

Chairman of Selectors.

"I was President of the EGU in 1982 when Keith McKenzie (the then Secretary of the R&A) announced his intention to retire.

"I was with another R&A official one evening when he suggested that I apply for the job. I really hadn't considered it, but I went home and started to think about it and the idea became very appealing."

At the time he was running the Leisure Division of construction and property developer company Miller Buckley based in Rugby. Among his roles was Chairman of Cotton Pennick & Lawrie, the Golf Course Architect company, who had been acquired by Miller Buckley.

"I still lived in Essex at the time and when I got the job in 1983 we sold up, bought this house and we've been here ever since."

The first Open Championship he presided over was a real cracker - St Andrews '84, when Seve Ballesteros memorably pipped Tom Watson and pumped his fist excitedly on the 18th green.

It's not a question you get to ask very often but, "Did you get as much of a buzz running The Open as you did playing in it?" produced a positive response.

"I used to love it. I thoroughly enjoyed everything about the game, the atmosphere and the people you meet in it."

Perhaps not included among that number was the Sheriff who presented him with a writ during the Post Match Walker Cup dinner at Peachtree Golf Club in Atlanta in 1989 as the "Square Groove" dispute reached its peak.

"We'd just won the Walker Cup when I got a tap on my shoulder and there was a Sheriff serving me with a writ for myself as an individual and the R&A for \$100 million tripled. It put me off my meal a bit," he said.

The case was settled a few months later.

Sir Michael also saw the famous R&A document "The Demand for Golf" published in 1986, which said that 700 more golf courses were needed by the end of the century.

"We were not far out, but what it didn't say was where those clubs were needed and what type of golf course it was that was required.



Image supplied by Getty.

"People started building very high profile, so called 'Championship' golf courses, when it was pay and play courses that were needed to get more people playing the game."

Through his Cotton Pennick & Lawrie connections Sir Michael first got to know Jim Arthur.

"We used to have the most tremendous arguments but he has the game's interests at heart and if it wasn't for him the Greenkeepers Association wouldn't be what it is today. He was the catalyst for everyone working together.

"I think BIGGA has come on tremendously since it became one unified body. Now, through training, greenkeepers are completely different to the old style greenkeepers, who were very good at their job but who didn't have the scientific knowledge.

"Now greenkeepers are virtually qualified agronomists as well as greenkeepers and they are starting to be regarded as professionals by the golf club members."

Having retired from the R&A in 1999 Sir Michael is finding himself as busy as ever. In addition to his Presidency of BIGGA he is a Non Executive Director of the European Tour; President of the Golf Foundation; Chairman of the World Ranking Committee and he has just

finished a two year spell as President of the PGA of Europe.

"I thought when I retired from the R&A I'd have more time to play the game and have a quiet life but I seem to have got involved in more and more things."

He is delighted to have become the first recipient of the BIGGA Lifetime Achievement Award.

"I'm very honoured to have been given this award because when I grew up I was always friends with the greenkeeper. We had a great man at Thorpe Hall called Jock Glass who used to chase us around the course if we hadn't raked a bunker or put a divot back.

"It has to be remembered that the golf course is the biggest asset a club has and the greenkeeper is the person responsible for looking after it."

Sir Michael will be at Harrogate later this month to be presented with the Award.



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Your Letters...

How did you get into greenkeeping?

For me it was pure luck.... Or, on a freezing cold day in mid January, the day fate kicked me squarely in the nether regions.

I'd never heard of greenkeeping, let alone considered it any sort of career. The primitive life form that I was at 16, having the cognitive ability of a retarded sheep, has through nurturing, encouragement, not to mention a little hard work and application from myself, produced (I hope) a competent greenkeeper. In between time, I have observed similar scenarios from the perspective of trainer/supervisor, dealing with trainees ranging in ability from those with special needs to an academic on a gap year destined for Cambridge and a Master's Degree in particle physics. It could be argued that neither of these extremes would provide the ideal raw material for creating a good greenkeeper. In practical terms, it's a futile exercise and a misappropriation of time, energy and resources.

In retrospect, my perception of the process involved in the identification, training and development of the next generation of Course Managers has been and still is, like having your teeth pulled... excruciatingly painful and ultimately unsatisfying. I concede that there are those tiny oases in an otherwise barren landscape but they are few and far between and the

journey saps ever last drop of your energy, much to the frustration of her in doors.

However, for the potential rewards I am prepared for the journey, but feel that greater assistance should be available from the wider industry and is an area where we are missing the boat. I feel we need to develop a format of presentation for introducing greenkeeping as a career option in schools and Universities and at career events. This format should be accessible and portable as it would be a valuable tool for Course Managers to encourage and enthuse potential candidates.

I think it would be a little presumptuous to make a sweeping statement like, "the standard of potential trainees is poor", it's more a case of the number of potential trainees becoming less and less. Our local college don't have anyone to offer us and yet, there is a school leaver out there, possibly with a greater cognitive ability than that of a retarded sheep, keen, enthusiastic, looking for direction and inspiration. But lost to the greenkeeping profession because he or she has never heard of, nor considered the idea of, a career in greenkeeping.

It's a shame really, because by my reckoning, there was a half decent greenkeeper there for us.

Name and address withheld

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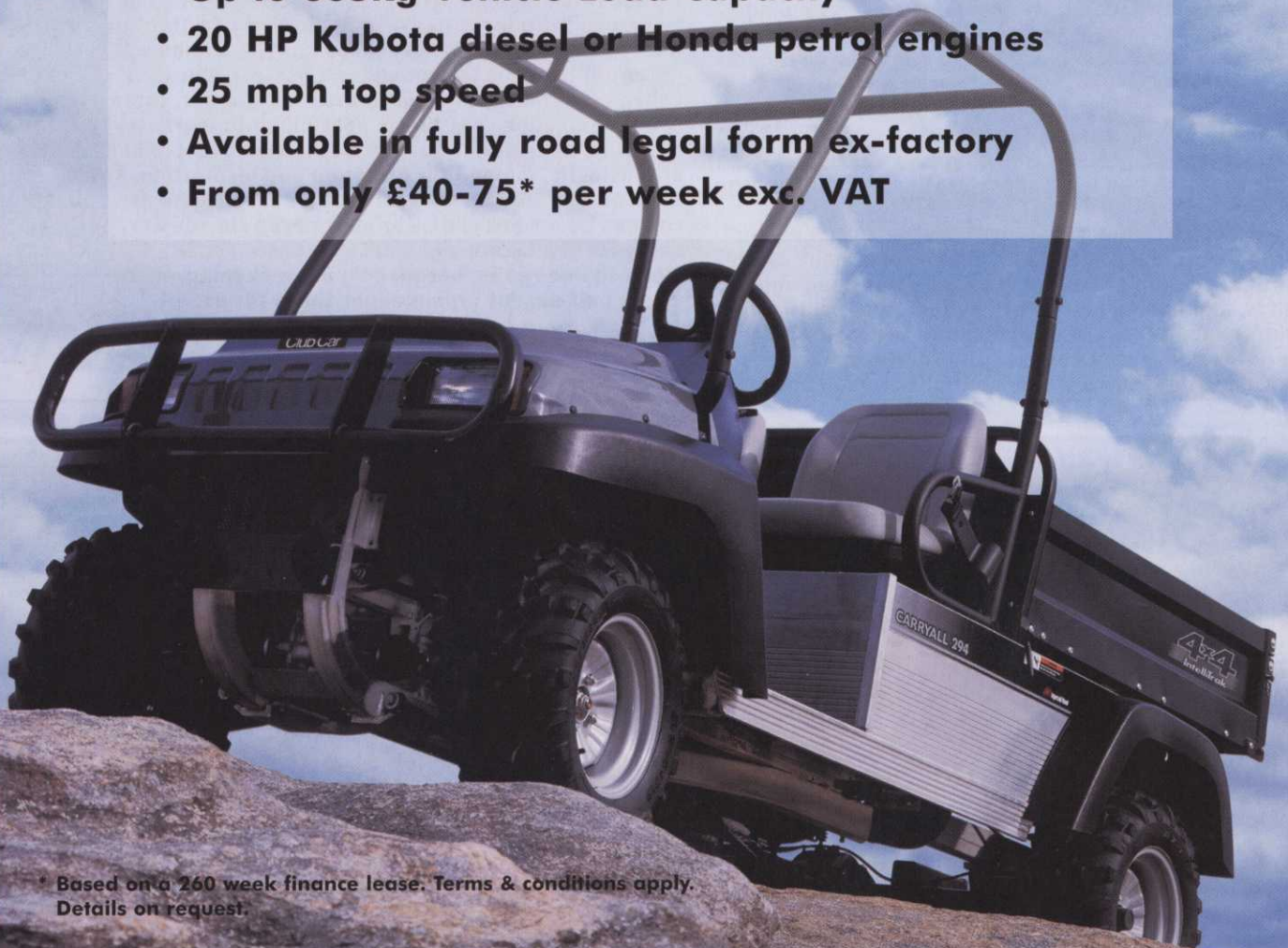
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Russell Walsh explains the ins and outs of studying a foundation degree in sportsturf online.

I have been studying for a foundation degree qualification since September 2003 and will now try to give readers some insight into what is involved in trying to achieve this.

I am the Head Greenkeeper at Bacup Golf Club, in Lancashire. To study for a foundation degree on a full time basis would not have been feasible so when I saw the advert in the press about distance learning online I thought I'd give it a go.

I am now in my second year of study, with the course running for three years from September through to May. The learning material is put together by tutors based at Myerscough College although the students are registered at the University of Central Lancashire, based in Preston.

Students are given their own pass number to access the online learning material.

Once you have entered the site your home page informs you of the subjects of study on which you are enrolled. Last year's subjects were:

Soil science and land management.

Plant biology and physiology.

Golf course presentation and management.

Turfgrass establishment and maintenance.

On the soil science subject students were asked to take samples from a place of interest within their own golf course, or sports facility, as one of the projects. These samples were then sent to Myerscough College for analysis.

The results from hydrometer readings, sand fractions, content of organic matter present, soil potassium, soil magnesium, soil phosphorus and soil extract absorbance were then sent back to the students who would then enter their results in a logbook and various calculations and graphs were created to show the student what condition the soil was in and what classification their soil could be placed under, ie, clay loam, sandy loam, silty clay, etc.

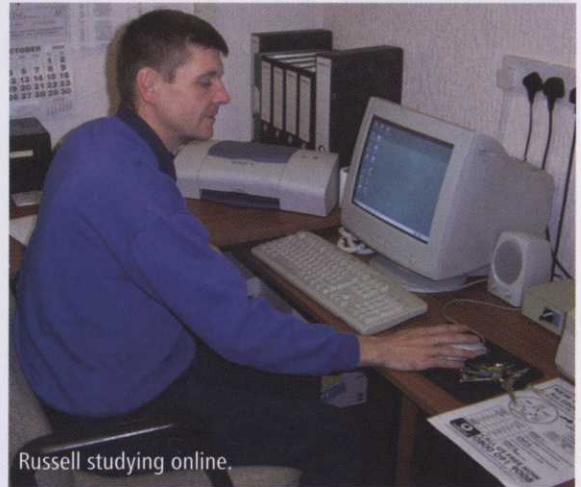
Many calculations were performed to determine the characteristics of the soil from the site chosen by the student.

This was a very in depth study that lasted several months and it enabled the student to understand the soil type they were dealing with at their workplace and its condition.

A mock report on the chosen site's results was then written up under the headings of intended use, structural characteristics and textural associations, water characteristics and drainage, fertiliser regime and nutrient retention, liming programme and management considerations.

Plant biology and physiology was covered by the release of a series of session booklets that could be downloaded and printed for studying purposes, as was the case for each subject of study.

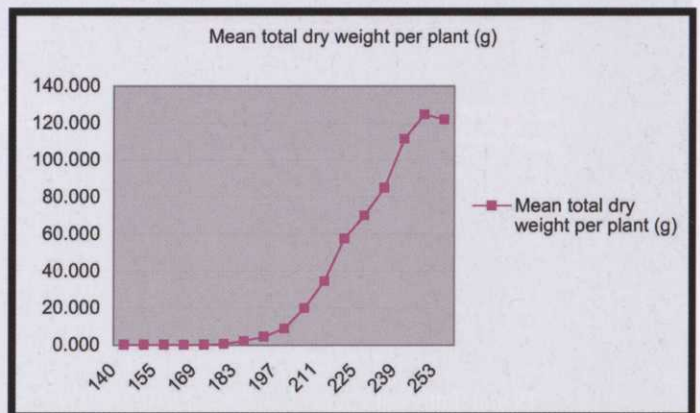
Assignments were set on the subjects of plant form and function, plant



Russell studying online.

genetics, plant cells, plant chemistry and plant physiology. Each assignment was worth 20% of your final mark for the subject.

On the plant form and function subject we studied the external and internal structures of plants that included roots, stems, leaves, flowers and seeds and whether or not the plants were monocotyledons or dicotyledons.



We were asked to draw specimens of plant cells, with drawing definitely not being one of my strong points I managed to get by, after a little encouragement from the subject tutor.

In assignment two we were given a method of determining glucose and stored glucose (starch) levels in a leaf.

From the results that we were given we were asked to plot graphs and were also learnt how to calculate results using spreadsheets.

Some of the topics covered in golf course presentation and management were bunker development and design, facility types, mowing and manicuring and tournament preparation, to name but a few. The tournament preparation topic covered different levels of competition right from local club level through to national level.

I found this topic most interesting and learnt just how much

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preparation goes into organising a top golfing event. The final section that was covered was turfgrass establishment and maintenance.

We learnt about turf quality, establishment of turf from seed, plant growth regulators, thatch development and management, soil compaction and aeration and fertilisation.

The fertilisation session booklet taught the students about the annual nutrient requirements of turfgrass, nitrogen release fertilisers, quick and slow release fertilisers and how they are released into the soil. The booklet explained, for example, that sulphur coated urea (slow release) is manufactured by spraying preheated granules with atomised molten sulphur. The majority of manufacturers seal the sulphur coating with a thin coating of wax.

A conditioner is also added to help the product absorb water, which will eventually break down the product over time after microbes have destroyed the wax coating. The thickness of the coating will determine the length of time the granules take to break down and release nitrogen.

Although I did enjoy the studies of the first year, the summer break was very welcome when the busy cutting season at work was in full swing.

This year's semester one consists of the following topics as shown on the sample homepage.

Cultural practices in Sportsturf.

Ecology, conservation and sportsturf management.

Turfgrass Growth and Development.

Part Six: Slow Release Fertilisers - Coated Slow-Release

The next stage of development in slow release 'technology' was the development of coating slow release granules or pellets of urea or other highly soluble sources of nitrogen (eg ammonium nitrate) with an impermeable coating. The coating prevents the wetting of the nitrogen source so that the release of nitrogen from the product is delayed even further, enhancing the longevity of the product.

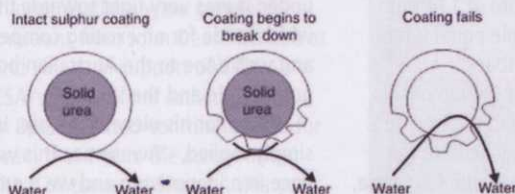
The most common types of coating are Sulphur Coated Urea (SCU) and Resin Coated Urea (RCU).

a) Sulphur Coated Urea (SCU)

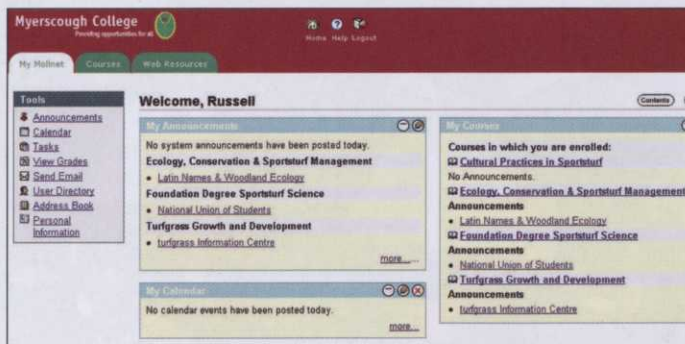
This is manufactured by spraying atomised molten sulphur on preheated urea pellets or granules. The sulphur provides an insoluble barrier that prevents the immediate dissolution of urea. As the sulphur coating cools and solidifies, cracks, pinholes and imperfections develop. In most manufacturing processes, the sulphur coating is then sealed with a thin coating of wax, consisting of a combination of polyethylene and heavy weight oil. A conditioner, composed of diatomaceous earth (calcined diatomic silica material), is added to help reduce stickiness and to make the product hydrophilic (ready to absorb water). The final product contains 30-38% nitrogen, 13-22% sulphur, 2-3% sealant and approximately 2% conditioner.

Microbes will gradually destroy the wax coating of particles and expose the imperfections in the sulphur coating, allowing water to enter and enhance the speed of release of urea. SCU rapidly releases urea when water enters the particle through these cracks and imperfections.

SCU granules release urea into the soil when the sulphur coating finally fails, allowing water to dissolve the urea.



The thickness of sulphur coatings can vary amongst particles and in uniformity on individual particles. The thinness of the coating on any area of a particle will determine the release of nitrogen from it. Others will have a coating so thick and resistant that the urea remains locked in and unavailable for long periods of time.



My homepage from the mollnet system showing this semester's subjects of study, on the right of the page.

The cultural practices in sportsturf session should prove quite interesting as we are at present studying engine types, fuel systems, lubricating systems, cooling systems, ignition systems and electrical systems of most engine types.

For the first assignment in this area of study we have been asked to carry out a critical appraisal of any item of groundcare machinery of our choice. This must include a minimum 2500 word document that can include photographs and drawings.

So far in the Ecology, conservation and sportsturf management section we have covered ecological principles, which includes scope of ecology and ecosystems - both land and aquatic.

It is intended that the students learn how to establish a conservation programme at their place of work. Sand dune ecology on links courses and grassland ecology have been studied as examples of a project that the students are expected to cover, as part of this section that must be in the form of a written document of an advisory brief that will inform the golf club committee to make decisions on conservation issues and an intended plan of action to help them carry these through.

Also, Health & Safety issues are to be covered in the brief.

In August of last year each student on the course was sent a package that contained many grass seed cultivars from several breeding companies.

These separate packets of seed were to be split into two and sown. One sample is to be kept cut at specified height and the other to be left to grow on.

These cool season grasses will then be used to help the students understand how turf grasses develop and grow and study morphological features that will help in identifying different sportsturf grasses.

At present we are studying warm season grasses that are best suited to temperatures of between 27 and 3°C. These grasses are widely used across North and South America, West Indies, Asia, Africa and some parts of Europe. We have learnt that the cool season grasses grow best at temperatures of between 16 and 24°C.

I do hope that this has covered the main delivery areas of the subjects and has been of interest to any persons considering studying for a foundation degree qualification as it has so far certainly helped me to understand a lot more about what is happening around me and under my feet at work!

A special mention must go to all the online tutors at Myerscough College who are always willing to help and Ransomes Jacobson for their continued financial support through BIGGA by helping students continue to learn more about our industry.



Winning team from Branxton Golf Club, Australia.



Worfield Golfers and Ireland in US

Worfield Golf Club, from Shropshire, represented Great Britain and Ireland in the World Finals of the 2004 John Deere Team Championship, held in November in Arizona.

31 teams from six nations took part in two days of competition at the world renowned Grayhawk Golf Club, in Scottsdale, playing on the prestigious Raptor and Talon courses.

Worfield's overall score of 114 put them in a very respectable equal tenth place, eleventh on countback.

The John Deere Team Championship title went to the Australian team, who finished on 103, narrowly beating the American team, from Hesperia, California, with a total score of 104. This is the first time a team outside North America has won the Championship.

The competition got off to a great start for the Worfield team - made up of Club Chairman, Trevor Williams; Secretary, William Weaver; Professional, Steve Russell; Course Manager, Mike Fowkes

and John Deere dealer salesman, Pete Worthy, of John Osman Groundcare, Oswestry, Shropshire - with a first day score of 16 under par.

"Then on the second day we were absolutely flying round, and after nine holes found ourselves 12 under," said William.

"Unfortunately the back nine weren't so good and we finished the day two 14 under. It was very tight towards the end, which made for an exciting competition, and well done to the Australian boys who got the title and the trophy."

Asked for his view of the trip, William simply replied, "Awesome. This was a once in a lifetime trip and we were determined to make the most of it. In the end we played six days of golf altogether."

In addition to the two days of practice and two days of competition at the John Deere World Championship, the team managed to squeeze in a day at Troon North on their first day in Arizona and



Left to Right: Howard Storey (John Deere), Eddie Donlon (GCSAI), Pete Worthy (John Osman Groundcare), Mike Fowkes (Worfield Golf Club), Steve Russell (Worfield Golf Club), David Hart (John Deere), William Weaver (Worfield Golf Club), Trevor Williams (Worfield Golf Club) and Andy Campbell (BIGGA).



Gregg Breningmeyer, of John Deere, with Andy Campbell, of BIGGA.

fly the flag for Britain finals

finished their trip with a round at TPC, Scottsdale before, catching the flight home.



The team was accompanied to America by BIGGA Chairman, Andy Campbell, and by Eddie Donlon, President of the Golf Course Superintendents Association of Ireland (GCSAI).

Both organisations were presented with donations from John Deere Limited at the World Finals, in support of BIGGA's and GCSAI's educational activities.

John Deere Limited contributes £25 for every team that enters the competition and, with 426 teams taking part this year in Great Britain and Ireland, this amounted to a total of £10,650.

In Britain, this funding will be used to support BIGGA's Continue to Learn workshops at Harrogate in January, and the Turf Managers' Conference at Staverton Park, Northamptonshire in March.



Worfield Golf Club - William Weaver, Steve Russell, Trevor Williams, Pete Worthy and Mike Fowkes.



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