

Patterson's Page

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I have now completed a full term of eight years as a BBKA Trustee, so I thought it was safe to tell members about my experiences over that time. The BBKA constitution states: *'Elected members shall hold office for a term of up to three years and shall be eligible for re-election for further terms. No elected members shall serve longer than eight consecutive years.'* I was elected for two terms of three years and one of two, hence I have served the 'full term'. There must be a two-year gap before being elected again and it is unusual for anyone to do this.

The Executive Committee (EC) is made up of the President and twelve other Trustees, all unpaid volunteers, being similar to any other organisation, such as a local BKA, tennis club or Parish Council. Trustees can come from any of the Area Association Members (AAMs) and from all walks of life, with different skills, experiences, views, outside interests, beekeeping knowledge and accents. If you are reading this, then you are probably eligible to serve.

There are potential problems with this system which include a fairly rapid turnover, getting a balanced skills-mix and having no interview for the position. If there are the same number of candidates, or fewer for the post they are all elected. I believe it is better for there to be several more candidates than vacancies so the AAMs can make a choice.

Upon my election, I asked to see the minutes for the previous two years, so I understood what had been discussed and decided. This gave me some preparation, but I was completely unprepared for the various specialist sub-committees, each having their own minutes that are not often shared with other Trustees. I could have turned up to the first meeting without any knowledge of the workings of the BBKA at all. This has changed, as there is now an 'Induction Pack', which prepares the new intake better.

The continual turnover in Trustees can mean changes in direction. Out of twelve Trustees it is quite possible for there to be four or five new ones, depending on resignations and the possible elevation of an existing Trustee to President. If some of those have different ideas and forceful personalities, then the hard work that has gone before could be discarded with a show of hands.

It is important to understand that being a Trustee of a charity has legal implications that do not apply to a normal committee member. On a number of occasions there have been suggestions, even demands, that the BBKA should do 'this' or 'that', but contravention of the regulations could expose Trustees.

In my eight years we have been able to use the expertise of Trustees quite well, but this may not always be the case. Ideally, I think you need a good mix of non-beekeeping skills and knowledge, which could include financial, employment, public relations, legal, insurance, etc. These may be in abundance or non-existent, in which case there is a need to rely on a network of members or to buy in relevant services. In my view there is always room for everyone, whatever their skills, so a carpenter, chef or florist can make a useful contribution.

It is my strongly held view there should be a reasonable amount of sound beekeeping experience in the EC. After all we are dealing with bees and beekeeping, and poor decisions that affect our craft could easily be taken. The specialist Committees are usually populated by a mixture of Trustees and invitees who have an interest, history or knowledge of the relevant committee. They all have their own Terms of Reference and a brief, with very little overlap, so we know who should deal with what. Overall, the system works quite well.

In eight years the BBKA administration has changed considerably. We have gone from a volunteer secretary who was paid an honorarium to a full-time employee who doubles as Operations Director. Owing to the much greater amount of work, the Treasurer no longer handles the day-to-day accounts; there is a self-employed person who does that. There are more staff members, as more work has been brought into the office that was formerly done by volunteers.

Each Trustee is linked to a number of AAMs, usually between four and six, that are referred to as 'Link Associations'. This is to help and advise both the AAM and their members on BBKA matters. It is ideal if the Link Trustee is fairly local to their AAMs, but this is not always possible, owing to the locations of Trustees. I live in West Sussex and two of my Link Associations have been Gwent and the Isle of Man, as well as others that are much

closer. I have had very few queries with mine, just a couple of BKAs that have asked for advice and a few members who have asked questions. In each case I was able to help, but as the result of one issue I suggested that guidelines are written for Link Trustees. It is not always understood that the BBKA is unable to get involved in local affairs, as each AAM is autonomous.

Some EC meetings are held to coincide with the requirements of the constitution, such as the Annual Delegate Meeting, which means that dates can be fixed well in advance. This means that attendances are very good, with illness probably being the main reason for non-attendance. Even as busy as I am, I only missed one, possibly two, meetings in eight years, in both cases because of date changes where I had already been booked to speak at events.

I view the BBKA as a small business with 25,000 customers who just happen to be the members; they need the same treatment and respect, which should be reciprocated. Often 'The BBKA' is seen as the EC, when it is all its members; we are all the BBKA. It is, unfortunately, seen by a very few members as some sort of 'authority' that can be abused. Fortunately, many members and AAMs that I have dealt with are very considerate and understanding if things are explained to them. Although there have been requests to do so, the BBKA cannot throw its weight around with the NBU or the Government. Although we are a major beekeeping stakeholder, we are one of thousands the Government has to deal with.

My time as a Trustee is over. Much of the work has been enjoyable, but as may be expected, some has been less so. You cannot walk away from issues, you have to get stuck in and deal with them, otherwise they can quickly degenerate. Looking back at the history of BBKA since its formation in 1874, there have been a number of issues that are worse than anything that has happened in the last eight years. The first half of the 20th century seemed to be particularly volatile, with many resignations, committee members being expelled and references in literature to the BBKA being 'autocratic' and 'dictatorial'. Some may argue that is still the case, but it is difficult to know what to replace it with that is better. I now quietly withdraw to my bees and wish others well.