

Scott MacCallum talks with the new Chief Executive of the STRI, Dr Mike Canaway

A brighter future begins today

Dr Mike Canaway has had six weeks to settle into his new office and become accustomed to the responsibility of being the Chief Executive of the STRI. In many ways it is less of a quantum leap than it might have been for others as he has been with the Institute since 1974 and made steady progress through the ranks before making the final step up from Head of Research and Assistant Director to main man.

He has therefore an almost encyclopaedic knowledge of the workings of the Institute and appreciation of its strengths and weaknesses.

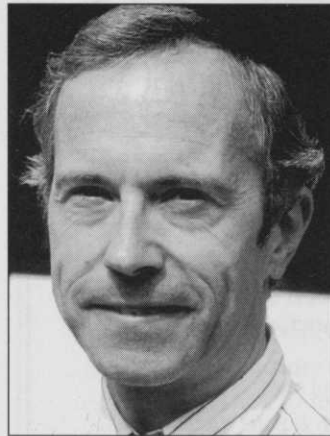
"The beauty of the Institute has always been that we've had our research department providing answers to questions that our agronomists and their clients want answers to. It is the perfect chain, one which no-one else can provide," he explained.

"On the other hand one of the problems we've had in the past has been our conflicting corporate objectives and a lack of overall direction. In other words the communication between the different departments has not been as good as it could have been.

"We've also been weak in the past with regard to our image within the industry. We've tended to let work come to us and done very little in the way of marketing."

It is this situation which Dr Canaway is keen to address quickly and he already has a plan in place.

"It is my intention to appoint an External Affairs Manager who will look after marketing, advertising, public relations, customer care, publications, seminars etc. Our staff is professional and I want them to have the back-up from base to help them improve



Dr Mike Canaway: 'We're in a different, more commercial world'

our customer care."

An unassuming, friendly man Dr Canaway, who achieved his Doctorate from Liverpool University while at the Institute, is modest to a fault. He must be otherwise the "Differential Slip Wear Machine" which is internationally recognised as the best piece of equipment to simulate golf course wear would have been known as the "Canaway Differential Slip Wear Machine".

He feels that it was his commercial business like approach in his 12 years as Head of Research that helped him clinch the job as Chief Executive.

"I encouraged staff to produce budgets and costings for different projects so that I could produce annual budgets for different sections. Prior to that nobody had really looked at costs. We were a non-profit research organisation with some advisory work grafted on to it.

"We're in a different, more commercial world these days so you have to look at everything in terms of cost and ensure that whatever is being done in the most cost effective way. Are there other ways in which we could do it better? Are there other ways in which we can give a better service to the clients and to the golf clubs?"

It is a point which was hammered home time and time again during our meeting and gave a clear indication that Mike Canaway's STRI is more attune to the demands of its customer and the threat of competition.

"I want to be more customer

led... We need to be meeting the needs of the customer rather than just offering a service... We need to operate in a commercially aware manner and generally operate in a more efficient way and in a manner appropriate to an organisation heading towards the 21st century."

He is still fine tuning his vision for the Institute but it is clear that an ability to fight its corner and compete for business will be fundamental in that vision. As will a restructuring of its internal workings.

"Other than in 1951 when other sports were added to golf the structure of the Institute has not changed since it was formed in 1929 and I think from a business point of view it has led to us under performing.

"We have conflicting objectives in that as a research organisation we are here to carry out research for the industry as a whole and provide answers to questions and that essentially is why the Institute is a non profit making organisation. Research is not meant to be profit making. If we are doing research for the R&A it's not our intention to profit from it as they have donated money for it to take place freely and on behalf of golf. So one element of our work is almost a charity.

"The other part of our business, the advisory, consultancy work and commercial research is where we are trying to be profitable, trying to be dynamic and a commercial operation trying to make money.

"We are therefore in a Catch 22 situation. If we make money people say why should we give you donations when you've got enough money to do it yourselves and if we don't make money we're told we're not operating efficiently.

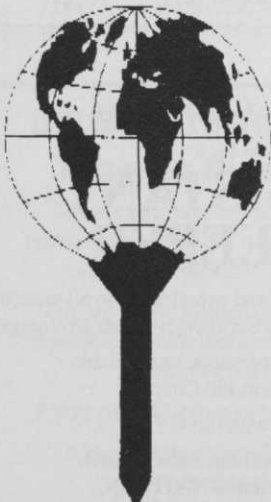
"I would like to look at ways of ensuring that the two sides of our business work independently and are not as closely connected as they are at the moment."

Meeting Dr Canaway you are left with a feeling that the new Chief Executive is a man desperate to pull the STRI into the commercial world and will ensure that the resources are there to make it happen.

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