as creator: building a botanical bill with intention, using your reason for making the gin as a guide for every decision after it, provenance done intentionally rather than incidentally, archetypes as a recipe tool, and the occasions people are buying into. It closes with your own operator self-check.

What you'll gain: Implement this and you stop treating your recipe, your positioning and your price point as separate decisions, and start treating them as one. You'll know exactly why your gin tastes the way it does and be able to change it on purpose, and you'll be able to defend a provenance claim under real questioning rather than just printing it on the label.

Making Better Whisky

Covers the category properly understood: what whisky legally requires wherever you make it, what it means to make whisky somewhere without an inherited rulebook, and how single, blended and grain designations commit you to a positioning before you ever choose a still.

It covers making it well: grain choice and terroir, moving beyond 100% malted barley, grist and milling, mashing chemistry, wort clarity as a style decision, yeast as a lever craft can pull that scale can't, fermentation length, smoke, still shape and copper contact, and cut points.

It covers wood and time in depth: oak species and origin, cask history and char, cask size, fill strength, building a wood policy you can buy against, warehousing risk, the angel's share, and creating a real maturation schedule. It closes with the commercial reality only whisky makers face: what you can say before you have an age statement, the market you're laying stock down into, and funding the gap between filling a cask and selling it.

What you'll gain: Implement this and you'll be making decisions today with a clear view of what they commit you to years from now, rather than discovering at bottling that an early choice locked you in. You'll have a wood policy you can defend to a distributor, and a real answer for how you're funding the years between filling a cask and being able to sell it.