

AMENITY HORTICULTURE - A MODULAR APPROACH

We mentioned in FOCUS a while ago that we have plans to revise the Field Sales and Technical Staff (FSTS) exam for this important qualification. Accordingly we have been amending and consulting with industry experts to now have an industry-focused syllabus and exam.

The principal changes to the syllabus have centred on the recognition of the specialisation that is part of everyday working life for many people in amenity horticulture. Previously the syllabus was by nature of a "catch-all" pesticide sales and advice in the sector.

The syllabus now has 7 core modules which all candidates study. These cover product registration, weeds, pests and diseases, safety, etc. There is then a trio of skill area modules of which candidates select one of their choosing to study in the tuition for the course and for which questions relate in the ensuing examination.

The 3 skill areas are

- Hard Surface Spraying
- Turf and Sports Amenity Grass
- Shrubs, Borders and Plants

Since making the revisions there has been good acceptance and four courses and examinations have been held so far, another two are booked for a few weeks time and more are expected for the autumn.

Candidates have welcomed the more specialist approach and feel the training is geared to their needs.

Another change has been incorporated into the actual exam, whereby the project part has been replaced by a scenario exercise. This means that during the exam, candidates are given a scenario setting out a set of circumstances and issues which relate to the skill area the candidate has selected. There are then questions to answer which relate to the scenario and which can cover subjects from seven care modules and the skill area module. The scenario and questions are practical in nature and pose the sort of issues candidates are likely to face as part of their job.

The removal of the pre-prepared project is a first for a FSTS exam and is felt to have two major benefits. Firstly that the answers are all the personal

thoughts and knowledge of the candidate, where as with projects it is increasingly easy to "cut & paste" on a computer to pre-prepare all or part of the project.

Secondly, the scenario and questions are specific to the specialisation requested by the candidate and their skill area of choice.

The new Amenity Horticulture FSTS course and exam has been checked with PSD and is compliant with the requirements in the Yellow Code for pesticide sales and advisory staff.

Amenity Horticulture, to gain certification if their exam results meet the required 70% pass mark. So far candidates have done well with the four exams so far and the expected level of success has been achieved.