

Going for the **SBA Basic or Junior Beekeeping Certificate**



BASIC or JUNIOR BEEKEEPING CERTIFICATE

Been keeping bees for a few years (or even a good few years), but never taken your Basic Beekeeping Certificate? Why not make this the year. The Basic Beekeeping Certificate (BB) (or the Junior Beekeeper (JB) for 10 to 16yr olds) is the first exam in the SBA education system. It is a practical exam, although the examiner will have a few straightforward oral questions. You can be assessed in your own apiary or individually as part of a group in a local association apiary. Juniors can sit the BB rather than the JB if they prefer.

Beekeepers who have taken their BB (or JB) all comment that the preparation for taking the assessment made them better beekeepers by causing them to study a little and have a fresh look at beekeeping and where it's at in the present challenging times.

Once you've got your BB (or JB) you can then enter any of the more advanced practical follow-on exams in the SBA system.

Don't let age be a barrier; we have had many successful, mature candidates. The SBA deliberately keeps the entry cost low, to encourage as many applicants as possible. (See application area for current price)

Children, have you got beekeeping parents or grandparents that have kept bees for some time but haven't yet plucked up the courage to take their BB – why not encourage them?

See <https://www.scottishbeekeepers.org.uk/exams/basic-beekeeping> for details on how to apply.

Once you have applied the exam administrator will confirm your application and they will allocate an examiner, who will contact you to arrange a venue and time (usually sometime between mid-June and mid-August)

Meantime, here are some brief guidance notes about the exam, but do also access the syllabus and accompanying guidance notes in the Education section of the SBA website. Your local association may also hold some mentoring and preparation sessions -ask your local association secretary.

Taking The Basic Beekeeping exam or the Junior Beekeeper – Some Brief Notes – See also Guidance Notes for Mentors on the SBA web-site

The first exam that all Scottish Beekeepers should sit is The Basic Beekeeping Certificate (BB) or the Junior Beekeeper (10 to 16yr olds) – very practical “over the open hive” exams to demonstrate skills combined with some

oral questions and answers, followed up by 1/2hr or so of oral questions about bees and beekeeping. Juniors may elect to sit the BB if they wish.

Always obtain and read the syllabuses, They are available on the SBA web site, the examiner will not ask for anything that is not contained therein. The 23 page Guidance Notes for Mentors follows the BB syllabus & is well worth reading.

A good explanation of taking the BB was given in Ian Craig's article in **The Scottish Beekeeper of April 2012** along with the experiences of recent candidates.

If possible form a study group guided by an experienced mentor and practice using a virtual or dummy hive.

Of course the examiner will be interested in your ability to light the smoker (& keep it lit), open the hive and control the colony, but will be particularly interested in your powers of **observation** –

- before you open the hive - what are the bees bringing in, is there pollen being collected (nearly always a sign that things are well within), do they look busy and eager



- when you open up - do they have sufficient food reserves (for the next 10 days at least),
- have they plenty of space, signs of swarming, are there eggs (queen present), any signs of disease.

Some beginners write the letters FEDSS on their hive tool (FOOD, EGGS, DISEASE, SPACE, SWARMING), as a reminder until they get into the habit of automatically carrying out these five essential checks.

The examiner may point at bees and ask you to comment e.g. drone, worker, maybe queen, worker with deformed wing virus (sign of varroa).

The examiner will be interested in your “work methods”

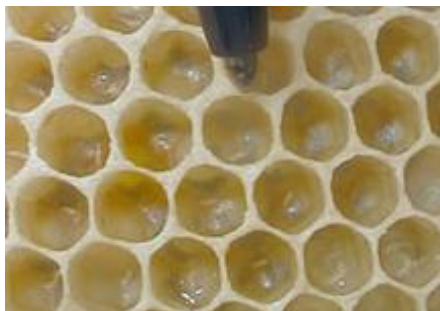
- Have you laid down the roof in a position where you're not continually tripping over it?
- Has the super been laid down (NOT on the ground (danger of bacterial contamination), but on the upturned roof), in a position where a “flying” queen won't accidentally enter it? (behind the hive is best)
- Is the hive equipment in good condition?
- Are all items of equipment and clothing clean?
- Hive tool always in your hand?
- Smoker readily available & well lit?

Tell the Story –What do you see



A “Brood” frame showing the typical rugby ball shape of sealed brood, with arches of honey (white upper corners), pollen store in-between the honey arches and the brood area. Each of

the sealed cells contains a bee larva in the process of metamorphosing into an adult bee. What could the empty cells signify? (Maybe inbreeding but maybe just pop holes left for "heater bees"

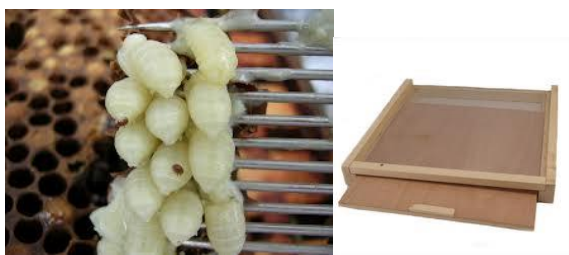


A useful observation from the candidate would be –

“Here are some eggs - the Queen lays an elongated egg in the bottom of the cell (over 1000 per day). The egg has a sticky end which enables it to stick to the bottom of the cell and stay upright. The cell is then” fuelled “ with some broodfood – a rich creamy substance produced in special glands in the Worker. The egg hatches into a larva (at 3 days), & becomes an “eating machine”. At day 8 the cell is capped (sealed) & the grub starts metamorphosing into an adult bee which emerges at day 21 (worker)”

Quite a lot of emphasis is put on checking whether the candidate is proficient in controlling varroa, as this is currently the largest direct & indirect cause of bee losses in Scotland.

You may be asked to demonstrate quick checks by drone removal



- You will be asked to describe various means of monitoring and of controlling varroa and especially your knowledge of the meaning of Integrated Pest Management (IPM).

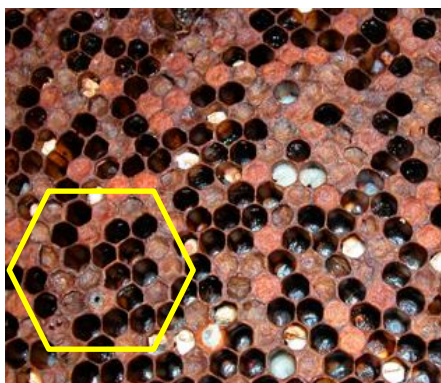
Varroa mites on a varroa floor tray



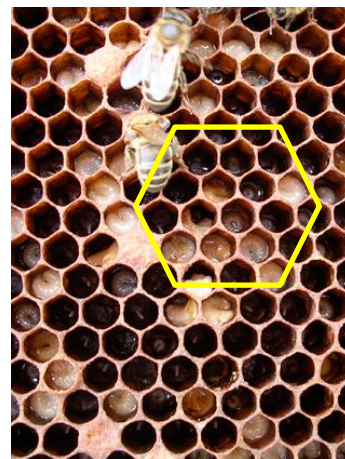
The examiner will ask about the brood diseases & will be especially interested in your ability to recognise “normal brood”



Normal Brood



AFB – Sunken cells, perforated



EFB – Twisted larvae

See the NBU's Advisory leaflets which have very good pictures

<http://www.nationalbeeunit.com/index.cfm?pageid=167>

Check that you can assemble a frame correctly (cross pinned at top) & fit the foundation. Remember the important concept of bee-space, on which modern beekeeping equipment is based,

Alan Riach Apr2023