Greenkeeping education's new PHILOSOPHY

The last few years have seen more changes in British education than in the previous century. Indeed, it will probably be one of the vote winning or losing issues in the next general election. Those of you who are parents of teenagers will be all too well aware of the changes within secondary schools with the change from GCE and CSE to the GCSE. This will be even more significant to you if you have just left school and have had to deal with all the changes. You will know all too well whether the core curriculum and return to the three 'R's has worked or whether the supposed lower standards are just a figment of some politicians imagination. One thing is for sure, change is the only constant thing in today's society and something with which we must come to terms.

Changes in education, however, have not been limited to schools. Colleges have also had to make drastic changes to the way they operate. This has been due to both the change in teaching methods and the rapid decline in school leavers. Who would have dreamt of agricultural colleges advertising their courses in magazines ten years ago?

From about five years ago many of the college courses changed their national validating body. All three year diploma courses are now validated by BTEC (The Business and Technical Education Council) in England and Wales (SCOTVEC in Scotland) and BTEC philosophy has meant a move to more student centred learning. Students are encouraged to be responsible for their own learning and discouraged from the spoon-fed lectures of the past. This generally means that information learnt in this way is better understood and more likely to be retained by the student. However, it also means much more work for the student and, incidentally, for the teaching staff. On the whole this new approach is much better, albeit more demanding, for students, staff and college resources.

As part of this 'student centred' learning strategy BTEC has devised the 'Integrated Assignment' for unit based courses. This is to make sure that courses taught as a number of units (or modules) do not become too compartmentalised. It encourages students to relate different topics such as design, construction, maintenance and machinery to each other as is the case in the real world. After all, you don't build a new tee or green without thinking about what it will look like before you start or how you are going to maintain it after it's put into use. The assignment also provides an opportunity for assessing students, not only on whether they can do the technical skills involved in greenkeeping but also those interpersonal skills necessary if they are to work together as a team.

These 'common skills' as they are known include communication, ability to work with others, problem solving, information handling and data presentation.

The National Diploma in Turf Science and Sportsground Management at Myerscough is now in its fourth year. The integrated assignment for the course last year, and for the next two years, involves the design and construction of a golf green and tee. It is integrated because it involves co-operation and input from five separately taught skills – Design, Surveying, Construction, Machinery and Management – over three terms of the second year. Students are able to learn and/or practice a range of skills including surveying, design, drawing, proposal presentation, preparing specifications and bills of quantity, construction techniques – using a range of machines and site management.

The Team standing on their new green

The construction of a new green means the college now has seven standard greens built to differing specifications. Golf green construction types include an 'All Sand' Cell System, a USGA specification, a sand/peat system, a sand/soil system mixed off and on site and a native soil green. The featured new green consisted of a 300mm sand/soil rootzone mixed off site and laid in a herringbone drainage system installed at 3m centres. Humell peat was then added and rotovated into the surface prior to the application of a fertiliser and turfing with Rolawn 'Advantage' turf.

Teaching in this way involves a number of new teaching methods and I'm sure that other colleges using integrated assignments have, like us, had to make changes to the way courses are time-tabled and run. While the initial survey and design work was undertaken in the autumn of '89, the construction taking place during two weeks last summer. It is easy to imagine the problems that would occur if those two weeks had been wet, not only with the construction work but also the knock-on effect within the college teaching scheme. Fortunately for us the first week or so was dry, although final clearing work at the end was rained off. The photographs show students building the green and I know that they all enjoyed and gained something from the experience.

Laying the Rolawn 'Advantage' turf

Undertaking projects of this nature are, of course, costly in terms of an educational budget and we rely upon the generosity of commercial companies to supply goods either free of charge or at cost. Special thanks are due to: Rolawn, Tarmac Roadstone, Inter Seed Ltd and Kubota.

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