

Summary Note of the Bee Health Advisory Forum
27th meeting
Defra, Nobel House, Smith Square, London
25th February 2019, 11:30 – 16:00

Present:

Belinda Phillipson (BP)	Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Defra) – Bee Health Policy
Louise Mount (LM)	
Kevin Beattie (Kevin B)	
Frank Petherbridge (FP)	
Nigel Semmence ☎ (NS)	Animal & Plant Health Agency, National Bee Unit (NBU)
Julian Parker (JP)	
Maureen Wakefield ☎ (MW)	Fera Science Ltd
Margaret Ginman	Bee Farmers Association (BFA)
Ken Basterfield (KB)	National Diploma in Beekeeping
Dan Basterfield (DB)	
Wally Shaw (WS)	Welsh Beekeepers' Association (WBKA)
John Bowles (JB)	
Margaret Murdin (MM)	British Beekeepers' Association (BBKA)
Pam Hunter (PH)	
Chris Hartfield ☎ (CH)	National Farmers Union
Kathleen Carroll (KC)	Welsh Government
Steve Sunderland (SS)	Scottish Government
Norman Carreck (NC)	Sussex University

☎ indicates "joined by telephone"

Apologies received from:

Anna Burrows	Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD)
Rebekah Clarkson	Animal & Plant Health Agency, National Bee Unit (NBU)

WebEx videoconferencing and teleconferencing facilities were used. There was some difficulty in setting up and using these facilities, which led to the meeting starting late and difficulties for those who joined by telephone. Apologies to all those affected by these problems - we hope to learn from them to ensure that the next forum runs more smoothly.

1. Welcome and introductions - BP

2. Minutes of 26th meeting – FP

DB pointed out that he had attended the 26th forum but had been missed off the list of attendees [the minutes of the 26th forum have since been corrected].

JP explained that APHA had now budgeted for this year to ensure that inspector availability would extend to cover October, as part of the planning to deal with Asian hornet incursions.

WS pointed out, in relation to potential sources of funding, that there were lots of other interested parties besides Defra. A brief discussion clarified that some bodies, such as Non-Native Species Secretariat and Natural England were also part of the Defra group, although there were some independent bug and bee conservation bodies, e.g. Buglife.

Forum members were invited to send any comments on the minutes by 1st March.

KB asked if the budget has been agreed for the Healthy Bees Plan education contracts. LM explained that it was being held up at the procurement stage and, in response to a question from MM, agreed that stakeholders could make plans based on receiving funding.

3. Healthy Bees Plan – Education update - BP

- **BBKA – Margaret Murdin**

The BBKA had been successful in its bid to Defra for intermediate level education funding for 18/19. For the General Husbandry courses, training took place in the candidate’s own apiary. It was quite daunting for students as it lasts several hours. It included an element of queen rearing.

In year 19/20, training was planned for 3 venues – Yorkshire, the Midlands and the Southeast. So far, there were 38 participants. There was funding for 120 participants. Courses would take place in May-June. There was nothing planned so far for Wales.

WS advised that this matter had been discussed by the Welsh Beekeepers Association’s (WBKA) Learning & Development Committee. MM and WS agreed to discuss this further.

ACTION 27-1	MM and WS to discuss training venues for Wales
--------------------	---

Although association members were surveyed, they were not always forthcoming with views.

WBKA courses were previously funded by Welsh government but were currently funded by WBKA.

MM explained that one reason why people had not undertaken the general husbandry course, or failed it, was because of the queen rearing element (this point was supported by KB).

BBKA was keen to discuss with Defra what was feasible in this coming year.

There was a whole-day course (in practice it runs over 2 days) at Stoneleigh [Warwickshire] which included queen rearing and microscopy work.

Currently there were 14-15 participants, and funding for up to 24. People who have had queen rearing training tended to be more successful on the general husbandry course.

- **National Diploma in Beekeeping – Dan and Ken Basterfield (slide presentation)**

NDB was contracted to provide the advanced element of beekeeper training, and was meeting most of its targets. The contract had rolled over; the requirement to target 7 regions around the country was not being met.

Another tutor had been brought into the NDB team. The management aspects of the contract included an obligation to develop new training courses each year. Previously, courses had run for 2 days but this year NDB was developing a 1-day course on Asian hornet. NDB were conducting a review of their training materials: not a great deal had changed but some of the material dated back to 2010.

NDB had an obligation to ensure that course candidates are signed up to BeeBase but could not enforce this – only encourage people.

The short course programme was to continue more or less as before.

DB explained that the NDB board was going through a process to convert to charity status. The organisation has existed since the 1950s – this change was not expected to result in any differences in terms of dealing with NDB.

NDB's aim was to cascade training, i.e. to train people to be able to go out and train others. It had encountered great difficulty in trying to find suitable facilities to run its courses – a suitable location must have beehives on site, as well as microscopy facilities.

NDB had reverted to running courses at its key locations (identified on the accompanying slides). Courses had been run in more remote locations but a point had been reached where everyone in a particular area who wanted to attend *had* attended.

NDB believed that if a good course is available and marketed well, people will sign up. The distance people had to travel to attend a course did not seem to be a big problem. People were willing to travel substantial distances to attend, e.g. when courses had been run at Thorne's (beekeeping suppliers) in Lincolnshire, the nearest student had come from 54 miles away – there had been no local students.

There were 3 short courses' worth of topics, covering brood, nutrition management and queen raising. The courses were attracting the cream of beekeepers.

NDB wished to obtain agreement that the advanced course could be considered equivalent to 3 short courses.

The week-long residential course was not subsidised, whereas the short courses were subsidised. There were normally two tutors to a group of 10 students. The course had received very good feedback.

KB added that although the idea behind the courses was to “train the trainer”, a course in York was attended by three people who didn’t even keep bees. It was not desirable to have people coming along casually, simply because the course is on their doorstep.

NDB wished to revert to including the advanced course in what they delivered. Similarly to BBKA, there was very little uptake from Wales. There was, however, a very good candidate (Linfa Davis) and there was a course run in Swansea (at a school), but only half the candidates who attended were actually from Wales.

KC said she had discussed this with Linfa. It perhaps made sense to focus on South Wales, but this was still an open question for now. There was a potential good location in North Wales, and one in Carmarthenshire, South Wales.

KC was happy to look at criteria if NDB provided them. KB and DB agreed to do this.

ACTION 27-2	KB and DB to provide KC with criteria to be met by potential course venues
--------------------	---

BP added that, because work on the HBP Review was ongoing at the moment, it was a good time to be looking at this.

- **BFA – Margaret Ginman**

MG informed the forum about the Bee Farmers Association apprenticeship scheme, and began by highlighting that the industry needed young people. The ageing population of the beekeeping community was an important issue. In a straw poll, the average age of a beekeeper was found to be 66.

MG had appeared on radio with one of the apprentices to discuss the scheme. Young apprentices attracted good publicity. The picture of apprentices on Westminster Bridge had been shared worldwide.

The scheme focussed on the commercial applications of beekeeping - people saw a real way of making a living from it. The apprenticeship emphasised the business side of beekeeping: there were elements of business studies, first aid and Health & Safety, as well as the technical skills.

BFA had drawn up the framework for the scheme in collaboration with City & Guilds. BFA was also keen to ensure that it fitted in with the pollination strategies of all 4 administrations in the UK.

BFA required its members to be registered on BeeBase.

In terms of Key Performance Indicators, and bearing in mind the scheme was only in its fourth year:

- 26 apprentices had benefitted from the scheme
- 8 had qualified
- 2 had yet to complete their final piece of work
- 3 had achieved distinctions

This year would see BFA achieve its target of 30 apprentices. Long-term funding had also been secured to continue the scheme into the longer term. Fera were taking on an apprentice.

There was a low drop-out rate. The rate across City & Guilds as a whole was 50% but only 2 people had dropped out of the BFA scheme, which had a huge ethos of pastoral care, taking an interest in each individual.

The first awards ceremony had taken place in London – the Lord Mayor had presented the awards. The title of the qualification was the Wax Chandlers Diploma in Excellence in Bee Farming.

BFA had also expanded into adult training. There were more than 30 units available to all bee farmers. Lots of enquiries had been received from people who wanted to upscale from hobbyist to business and were seeking business training.

BFA's major sponsor was Rowse. MG noted that BFA would need to update the Defra logo on its materials.

Apprentice wages were paid by the bee farmer, with sponsors - e.g. the QE Trust – having provided half of the wages. There were also a few philanthropists, one of whom had expressed an interest in continuing to support the work, as they were very pleased with how it had gone.

One couple who had employed an apprentice received an innovation award from Defra.

Lord Gardiner had been a huge supporter of the apprenticeship scheme.

At the start of this season, there were six apprentices, and this is the fifth group.

Almost 100% of apprentices had completed the course - nine out of the first ten. They had not set up their own business yet, but one had been in the process of obtaining funding to do this.

PH asked if apprentices had to undertake written exams.

The focus was all on practical work, rather than exams. An e-learning platform had been set up. Apprentices were assessed on a daily basis by assessors who were all qualified bee farmers. Some uploaded pictures or pieces of work. City & Guilds were very strict in terms of how assessments were done – it was comparable with other rural craft qualifications.

One apprentice had also improved his standard of Maths and English alongside the bee husbandry skills he had learned.

The course assessors included people like David and Celia Rudland, and Gay Marris, who were well known in the beekeeping community. The frameworks for the qualification were reviewed every year. About 75% of applicants already had a degree.

BP thanked all the speakers.

After a break for lunch, CH, MW and NS rejoined the meeting by phone.

4. HBP review – progress update on partnership working – Louise Mount (slide presentation)

The purpose of the Healthy Bees Plan Review was to look back at what has happened under the Plan, which was coming to the end of its 10-year life. It would identify successes and also things that hadn't gone so well.

The accompanying slides included a reminder of the HBP objectives, namely:

- 1) *To keep pests, diseases and other hazards to the lowest levels achievable;*
- 2) *To promote good standards of husbandry to minimise pest and diseases risks and contribute to sustaining honey bee populations – prevention is better than cure;*
- 3) *To encourage effective biosecurity to minimise risks from pests, diseases and undesirable species;*
- 4) *To ensure that sound science underpins bee health policy and its implementation; and*
- 5) *To get everyone to work together on bee health*

Projects had been set up within each of the five objectives, with at least one project per objective.

Project 1.1 was a review of DASH, the Disease Assurance Scheme for Honeybees, which had been introduced in 2013.

Project 1.2 was reviewing the BeeBase Risk-based inspection algorithms. We had been a victim of our own success to some extent – the number of beekeepers registered on BeeBase had increased from c.9000 to c.40,000. The current algorithm identified many apiaries in England & Wales as high risk, and the project could help to make the numbers of high risk apiaries more realistic and manageable.

Project 1.3 – Foulbrood strain typing

Strains were being analysed to determine whether identifying particularly virulent strains could be useful in prioritising work. This was a partnership between Newcastle University and Fera Science.

Project 2.1 – Husbandry Survey analysis. This project was assessing 10 years of survey data. There had been some drop-off in the number of respondents over the life of the survey, but there were still around 1,500 respondents each year. This work was also being done by Fera and Newcastle University.

Project 2.2 – BeeBase Interaction and Husbandry Practices: this was examining whether the level of interaction people had with BeeBase had a large impact on husbandry.

Defra Policy Team and NBU had contributed ideas towards a conceptual model which Newcastle University were developing to support the husbandry survey analysis. The model examined how various factors influence disease.

A discussion on this work followed, in which it was suggested that “hive hours”, or “hive years”, would be a better measure than “years of experience”. A query was also raised about whether the survey really asked beekeepers about their income. The survey did ask about income but some people chose not to fill in that section.

A concern was expressed that, because the survey is voluntary, it was difficult to know whether the results were representative of real beekeepers. People could have provided false information or may not have understood the questions.

The survey could still be useful, so long as we were not concluding that we could obtain a lot of numerical results from it.

There was agreement that, even though the survey could be said to be flawed, there wasn't really a better way to do it.

Project 2.3 VMD

The Veterinary Medicines Directorate was contributing a report on how the availability of medicines to beekeepers had changed over the course of the Healthy Bees Plan.

Project 3.1 Contingency response

This project, led by NS, was looking at our response over the last few years and lessons learned. There had been many developments over the last 9 years.

Project 4.1

This project focussed on work funded specifically under the Research & Development programme, not to be confused with funding for the Healthy Bees Plan itself.

Outcome 5 had four projects associated with it:

Project 5.1 – Partnership Working.

Forum members contributed case studies to this project. Key findings were highlighted on the accompanying slide, e.g. the removal of sub-groups from the BHAF.

Project 5.2 – Increased delivery of education

RC has had discussions with BBKA and BFA on this project. KB suggested that “Education” should go on Slide 5, as one of the factors in the conceptual model referred to under Project 2.2 above. LM explained that the term “Training” has been included in the model as a factor.

Project 5.3 – Changes in bee farming/beekeeping

KB mentioned that an example would be changes in crop strains – there were anecdotal complaints that newer strains of oilseed rape were not attractive to pollinators.

NC commented that there had been a few PhDs on this topic at the University of Sussex. PH recalled that Rothamsted had gathered useful information on willow and oilseed rape, but had been reluctant to share the information. NC said that the national willow collection had not been set up with the intention of identifying suitable varieties - there was nothing co-ordinated.

MM commented that, over the last 10 years, awareness of viruses had increased significantly. BP recalled that there was some good work going on 10 years ago, but was not sure how much more awareness there was now. There was some agreement that awareness among ordinary beekeepers had improved. WS commented that virus behaviour had changed because of the impact of Varroa.

Project 5.4 – this project was looking at the quality of advisory materials available to beekeepers over the life of the Healthy Bees Plan.

In terms of how the new HBP was being developed, evidence was being gathered for the review until around May. Subsequently Defra intended to consult formally with a view to producing the new plan towards the end of this year.

Defra also intended to work more closely with Wales, depending on how the relevant ministers wished to proceed.

5. EU Exit update – Julian Parker (slide presentation)

Information should be published shortly on BeeBase and gov.uk. There was generic information at present, which covered the possibility of a no deal exit. If the UK reached a deal with the EU, there was effectively no change to procedures.

On the slides, the orange-red colour indicated where there was a change to current procedures.

Imports from the EU

In a No-Deal scenario, the UK will no longer have access to TRACES (box 2 of the slide). Advance notice will need to be given by the importer either by submitting a Bee28 form or via BeeBase. BeeBase automatically creates a reference number. This process mirrors that used by animal health colleagues, but they don't have an autogenerated reference number.

The reference number must now be added to the health certificate produced by the exporting country. The UK will be issuing an amended prescribed format, basically with an extra box to input the reference number. Otherwise the consignment will be non-compliant. Without this process, there is no way of knowing what is coming in to the country.

KB asked what happens regarding queens and attendant workers.

LM explained that if the UK leaves without a deal, EU countries will continue to be treated as before.

The health certificate should be provided within 3 days.

Imports from 3rd countries

The only thing that's changing here is that the importer must now make the required 24hrs advance notification through IPAFFS (Import of Products, Animals, Food and Feed System).

[KB and DB had to leave the meeting at this point]

Exports

After exiting the EU, the UK will be considered a 3rd country. The only other thing that will change concerns references in the guidance to the UK being a member state.

It will only be possible to export queens, but this will not have an enormous impact, because exporting of colonies has tended to relate to a situation where a beekeeper is moving home to live abroad.

6. Apiculture Programme – Kevin Beattie

Defra had recently contacted BBKA and BFA to consult around the use of apiculture funding. This was related to the England apiculture programme, which covered inspections and training provided by the inspectors.

Every 3 years Defra submitted a programme to the EU, based on inspections and training. The programme was delivered by NBU. The e-mail issued to BBKA and BFA was specifically about how we spend EU funds.

Defra was keen to work with stakeholders to ensure that the right measures were being put in place.

We had not anticipated making another bid to the EU, but had been advised to do so and this had to be done by 15th March.

It was an opportunity for stakeholders to provide feedback on how funding could be used. As we develop the successor to the Healthy Bees Plan, we can incorporate these views.

A question was raised about what happens to the bee inspectors if the funding is not obtained from the EU. A case was being made within government for funding. The funding represented about 25% of the National Bee Unit's budget. Currently the amount received was c.£360,000 p.a.

MG said that, last June, she had attended a Brussels meeting where it was announced that the EU apiculture budget was to be increased by 70%. Kevin B said the figure he had seen suggested that there could be an increase from a total annual EU budget of £33m to £36m. LM added that there appeared to be an intention to widen the scope of the budget to include pollinators more generally.

MM said that BBKA was keen to be helpful, and asked if Defra was seeking BBKA's support for the money to be used to maintain the NBU programme. MM said that, while she would be happy for BBKA to receive the funds, she was content that the money should stay with NBU.

MG explained that, if this was not simply a tick box exercise, BFA's position was that the money should be used towards other aspects of what it could legitimately be used for under the rules of the apiculture programme. As well as restocking, BFA was in favour of the distribution of Varroa treatment to all, not just bee farmers.

Kevin B pointed out that, although we might initially say that we intend to continue with the two existing measures, there was scope for this to be reviewed during the 3-year programme. A case must be made to the Commission if any changes were sought, and a corresponding Key Performance Indicator would have to be devised.

MG commented that the new criteria seemed to be more flexible.

PH asked about Scotland, where inspectors are not part of Defra. SS confirmed that the inspectors were funded directly by Scottish Govt. The government funded Varroa testing, and Graeme Sharp's apiculture role. Similarly to Defra, Scotland had approached its own government's treasury for funding if EU funding were to stop.

KC explained that Wales received about £75k p.a. Initially Wales would intend to continue with the current programme.

7. AOB/Comms/news

As Steve Sunderland was retiring from his role of Lead Bee Inspector for Scotland, this was his last attendance at the forum. A presentation was made to Steve, to acknowledge all his valuable contributions and wish him all the best for his retirement.

New versions of Asian hornet identification posters were handed round. The alert system (reporting app) has been prioritised on the new version. An example of the identification postcard was also passed round. KC said that she would like to forward these on to Natural Resources Wales. NS explained that the large posters were now available on BeeBase.

MM asked if an electronic version could be provided, so that they can be forwarded to organisations like Buglife. NS said he was happy for the postcard to be passed on once the design had been finalised. All 3 documents should be circulated to various groups through the Non-Native Species Secretariat (NNSS).

NS provided a brief update on Asian hornet sightings. Six suspect nests had so far been reported since the end of the 2018 season, but none had actually been Asian hornet nests. Three had been median wasp nests, high in trees; one had turned out to a drey; one was unknown and one was under investigation but not considered high risk. These suspect sightings had occurred since the end of October 2018, through the winter, and this information related to England only.

MM confirmed that BBKA was happy to accommodate a request from NS that Wales be included on the AHAT map.

The National Bee Unit was continuing to work on lessons identified from the 2018 outbreaks. Lots of work had been ongoing with BBKA on Asian Hornet Action Teams (AHATs) and NS expressed his thanks to BBKA. The BBKA AHAT page should be helpful with triaging.

WS commented that he had just attended an excellent presentation by an RBI on Asian hornet.

- **Future meeting dates**

A brief discussion established that the next forum should be a face-to-face meeting again, as it was hoped that there would be more to discuss on the Healthy Bees Plan review. The next meeting will be in June and London is probably the best venue on balance.

MM informed the forum that this was her last year as President of BBKA, so there will be a different BBKA representative at future forums.

- **Hive count update**

The final figure from the 2018 was not available as yet. The response to the count was up from last year. A message requesting that beekeepers take part in the count had been sent out around 1st Nov, asking for update by 31st November.

MM commented that BBKA reminded its members to complete the hive count.

WS asked if the profile of people who respond on BeeBase could be examined, because it would be interesting to know whether it is the same people who responded year after year.

Defra had looked into this issue of whether we can tell whether over the last, say 3 years, the people responding were different from those who have responded before or the same.

WS added that he thought it should be quite easy to see how long people who responded to the count have been registered on BeeBase. It would be good to know whether the respondents were fairly new to BeeBase or whether they were longstanding members. It was possible that more experienced keepers had more hives and this could lead to an underestimate of hive numbers.

SS mentioned that, among the responses from Scotland, someone had filled in their phone number instead of the number of hives.

PH commented that there seemed to be a fixation with knowing the actual amounts of honey collected. Many beekeepers did not really care about the amount of honey they collected. MM added that she had been contacted about this just last week by a journalist, who seemed to think honey production was declining. That was not information that had come from BBKA. WS added that he had declined to comment when asked about this.

8. Meeting closed 15:25

RAG STATUS; **Red: Target date cannot be met, Amber: Target date at risk, Green: On target**

Date Action log reviewed: 18-06-2018

Date Action Agreed	Agenda No.	Required Action	Owner	Target Date	RAG	Progress Review/Action Completed
12/12/2017	22-3	Collate comments, provide a product journey plan and include points relating to Trade raised which were raised at the meeting in 06/2017.	Louise Mount			Closed - EU exit guidance in place
12/12/2017	22-10	Prepare draft TOR incorporating comments	<i>Rebekah Clarkson</i>	2019		Complete over email
20/03/2018	23-5	Request questionnaire data regarding mentoring and passing on skills. Merged with 23-7action 5 request evidence and case studies where HBP impacted on Beekeeping. (As part of HBP review)	<i>Rebekah Clarkson</i>			Case studies have been received and draft chapters in progress.
20/03/2018	23-6	Update HBP Indicators	Fera/ BBKA			Not received all yet
19/06/2018	24-5	Discuss BHAF query regarding reviewing/recording BHAF science input with Defra science and evidence team to understand best practice and report back to BHAF	<i>Rebekah Clarkson</i>	June 2019		Cover as AOB 21/06/2019
7/09/2018	25_5	Liaise with Defra Evidence Team re. any estimates of pollinator insect biomass	Ian Fenn	March 2019		Email request sent
22/11/2018	26_4	Invite an apprentice to the BHAF to present.	<i>Rebekah Clarkson</i>	2019		Planning to invite for December 2019 once date is set
22/11/2018	26_5.2	Queen rearing working group	<i>Kevin Beattie</i>	September 2019		
22/11/2018	26_5.4	To investigate whether it's possible to work out whether repeat participants in Hive Count	<i>Kevin Beattie</i>	25/02/2019		
25/02/2019	27-1	MM and WS to discuss training venues for Wales	<i>MM</i>	21/06/2019		
25/02/2019	27-2	KB and DB to provide KC with criteria to be met by potential course venues	<i>KB/DB</i>	21/06/2019		