

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This report is a resume of my three years as Chair of UBKA.

I have thoroughly enjoyed my three years in this position. I took on the role in October 2020 which, of course, was in the middle of the Covid pandemic. This gave rise to various problems for me and the Executive to steer the association through this unprecedented time.

The first change was to have Executive meetings by "Zoom". This was new technology and required mastering the system, which we did quickly. This format proved successful, and I continued with it after the pandemic because it was very convenient, however I do hope my successor will include some face-to-face meetings.

Bank arrangements had proved a major headache for many years. Brian Grzymek and David Morgan reformed everything and so produced an online system that even this technophobe Chair was able to work. Accounts are now produced and audited much more easily.

The pandemic meant that we could not have a conference in 21 and 22. I set up a series of webinars with 6 in 21 and 7 in 22. These were widely publicised to the home countries. What surprised us was how far the publicity went. In 21 we had listeners from UK and Ireland but also all-over North America, Europe, and the Middle East. We had over 900 people for Jed Marshals second lecture. In 22 we reached the same spread plus Australia and New Zealand. These webinars were sponsored and free to listen to. Prof Jamie Ellis from Florida could not believe the audiences as he was used to speaking online to perhaps 50-100 people. The goodwill generated for UBKA was astonishing will many congratulatory emails. I would like to thank Jo Gibson for designing the webinar publicity and David Morgan and Trevor Dawson for managing the live shows.

WE had a major reform of the Constitution introducing 6 trustees to oversee governance. The various sub committees were renamed teams. Trustees meet twice a year and occasionally if an issue needs to be discussed urgently.

A major bespoke Child and Vulnerable Adult Protection policy was written for us by the NSPCC. Regular training meetings have been held and will continue in the future.

We found that there was a need for better communication between UBKA and associations. WE have created a database of all members and their email addresses so that we can publicise events directly to members.

The biggest change in the last three years was in Education. Previously we shared the FIBKA system which we had done for many years. During covid, however, FIBKA had a change of personnel and made some changes we could not agree to. We decided to produce our own Education system with support from CAFRE and Open College Network NI. We set up the Introduction to Beekeeping course for beginners. This is based on lectures with the student's doing homework through the online Moodle system. Their work was assessed and verified and if successful, a certificate was awarded. There was no exam at the end, the work could be completed with the books open. The second course "Proficiency in Beekeeping" took over from the old Intermediate course. A two-year course, again set up in similar lines with homework submitted through Moodle and assessed and verified. A separate Apiary Practical exam is carried out when the student has 2 years hive records. The students were given free reign to write in the first year. This proved difficult as many wrote vast volumes of

material which, while good learning, put huge strain on the assessors. Maximum word counts have been introduced to help students and assessors and this has proved successful. This has been a very successful project and with some future tweaking will be a huge asset to UBKA. The standard of learning has improved. I would like to thank the Education Team for their incredible hard work and dedication in producing a great learning system. They are Esther Ross, Ethel Irvine, Wendy Johnston (Secretary) Robert McCreery, Chris Hodges, and Chair Susie Hill. I have sat in on many of their weekly meetings and can assure you that their achievement has been monumental. Next courses will be a Senior level and Bee Master.

The Website had become very outdated and needed an overhaul. A website team worked in conjunction with Andy White of Trebania (Website designer) After a long gestation the new website has been rolled out earlier this year and looks well. It needs content from every association and can act as a central information hub. My thanks to the Website Team, Cathal Tunney, Gary McConnell, Valentine Hodges.

Trevor Dawson (Randalstown) has produced editions of a ezine called "Buzz" in collaboration with a journalist student. These have been excellent publications and congratulations to Trevor. He is always on the lookout for articles and photographs from members and would appreciate your help.

The conference made its return on 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> February 2023 to Greenmount under the management of Brian Grzymek. The theme was "Back to the Future" looking at post-covid times. We planned for fewer numbers at around 200-250 and ended up with nearly 400 which was brilliant. The main speaker was Prof Juliana Rangel from Texas A&M University. The trade exhibition was smaller, especially as Donegall Bees withdrew at the last minute due to illness. Thorne, however, coped with the red tape of the NI Protocol and appeared with full contingent as did Burke's Beehives. The lectures and workshops were well attended. Unfortunately, Fewer southern beekeepers appeared due to an emergency meeting of FIBKA held the Saturday. Plans for 2024 are well on the way.

The UBKA Honey Show returned in 2022 and was a great success. Judges Enid Brown, Shirley Bond and Jim Fletcher were impressed by the standard of entry with Gary McConnell, Three Rivers< winning the Blue Riband for his mead. This gave him free entry to The National Honey Show where he came third in his class. Many new beekeepers have not experienced showing through Covid and many are stimulated to try for today.

We had three Bee Health Workshops in March in Enniskillen, Derry and Belfast. The speakers were Dan Basterfield NDB from Devon and Tom Williamson, Senior Bee Inspector. These were well attended and excellent chances for members to socialize again after Covid.

UBKA invited wax expert Joyce Nisbet for a concentrated workshop day in Greenmount in March. Joyce showed groups how to clean wax, make wax molds of fruit and wax flowers. A great day which must be repeated in the future.

We made an appeal to the Wax Chandlers Guild for money towards a Microscopy course for our Senior Course. This was successful and they have awarded us £4,000 to develop this project. Plans will be made in the forthcoming year.

UBKA has entered a team on several occasions for the International Meeting of Young Beekeepers, IMYB. This July, Susie Hill, Valentine Hodges, and Charlene Abraham took our team of three to Slovenia. Despite a delay in Zurich, they performed well and gained a huge amount of experience as well as great networking with young beekeepers from 30 other countries.

Several UBKA Associations have been running Queen Rearing courses in conjunction with the Native Irish Honeybee Society, NIHBS, and promoting the Native Irish Black Bee. These are proving very successful with many beekeepers learning the ins and outs of queen rearing techniques. This will help us to become more self-sufficient in queens and reduce imports. It is fair to say that UBKA will support any beekeeper and will not discriminate against any breed of bee that members wish to keep.

I am delighted to say that five new associations have joined the UBKA umbrella during my three-year chairmanship. These are Foyle, Three Rivers, Downpatrick, Cornfields and recently Rasharkin. These are an excellent addition to our family. Unfortunately, Derry BKA decided to join FIBKA for their own reasons.

UBKA has been a member of the Council of National Beekeeping Associations which has recently rejoined Apimondia the world beekeeping organization. The British BKA had dropped out of membership some years ago which meant all 4 nations membership lapsed. Sense has since prevailed and membership for all has been restored. I have been elected Treasurer of CONBA.

There have been a few negatives in the past three years.

The organization of FIBKA has gone through collapse in recent years and we are sorry to see it. There is no doubt that we split away from their education system at the right time. No exams were held for their associations this year. I hope their emergency meeting in February will bring about a new start and return to normal function. We will look forward to re-establishing our regular biannual meetings.

A sequela to our new education system was that Derry BKA decided to move to FIBKA. A couple of other associations did not take up our new "Introduction to Beekeeping" course but did their own beginner's course. Unfortunately, this means that these students cannot progress further with our system until they repeat the Introduction course. I do hope that they will return now that the course is refined.

There has been a huge increase in EFB this year and in areas such as Co Down where it has not been seen in decades. There is every likelihood that there is much more Foulbrood disease out there in Ulster. EFB is not easily seen, however the fact that many beekeepers are reporting it means that our Bee Health Workshops are having an effect. WE are in desperate need of the bee inspectorate especially with the additional threat of Asian Hornet.

DAERA has proved a disappointment. Our bee inspectorate has effectively been nonfunctional for 2 years with very few apiary inspections. There is the issue of NI being used as a staging post for bee importations from Europe threatening introduction of Small Hive Beetle never mind a potential deleterious effect on the gene pool. Despite making approaches for discussions and meetings at various times, very little meaningful communication has occurred. Bee importations through NI to GB will continue as there is only a fraction of the paperwork required as opposed to importing directly from EU to GB.

As I said at the beginning, I have thoroughly enjoyed my chairmanship. I have worked with a group of very special people who have worked very hard for UBKA and helped it to attain a worthy status both at home and abroad. The Education Team, Ethel Irvine, Esther Ross, Robert McCreery, Education Secretary Wendy Johnston, Chris Hodges and Chaired by Susie Hill. Conference Manager, Brian Grzymek, Webmaster Cathal Tunney, Valentine Hodges and Gary McConnell. Mark Wallace for the Honey Show team. Trevor Dawson and Nichola Whan as UBKA Secretaries. I look forward to continuing to support this organization from the back benches.

Thank you.

John Hill MRCVS

Chair UBKA 2020-2023