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## Liquid Crystals Today

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other business units in the group. There are business units in Darmstadt which may also like to consider the liquid crystal state in new products and new applications. Some of these already exist today, and it's likely that we will find new ones in the future. So our research activities throughout the world could well be related to research teams that we've not previously worked with. In the future we expect to get more integrated into the Merck group as a whole, rather than just interacting with the liquid crystal business unit, as in the past.

**Erol:** What in your view are the special strengths of the Merck UK liquid crystal research group?

**Cumming:** Well very much that we have an excellent team with experience. It's a multi-skilled team with chemists, physicists, coatings people and polymer experts. These people are very important together with of course very experienced people like Dr Coates who has worked in liquid crystals since the early days of the modern phase. The second thing is Merck's ongoing commitment to R&D, and particularly to R&D in the UK. We have access to Merck's wealth of LC knowledge and patents, and a specialist knowledge of polymer related liquid crystals which has been built up mostly in the last five years. We've concentrated on our knowledge of coatings. We have close collaborations with universities and institutions within the UK, Europe and the USA. And I think there is a very strong customer focus, and a strong will to work with customers to solve their problems. This has been quite successful in the past: so it's a mix of those things.

**Erol:** Looking now at the wider perspective of liquid crystal research and development. Liquid crystal displays are now part of everyday life. What developments can the general public expect in the next few years?

**Coates:** In R&D we tend to think that things are going to happen much quicker than they do. We carry out the research, but it might take from five to seven years to actually put the results of the research into practice. It depends what it is of course, but it's a long time. So you've really got to look at trends. It is well known that over the next few years there will be larger screens, much brighter, with much wider viewing angles, they will also be faster, especially at lower temperatures. The main aim of course is to replace CRTs, monitors to start with and TVs later. It will happen, since there has been so much money spent on the research. We are coming under increasing pressure for the emissive types of technologies which could well be useful. There's going to be an increase in what we can use the displays for, so it's not that there's going to be fewer LCDs, it's just the whole arena's going to get a lot bigger. What would have been previously automatically an LCD screen may use another technology. We will see plastic displays that are flexible, not made of pieces of glass, as at present, but that's going to happen much later on, probably more than 7 years away. The other area where there will be developments is in colour reflective displays used for things like palm top computers. At the moment they are not very good, but enormous research effort is going into them, so it's likely that they will improve.

**Cumming:** One thing that I'd like to add, in the competition between the CRT and the LCD, we're really sure that any future sort of innovations which are used in LCD technology will be both better and cheaper. And I think that provides an enormous challenge to R&D. In order for the LCD makers to start to attack the CRT market for monitors, and colour televisions, performance of LCDs has to go up while making them simultaneously cheaper. I think that's one of the things that makes the LC research so exciting.

**Erol:** So how do you view the future for Merck liquid crystals, and in particular the Merck UK liquid crystal research group?

**Cumming:** Very positively. We will emerge from this period of change with a great deal of excitement for the future. We're looking forward to the move to our new laboratories. We've made a number of new senior appointments, including Dr Coates, Dr Greenfield, and Mr Verrall. The LCD market is predicted to grow at a huge rate, and we look forward to making a significant contribution in the future.

The following have accepted positions on the Editorial Board of *Liquid Crystals Today*, and contributions, comments or suggestions may be submitted to any member of the Editorial Board.

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