

**Summary Note of the Bee Health Advisory Forum
13th Meeting – 30 March 2015
Nobel House, London**

Present:

Richard Watkins (Chair)	Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Defra)
Louise Mount	
Kevin Beattie	
Nigel Semmence ☎	Animal & Plant Health Agency (APHA)
Marie Holmes	
Mike Brown	
Katherine Roberts	Food & Environment Research Agency (Fera)
Tim Lovett	British Beekeepers' Association (BBKA)
David Aston ☎	
Margaret Ginman	Bee Farmers' Association (BFA)
John Mellis	
Wally Shaw	Welsh Beekeepers' Association (WBKA)
John Bowles	
Bob Smith	National Diploma in Beekeeping (NDB)
Ken Basterfield	
Dan Basterfield	International Bee Research Association (IBRA)
Denise Burge	Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD)
Jane Jones	Welsh Government (WG)
Irene Allen	

Apologies:

Chris Hartfield	National Farmers' Union
Andy Wattam	Animal & Plant Health Agency
Mike McGuinness	
Steve Sunderland	Scottish Government

1. Welcome and introductions

The Chair welcomed attendees to the 13th meeting of the BHAF and informed members that Gay Marris had left the NBU in December. Recruitment was underway and the advert was live with a closing date of 17th April.

2. Highlight report and minutes of 12th meeting

Actions arising from the 12th meeting were discussed. All were complete.

Highlight report

The Chair invited comments on the report which had been circulated prior to the meeting.

Risks 1 (insufficient project team resources due to increased profile of bees) and 5 (risk to continuation of HBP and BHAF due to National Pollinator Strategy) could be deleted as these were considered to no longer be relevant risks.

3. Update on Newcastle University social science study

This study was commissioned by Defra to investigate and understand where and from whom beekeepers sought their information on beekeeping. A research group from Newcastle was contracted who wrote a preliminary report, Defra then requested the project to be extended and broadened due to the NPS. The paper and research was complete and being refereed by 2 academics and was presently working through the gateway procedure via Defra's evidence team who would have final clearance. It was anticipated the paper would emerge post election.

4. NDB presentation

Ken Basterfield presented an update on the HBP funded work of the NDB, key points included:

- Background on NDB including successes and publications of its members.
- Why we needed high quality trainers and standards of training.
- NDBs involvement in BBKA course in a case and exam outline.
- Short courses were delivered on microscopy techniques (microscopy skills, anatomy and dissection, adult disease diagnosis, brood disease diagnosis, honeybee nutrition and pollen and botany) and honey bee behaviour (management strategies and queen raising and stock improvement).
- 2014-15 course delivery:
 - 18 courses
 - 4 locations
 - 163 student places
 - 326 training days
- Tutor status pie chart of those trained – current, intends, further study and unknown.
- 2015-16 intentions:
 - 16+ courses delivered
 - 160+ student places delivered

- new venue in Kent
 - new handling skills course
 - further new apiary-based course development
- 781 students trained to date

The following questions were raised during discussions:

Q) It was noted that Scotland needed train the trainer which the government were prepared to back and queried the timescale in which NDB could help? Bridgette Beattie would be the contact and NDB were hoping she would be able to help soon.

The Chair noted there were previous concerns regarding numbers of tutors at the top capable of delivery and queried how much contact those who had received training were making? Bob said the expectation was for those trained to cascade information through their association and local contacts via substantive training, with each trainer reaching approximately 30 candidates. It was hoped that several, if not all, of the 5 candidates assessed would be successful and that they would become involved in short course delivery. The Chair also asked if the Forum had any suggestions on new courses to forward these to Ken.

ACTION 1: All - any thoughts on potential new NDB courses forward to Ken Basterfield.

5. BBKA presentation

Apologies were received as BBKA were unable to present on progress due to key staff being unavailable. Tim reported that the projects were progressing well, as planned and there were no concerns on delivery.

6. BFA presentation

Margaret Ginman presented an update on the HBP funded work of the BFA, key points included:

- Background on the £1.42m apprenticeship scheme. HBP had contributed £24k and was spent on assessors, verifiers and mentors for 16-24 year olds. 7 students were in place and applications had been received for next phase.
- £15k to investigate extension to apprenticeship scheme to include over 24 year olds. Time had been spent speaking with Swedish colleagues.
- £4k on DASH scheme - this was up to date and BFA were working with NBU.

- £500 on regional groups. 5 regions were awarded £100 for working groups which were mainly spent on queen rearing techniques.
- £11k web resource. 6 bee farmers were identified and willing to share how they conducted their businesses. Case studies had been drawn up with 3 bee farmers interviewed for web resource element. This would offer the benefit of wider business management techniques for apprentices.
- Background on BFA objectives; to further interests of bee farmers in the UK, to promote the maximum national use of the honeybee for pollination and honey production and, to maintain high standards in the production, packing and selling of honey in the UK.
- What the apprentices learn: focus on business management as well as beekeeping

The following questions were raised during discussions:

Q) Where did the rest of the funding for the scheme come from? £60k from HBP £468 from bee farmers with the rest from commercial sponsors most which was from Rowse. Other sponsors included; Waterloo Foundation, Waste Management Trust, City & Guilds, Wax Chandlers, Cass Business School, Livery Companies and Sherriff.

Q) How much did the bee farmer pay who received an apprentice? The bee farmer paid a minimum of £100 per week which BFA topped up with a further £100 per week. There was a waiting list of farmers who'd like to take an apprentice on.

Q) How many apprentices would be trained next year? The plan was to train a minimum of 30 apprentices over 3 years, with 10 trained in year 2.

Congratulations were expressed from the Forum on what Margaret had achieved with progression of the scheme.

7. Defra procurement processes – future ways of contracting

Marie had invited Simon Desborough of Defra network procurement along to update the Forum on possible future ways of contracting and the approach for this year and thereafter. It was likely arrangements previously used under Fera would change as Defra were becoming more commercially savvy and had greater restrictions and auditable procedures to follow.

Previously, annual arrangements were awarded as single tender actions (STA). Due to Purdah it was likely STA's would be awarded for 2015/16 activities (i.e. not out to competition). However, this was dependent on the information received in for 2015/16 intentions and identify any crossovers all 3 associations may have. Contracts awarded would now use Defra terms and conditions which were more robust than Fera's.

ACTION 2: Simon to forward example T&C's to Marie to distribute to the Forum.

Longer term from 2016/17 onwards it was anticipated the specification would be put out to tender on contracts finder (Bravo) as there may be a number of different training organisations that would be interested too. A similar process would take place to analyse any crossovers all 3 may have and perhaps Forum members could work together via a consortium to strengthen bids. To ensure greater longevity the 2016/17 contracts would be awarded for 3 years. This may well be via open competition, Defra already had a number of different contractual arrangements with training providers and there was already a farming framework in existence which could be used.

Timetable for this year due to Purdah would be to gather information from Forum members via the standard proposal form by the end of April/early May. This would be considered by Marie with advice from Simon who would then look to put contracts in place by early June.

The following points/questions were raised during discussions:

- It was thought agricultural colleges may apply who wouldn't have the necessary skills and expertise. This kind of information was key to help inform the longer term specification which would be started in the autumn for 2016/17. It was requested for greater lead time for 2016/17 tenders/proposals which was duly noted.

Q) The Chair enquired what would happen in the next 6 weeks. This was a period of pre-procurement activity where associations would complete project proposal forms. This was an easy way to capture information which would eventually become bids (due to purdah a bid can't be launched). These are to be completed late April/early May where Marie and Simon would assess for crossover and alignment to the plan. If there was too much crossover a short tender process may need to be launched which would delay the contract awarding process.

Q) Who should Forum members direct questions to? Queries should be directed to Marie who would liaise where necessary with Simon on specifics.

8. Update on EU apiculture programme

Louise Mount was invited to provide an update to the Forum. The last meeting was held 19th March where the Commission presented a further 2 papers. They had taken on Member States (MS) comments on previous proposals sent around. Key points included:

- No autumn count this year. 2017/19 figures would be based on 2013 figures although this was still in draft.
- A mandatory counting system wouldn't be imposed and the commission had voted in favour of an annual census/count and left it up to MS how they would count their hives.

- Removed some mandatory elements that MS had found difficult.
- Commission would like to adopt by summer to enable MS to put measures in place domestically.
- Proposing a minimum figure awarded to smaller states such as Malta and Ireland who otherwise wouldn't find it viable to participate in the programme.

Policy would be seeking proposals from Forum members regarding what they would like to see on the programme towards the end of this year.

There was a brief discussion on the potential cost of setting up a compulsory registration system in the UK which was thought to be around £150k. This wouldn't be funded from the apiculture programme and would need to come from existing funds if adopted. An alternative to this to gain greater insight into registered beekeeper numbers would be to repeat the comparison that Giles Budge had previously completed. This comprised of a comparison of numbers held on BeeBase with those of suppliers/manufacturers in a 10k square. This anonymised comparison would be compared to associations data and before completing a robust statistical extrapolation on a national scale.

It was queried how a reduction in hive numbers would impact NBU and how accurate the 247,000 figure was? It would be a policy decision whether the overall funding base remained the same. Regarding how robust the 247,000 figure was, this was felt to be quite accurate. BeeBase had become more sophisticated, more people were signing up (approx. 3,000 to 5,000 new registrations per year of new and previously unregistered beekeepers). John Mellis outlined how Spain had increased their count from 30% to 98% when incentives were included such as subsidised varroa treatments. He felt back end/autumn policing by bee inspectors would be relatively simple and give increased confidence in numbers.

It was asked whether BeeBase had the capability for beekeepers to change the number of hives they have registered, which it was. Irene Allen offered to tweet Welsh beekeepers with key messages to keep all informed.

9. AOB

Small hive beetle (SHB)

It was suggested it would be more pertinent for the Forum to consider where we were with SHB rather than how or whether beekeepers should be compensated. A reference was made to how Swiss authorities took action on SHB.

Mike Brown gave a brief update on the latest from Italy. There was little change from when Mike reported at the last meeting in December. NBU had tracked and inspected packages that had come via Italy, including 600 queens and had upped their exotic risk surveillance.

It was queried if SHB were to arrive in the UK, approximately how long would it take to move from eradication to containment? It was felt within 2-3 weeks the inspectorate would know whether an incursion was established or isolated. Italy destroyed 3500 hives, this approach was taken due to the time of year and location of the outbreak. Other countries with SHB had put in IPM approaches including trapping paired with appropriate with good husbandry and were managing it well. The UK would think carefully about using an eradication only policy. This decision would be made by Defra policy and would include input from the BHAF.

It was suggested that within the 2-3 week decision window the compensation element would be relatively small so it was hoped this could be considered to re-stock.

Soil drench – we don't have any approved in the UK at present and Policy were discussing potential options with CRD and HSE. It was asked if key points from these discussions could be circulated to the Forum.

ACTION 3: Kevin Beattie to circulate key points from outcomes of meeting.

Random apiary survey (RAS)

It was suggested that the NBU incorporated a totally random inspection and sampling element from hives to detect rare events and to keep random samples for future proofing.

Kat Roberts said Smartbees had a working group on future threats, including horizon scanning and sequencing to look at microbes in bees. Kat said it was important to have a monitoring element and the NBU were continuing the sentinel apiary scheme. There was already a random overlay element due to responding to requests from beekeepers which were outside of classic risk based areas.

Table of actions

Action Number	Action	Person(s) responsible
1	Any thoughts on potential new NDB courses forward to Ken Basterfield	All
2	Simon to forward example T&C's to Marie to distribute to the Forum	Simon Desborough/ Marie Holmes
3	Circulate key points from outcomes of CRD/ HSE meetings on soil drenches to help combat SHB	Kevin Beattie