



Students' gadget helps Olympic shooting team aim for gold

Students and their physics tutor Tony Sykes have designed a piece of training equipment that will save an Olympic shooting squad huge amounts in time and money – and could help them win the gold medal next year!

The British Rapid Fire Pistol team and their coach Hugh Hunter, from Upminster, had been travelling to the German town of Frankfurt for target practice because there was no suitable site with the specialised equipment they needed in the UK.

But travelling with weapons cost the team thousands of pounds, as well as many hours in bureaucratic talks.

Now, 12 students at Havering Sixth Form College – led by electronics and physics lecturer Tony Sykes – have designed, programmed and manufactured 10 flashing-light control units to sit above targets.

The devices have Olympic standard sequences and timings which let the shooter know when to fire.

Tony, who has been a teacher at College for more than 20 years, explained: “There has been no up-to-date equipment in the UK since the government banned handguns after the shooting massacre at Dunblane in 1997. So the team has been going abroad to train.”

Hugh spotted the electronics course in the College's prospectus and asked for help – and the lights Tony and his students designed surpassed the coach's expectations.

“I was so grateful and extremely impressed. None of them had ever been on a shooting range before, so their work was based on what I told them. I was expecting bulky items but these can be carried in a suitcase and transported around the country,” Hugh said.

He added that they would now be able to train in the UK – saving them time and money.

The squad had been unable to gain funding for lights in the past, but Tony agreed to do the designs for free and Hugh paid for the materials.

Tony said: “Hugh handed me the shooting rule book so I had to study that to understand the range of timings which needed to be programmed. Most of the programming is on the A Level syllabus, so it was great practice for the students involved. The design was fairly simple and it seems to do what Hugh wants it to do. Our biggest problem was squeezing all the wiring into the case we'd made.

“It feels great to be involved so closely in helping one of our Olympic teams. Hopefully they will do well at next year's London Games.”