

The British Beekeepers' Association

Examinations Board



Basic Assessment

2026 SYLLABUS AND INFORMATION PACK

BBKA Examinations Board

Application & Assessment Procedure for:

The Basic Assessment

Applicable for Assessments: 2026

Aims

To provide new beekeepers with a goal which will give them a measure of their achievement in the basic skills and knowledge of the craft. It is hoped that it will be a springboard from which to launch into the more demanding assessments. A pass in the Basic Assessment is a prerequisite for entry into all other practical assessments.

Conditions of Entry

The candidate must be a registered, partner or honorary member of the BBKA.

The candidate shall have managed at least one colony of bees for a minimum of one year.

A link for the online application form should be requested from the Area Association Examination Secretary. Direct members are to contact their Membership Secretary on members@bbka.org.uk.

Applications close on the 30th April 2026. The online application and fee shall have been received by the Examinations Board Secretary prior to the closing date. The 2026 fee for the assessment is £35.

Applications made after the closing date are not permitted. Any candidates who take the assessment without following the correct entry procedure will deem the assessment invalid. Retrospective entries will not be accepted.

This assessment cannot be taken in the same year as the Honey Bee Health Assessment.

The Assessment

An assessor approved by the Examinations Board will conduct the assessment at a suitable apiary, also approved by the Examinations Board. Direct member assessments will be held at Stoneleigh.

The assessment shall consist of four parts and the candidate must achieve a mark of at least 50% in all four parts individually to pass the assessment. The pass mark is 50%. A credit will be awarded if the total mark is 75% or greater and a distinction if the mark is 90% or greater.

The parts are:

- Manipulation and Equipment. Practical Assessment of the Candidate's ability to handle bees and beekeeping equipment and the ability to interpret what is observed.
- Oral questioning and Assessment of the Candidate's knowledge of Natural History and Beekeeping.
- Oral questioning on Swarming, Swarm Control and effects.
- Oral questioning on Diseases and Pests.

Scientific names, although useful and show a greater depth of knowledge, are not required.

It is essential that an apiary manager or other responsible person should be present for the duration of the assessment(s). Details of how to contact emergency services must be available and should include a map reference and postcode (where applicable). If these health and safety requirements are not met, the assessment will not proceed, and fees will not be refunded.

Assessors will use standardised assessment sheets supplied by the Examinations Board so that the outcome may be moderated.

The Examinations Board may wish a trainee assessor or member of the Examinations Board to be present as an observer.

The length of the Assessment should not normally exceed one hour. The final date for an assessment is 31st August.

In no case will an assessor indicate to a candidate the probable result of the assessment. This decision rests with the Examinations Board.

Guidance for Applicants

Candidates should request an online application link from their Area Association Examination Secretary. Direct members should contact their Membership Secretary for the online link. A confirmation email will be sent to the candidates once the application has been processed.

Candidates with additional support needs are to annotate this on the application form. An additional support form will be sent with the application confirmation. It is the candidate's responsibility to return this form with supporting evidence to the Examinations Board Secretary before the assessment is due to take place.

The Area Association Examination Secretary will arrange the assessor, venue date and time and contact the candidates with the information.

It is the responsibility of the candidate to supply a valid email address when applying.

The candidate will normally be informed of the outcome via email from the Examinations Board Secretary within six weeks of the assessment. The certificate and badge will be sent to the Area Association Examination Secretary for presentation to the successful candidates.

Further information regarding assessment procedures can be found in the Examinations Board Procedure Manual, available to all members on BBKA Learning Online.

Any questions regarding the assessment or entry process should be directed to the Examinations Board Secretary on sec.exams@bbka.org.uk.



BBKA Examinations Board

Syllabus for: Basic Assessment

Applicable for Assessments: 2026

1.0 MANIPULATION AND EQUIPMENT - PRACTICAL

The Candidate shall be aware of:

- 1.1 the care needed when handling a colony of honey bees.
- 1.2 the reactions of honey bees to smoke.
- 1.3 the equipment needed to open a colony of honey bees and the importance of its cleanliness.
- 1.4 the reasons for opening a colony.
- 1.5 the need for stores.
- 1.6 the importance of record keeping.

The Candidate will be able to:

- 1.7 open a colony of honey bees and keep the colony under control.
- 1.8 demonstrate lighting and the use of the smoker.
- 1.9 demonstrate the use of the hive tool.
- 1.10 remove combs from the hive and identify worker, drone and queen cells or cups if present, and to comment on the state of the combs.
- 1.11 identify the female castes and the drone.
- 1.12 identify brood at all stages.
- 1.13 demonstrate the difference between drone, worker and honey capping.
- 1.14 identify stored nectar, honey and pollen.
- 1.15 take a sample of worker bees in a suitable container from a suitable place.
- 1.16 state the number of worker bees required for an adult disease diagnosis sample.
- 1.17 demonstrate how to shake bees from a comb and how to look for signs of brood disease.
- 1.18 name and explain the function of the principal parts of a modern beehive.
- 1.19 discuss the concept of the bee space and its significance in the modern beehive.
- 1.20 assemble a brood frame and fit it with wired wax foundation.
- 1.21 discuss spacing of the combs in the brood chamber and super for both foundation and drawn comb and methods used to achieve this spacing.

2.0 NATURAL HISTORY AND BEEKEEPING – ORAL QUESTIONS

The Candidate will be able to:

- 2.1 give an elementary account of the development of queens, workers and drones in the honey bee colony.
- 2.2 state the periods spent by the female castes and the drone in the four stages of their life (egg, larva, pupa and adult).
- 2.3 name the main local flora from which honey bees gather pollen and nectar.
- 2.4 give a simple definition of nectar and a simple description of how it is collected, brought back to the hive and is converted into honey.
- 2.5 give a simple description of the collection and use of pollen, water and propolis in the honey bee colony.
- 2.6 give an elementary description of the way in which the honey bee colony passes the winter.
- 2.7 give an elementary description of how to set up an apiary.
- 2.8 describe what precautions should be taken to avoid the honey bees being a nuisance to neighbours and livestock.
- 2.9 describe the possible effects of honey bee stings on humans and able to recommend suitable first aid treatment.
- 2.10 give an elementary description of the annual cycle of work in the apiary.
- 2.11 describe the preparation of sugar syrup and how and when to feed bees.
- 2.12 discuss the need to add supers and the timing of the operation.
- 2.13 discuss and be aware of the dangers of robbing and how robbing can be avoided.
- 2.14 describe a method used to clear honey bees from supers.
- 2.15 describe the process of extracting honey from combs and a method of straining and bottling of honey suitable for a small-scale beekeeper, including hygiene.
- 2.16 show awareness of the various web-based resources relating to beekeeping such as BBKA and BeeBase.

3.0 SWARMING, SWARM CONTROL AND EFFECTS – ORAL QUESTIONS

The Candidate will be able to:

- 3.1 give an elementary description of swarming in a honey bee colony.
- 3.2 give an elementary account of one method of swarm control.
- 3.3 describe how to take a honey bee swarm and how to hive it.
- 3.4 describe the signs of a queenless colony and how to test if a colony is queenless.
- 3.5 describe the signs of laying workers and of a drone laying queen.
- 3.6 describe a simple method of queen introduction.
- 3.7 describe one method of uniting colonies and precautions to be taken.

4.0 DISEASE AND PESTS – ORAL QUESTIONS

The Candidate will be:

- 4.1 able to describe the appearance of healthy brood, sealed and unsealed.
- 4.2 aware of the reasons for good apiary hygiene.
- 4.3 aware of the reasons for regular brood comb replacement.
- 4.4 able to describe the signs of the bacterial diseases American Foul Brood (AFB) and European Foul Brood (EFB), the fungal disease Chalk Brood and the viral disease Sac brood.
- 4.5 able to describe methods for detecting and monitoring the presence of varroa (a mite) and describe its effect on the colony including awareness of the effect of associated viruses.
- 4.6 aware of acarine (a mite) and nosema (a fungus) and their effect upon the colony.
- 4.7 able to describe ways of controlling varroa using integrated pest management techniques.
- 4.8 aware of the current legislation regarding notifiable diseases and pests of honey bees.
- 4.9 aware of whom to contact to verify disease and advise on treatment.
- 4.10 able to describe how comb can be stored to prevent wax moth damage.
- 4.11 able to describe how mice and other pests can be excluded from the hives in winter.
- 4.12 able to describe the procedures for cleaning poly and wooden hives.

Version November 2026 (reviewed with no syllabus changes)

Previous Versions:

January 2025

January 2024 (reviewed with no syllabus changes)

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