

DBKA Education - The time is right for a fresh start

At last, after two years of Covid restrictions, we are able to run a more effective education programme again. In branches across the county, beginners' courses are taking place and apiary activities are being planned. Beekeepers always have high hopes for the upcoming season, and expectations for 2022 are likely to be ambitious, especially considering last year's disruptive weather.

Judging a successful season is not only down to such measured outcomes as the size of your honey crop, how many swarms you catch (or avoid losing!), successes at honey shows or the number of colonies going into the winter. It is also how effective your beekeeping skills have been in achieving this - and also, I believe, the satisfaction of knowing that you have made progress in becoming a better beekeeper.

The enjoyment which I have experienced over 20+ years of keeping bees has been mirrored in the faces of newer beekeepers when I have had the chance to pass on my knowledge and skills. Trainers in every BBKA branch will have witnessed that too. Sharing the joy and wonderment is basically why we volunteer our time to help other members.

That is perhaps the main motivation for putting my name forward to become Devon Education Officer. Having been elected to the post at last December's AGM, the challenge of how to draw together the education teams from across the county became a reality. The responsibilities of the role as listed on the DBKA website are comprehensive and quite daunting. I know I have the support of the Devon EC in carrying these out but I also **need the help of DBKA members to accomplish our organisation's aims.**

Branch committees have always had a strong education role to play by running beginners' courses, mentoring schemes, study groups, winter talks and apiary meetings. They generate such enthusiasm through delivering all this that they often become a victim of their own success. When members ask for more help, there is little capacity left in any single branch to provide it.

This is where a coordinated effort between the eleven branches can make a difference. Following Viv Thorn's Branch Education Survey in 2019, the Devon Education Sub-Committee (DESC) was formed to facilitate cooperation in meeting DBKA's Charitable Objectives:

- To further and promote the craft of beekeeping
- To advance the education of the public in the importance of bees in the environment.

All was going well - until Covid struck. The Education Strategy and Implementation Plan still exists as a document (see DBKA website) but the agreed goals remain largely unfulfilled. Life seems to have some semblance of normality now so this is why I think, **"The time is right for a fresh start!"**

What preparations have been made for the relaunch of DESC?

- I have attended the BBKA Area Association meetings Nov '21 to Feb '22 where Education Officers from nearly 40 associations have discussed problems and solutions related to educating members.
- I have kept notes on the 4 topics covered so far, ready for feedback to Devon branches (Beginners' Courses; Mentoring Schemes; the Basic Assessment; and Improving the Conversion Rate i.e. from beginner to established beekeeper)
- I am reviewing the 2019 Education Survey and the 2020 DESC Strategy & Implementation Plan ready for branch representatives to revise the document for 2022.

What can branches do?

- Consider what education opportunities they are already providing and what else they would like to offer / what members would benefit from if there were other ways of achieving this.
- Nominate an Education Representative willing to respond to the new survey on behalf of the branch and to be part of the Devon Education Sub-Committee.

What can individual members do?

- Look at the current Education Strategy document and see how it reflects your needs. Feed back your comments to members of your branch committee.
- Pass on ideas to members of your committee on what else you would like to learn about or learn to do.

Vision Statement from the
Devon Education Strategy:

Every beekeeper is able to access
the education resources they require
to fulfil their beekeeping potential.

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