

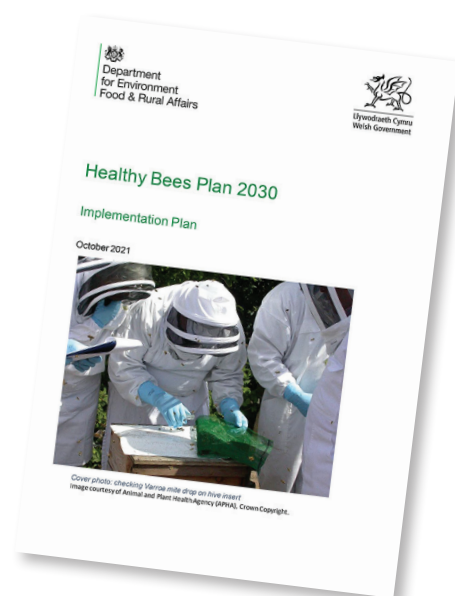
# Working Together to Keep Our Bees Healthy

**Rebekah Clarkson**, Healthy Bees Plan Project Manager at the National Bee Unit, and **Dan Etheridge**, DASH Coordinator, update on the progress of actions relevant to bee farmers in the *Healthy Bees Plan 2030 Implementation Plan*

The *Healthy Bees Plan 2030 (HBP 2030) Implementation Plan* was published on BeeBase in October 2021 and sets out actions agreed by bee health stakeholders including the Bee Farmers' Association (BFA), Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) and the Welsh Government. *HBP 2030* and a review of the previous ten-year *Healthy Bees Plan* were published in 2020. *HBP 2030* is a joint initiative between Defra, Welsh Government and bee health stakeholders and is underpinned by the continued cooperation among all four UK administrations, including Scotland and Northern Ireland, to ensure good biosecurity across the whole of the UK. Quarterly Bee Health Advisory Forum (Bhaf) meetings are held to discuss bee health issues and the minutes of these meetings are available on BeeBase.

*HBP 2030* and its associated implementation plan describe four broad outcomes for beekeepers, bee farmers, associations and government to work towards. The interrelated outcomes are designed to sustain the health of honey bees and beekeeping in England and Wales:

1. Effective biosecurity and good standards of husbandry, to minimise pest and disease risks and so improve the sustainability of honey bee populations.
2. Enhanced skills and production capability/capacity of beekeepers and bee farmers.
3. Sound science and evidence underpinning the actions taken to support bee health.
4. Increased opportunities for knowledge exchange and partnership working on bee health and wider pollinator needs.



The four broad outcomes of *Healthy Bees Plan 2030* are addressed by actions listed in the *Implementation Plan*

## **Implementation Plan actions focusing on the Disease Assurance Scheme for Honeybees (DASH)**

Action Number	Action Description	Period and Reporting
12	Publish DASH membership criteria	Publish by March 2022
13	List numbers of successful DASH members annually to publicly acknowledge biosecurity compliance	Ongoing – first report March 2022 (annual)
14	Offer DASH to accredit further appropriate candidates with >50 hives	Initial offer September 2022 (annual)
15	Review audit of DASH members	First report March 2022 (annual)
16	Review how to extend and provide DASH refresher training	Review complete March 2023
17	Pilot online training methods	Pilot ends September 2021
18	Review DASH every three years (delivers value for money and benefit for bee farmers)	First review complete March 2024 (three-yearly)

Fifty-five actions are listed in the *Implementation Plan* and the BFA has committed to contributing to nearly half of these. Seven actions focus on ensuring the Disease Assurance Scheme for Honeybees (DASH) continues to operate effectively, maintaining its aims to reduce the costs associated with disease within commercial beekeeping operations and improve the overall health of honey bees. Over the past year, the National Bee Unit (NBU) and the BFA have reviewed some aspects of the DASH, which originally began in 2013.

## Implementation Plan Highlights

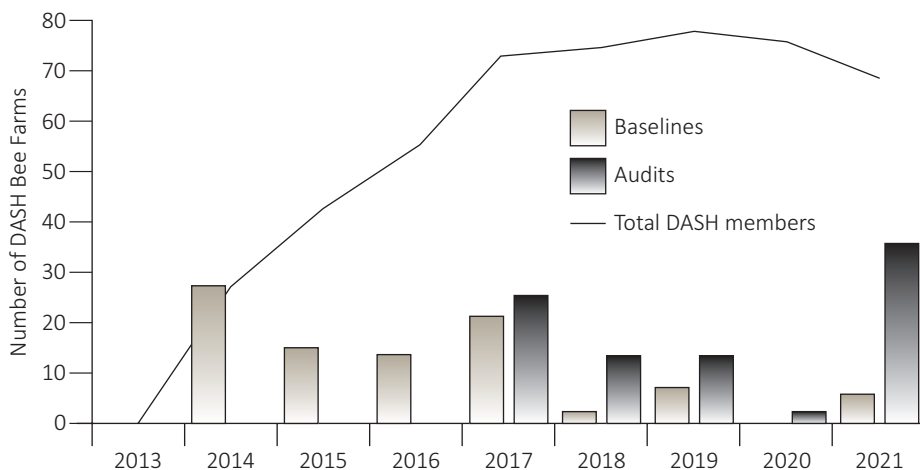
### Action 12 – Publish DASH membership criteria

Bee farmers had fed back that they were unclear about how to join the scheme and what it involved. The following DASH membership criteria have been recently published on BeeBase. Bee farmers wishing to join DASH must:

- manage bees using a high level of biosecurity to minimise the spread of disease
- have a minimum of 50 colonies with plans to increase to more than 80 at the time of baseline audit
- be active full members of the BFA
- be registered on BeeBase.

### Action 13 – List numbers of successful DASH members annually to publicly acknowledge biosecurity compliance

For each year since the start of the scheme in 2013, the table of summary figures, below, shows the number of DASH applications each year, the number who have successfully passed the assessment and numbers of baseline audits and review audits completed. It also lists the total number of businesses on the scheme during each year of operation.



DASH baselines, audits and total membership

The NBU and the BFA aim to review and train new candidates annually, but this is dependent on a threshold number of DASH applications and the inspector resource available. DASH training did not occur in 2020, but a pilot online course ran in 2021.

Since 2017, the total number of DASH bee farming businesses has consistently remained around 70 members (69–78). In terms of individuals, 132 bee farmers, their employees and apprentices have been trained since commencement of the scheme.

Jack Silberrad, now a seasonal bee inspector for the NBU, was a bee farming apprentice who succeeded in his DASH assessment in 2019. During DASH training, he observed attendees came from long-established and newer bee farming careers alike – all were motivated to learn.

‘One gentleman had come out of retirement from bee farming to assist his son, valuing the opportunity to return to the fledgling business with new skills in identifying disease and keeping healthy, productive colonies. Bee farmers and apprentices see many colonies every day. DASH primes you to spot anything amiss

for further investigation and encourages effective affirmative action early, which protects businesses from serious disruption, cost and stress.’

Jack found DASH to be an excellent return on investment of time in the classroom.

### Action 14 – Offer DASH to accredit further appropriate candidates with >50 hives

The NBU has worked with the BFA to agree a membership timeline, setting out what happens when, so candidates know what to expect.

Prospective DASH applicants can make an application via the BFA; applications are reviewed and forwarded to the NBU.

Following completion of training to recognise and manage disease, an assessment and a full baseline inspection, successful applicants receive a certificate of competency from the NBU and are accepted onto the scheme.

#### DASH Membership Timeline

**Autumn** – the BFA invites and reviews expressions of interest; details of eligible applicants are forwarded to the NBU.

**Winter** – the NBU reviews applications received via the BFA.

**Spring** – the NBU contacts candidates and invites them to training sessions

### Disease Assurance Scheme for Honeybees (DASH) summary figures

Year	Applications	New Entrants (Passed Assessment)	Baseline Audits (Completed)	Review Audits (Completed)	Left Dash	Total Current DASH
2013	34	34	-	-	0	0
2014	27	20	27	-	0	27
2015	31	15	15	-	0	42
2016	0	9	13	0	0	55
2017	23	23	22	25	4	74
2018	0	0	2	13	0	76
2019	21	15	6	13	3	79
2020	27	0	0	2	1	78
2021	0	16	5	37	14	69

**Spring** – the NBU hosts online training for applicants with an online assessment.

**Spring/Summer** – the NBU offers a mix of comb workshop events and/or apiary visits, focusing on disease recognition and biosecurity.

**One year** – baseline inspection of all colonies are offered. Timing of inspections is dependent on regional resources and DASH audits due.

**One year** – successful DASH members receive a certificate of competency. Applicants may receive improvement orders where necessary and are asked to rectify any non-compliances within an agreed period.

**Three years** – the NBU performs risk-based audits every three years.

**Annually** – in-field disease recognition sessions to be offered for continuing professional development (CPD) purposes.

#### **Action 15 – Review audit of DASH members**

The NBU aims to perform risk-based audits every three years after the initial full baseline inspection. During the 2021 season, 13 members were recorded as having left DASH for various reasons, ranging from stopped keeping bees to non-compliance. There are 37 audits scheduled for the 2022 season.

#### **Action 16 – Review how to extend and provide DASH refresher training**

The NBU aims to continue regular regional training sessions for DASH members, to minimise travel and encourage attendance. Training opportunities will be offered to DASH members during the 2022 season.

#### **Action 17 – Pilot online training methods**

In 2021, during the second year of the Covid-19 pandemic, the NBU offered pilot DASH online training sessions to 27 DASH candidates who had applied the previous year. Thanks to Keith Morgan and Simon Jones who ran these sessions shortly before their retirement from the NBU. DASH is currently being coordinated by Dan Etheridge, an inspector who has recently stepped up to cover the South East Region.

The pilot online training was held on MS Teams over three days from 29 June – 1 July. Training was offered to all participants to ensure they could use the training platform before the sessions began. The sessions were:

1. Overview and Introduction to DASH – Setting Expectations, led by regional bee inspector Keith Morgan
2. Disease Recognition – led by regional bee inspector Simon Jones
3. Online assessment.

Attending the training were 17 candidates and 16 of these successfully passed the online assessment. Practical comb and biosecurity training is being planned for 2022. Eight of the successful candidates require a baseline audit and the remaining eight are either business partners, employees or apprentices.

All those offered the training were given the opportunity to feed back about the pilot training. From the 27 offered the training, five DASH candidates responded in a survey about the pilot scheme. The regional bee inspectors providing the training fed back that they would have preferred in-person courses, but everyone appreciated the benefit of less travel.

The average score for what respondents thought of the sessions in general was four out of five stars. Respondents also rated the tuition as four out of five stars. The tuition received a lower rating than previous in-person sessions, where generally the NBU training received the highest rating. The lower rating perhaps reflects the ‘video conference fatigue’ people experience while video conferencing.

Bee farmers who join DASH bring different levels of knowledge and experience and this is reflected in their comments about what they learned from the course:

- I should have had DASH approval many years before!
- Less obvious signs of varroosis, new ways to deal with chronic bee paralysis virus (CBPV).
- How to identify brood diseases and pests, treatment options and pest management.
- More practical detail about European foul brood (EFB) and a broader understanding of biosecurity disease recognition.

Respondents also provided feedback on the reference material, ie, what they felt they would have benefited from:

- Material to be given earlier to allow for revision before the assessment.
- A workbook with pictures of diseases to aid when doing hive inspections.
- Any that may affect my bees’ health.
- CBPV.
- More detail on foul brood.

Two of the five respondents did not recognise that they had been sent reference material, although slides and the DASH handbook had been emailed. All of those who had received reference material said that they would refer to it in the future.

Finally, respondents were invited to comment about anything they wished, from the course to the feedback questionnaire. One respondent felt that candidates should be evaluated more, prior to attending DASH training, as they were surprised at the lack of knowledge of notifiable diseases. Another respondent felt that the timing of the training could be better scheduled outside of the ‘busy’ season, either by running the course in an evening instead, or during the quieter winter months. The NBU is working with one DASH candidate (who provided detailed feedback) with assessment design experience to review the current DASH material and assessments.

The feedback from the pilot in July 2021 has already been used to develop the DASH membership timeline and improve future training. In addition, an online application form will be used later in 2022, to reduce the administration related to new DASH applications.

#### **Action 28 – Maintain the Bee Farmers’ Association apprenticeship scheme**

Defra and the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) continue to contribute to the BFA apprenticeship scheme, both financially and by involving apprentices in DASH training.

## Summary

The success of the implementation of *HBP 2030* depends on the continual renewal of our commitment to work together. Ensuring the UK’s honey bees are healthy is a serious business and it is important that we listen carefully to each other so that bee farmers can continue to rear healthy, productive colonies both profitably and sustainably.

As new challenges inevitably arise, by working together we can understand problems early on so we can find solutions.

If you have comments on the *Implementation Plan*, or you would like further information, please get in touch. □

## Further information

### **BeeBase**

[www.nationalbeeunit.com](http://www.nationalbeeunit.com)

### **Healthy Bees Plan 2030**

[www.nationalbeeunit.com/downloadDocument.cfm?id=1421](http://www.nationalbeeunit.com/downloadDocument.cfm?id=1421)

### **Implementation Plan**

[www.nationalbeeunit.com/downloadDocument.cfm?id=1454](http://www.nationalbeeunit.com/downloadDocument.cfm?id=1454)

### **Bee Health Advisory Forum (BHAFF)**

[www.nationalbeeunit.com/index.cfm?pageid=339](http://www.nationalbeeunit.com/index.cfm?pageid=339)