

Askham Bryan College & FERA Biosecurity Project

Celia Knight Consulting

Final Report



Funded by



Executive Summary

As part of the Askham Bryan College project on Biosecurity led by Sally Steadman and involving sub-contracted work to Dr Charles Lane (Fera Science Ltd). I was sub-contracted to deliver work against milestones 6 and 9 from May – July 2015 in consultation with Dr Charles Lane.

Milestone 6: Develop a competency framework showing the skills, knowledge, experience and qualifications required to be a professional plant health inspector.

Milestone 9: Produce a report on how the competency framework could lead to professional recognition, such as gain registered status and lead towards a professional register of members and how this could be managed.

Progress against these milestones and recommendations for future work are presented.

Key deliverables

1. The Royal Society of Biology is primed to set up the pilot Plant Health Register in autumn 2015.
2. UK Government departments from England, Wales, Scotland and N. Ireland support the register for their Inspectors.
3. A first draft version of the competency framework, drawing on the Civil Service Competency Framework (2012-2017) and the Scottish Skills for Success Framework, was presented at a workshop meeting on July 14th at Sand Hutton attended by all key individuals.
4. Version 2 of the competency framework with greater alignment to the Defra report (April 2014 Protecting Plant Health-a Plant Biosecurity Strategy for Great Britain) is in preparation.
5. Volunteers have been identified to beta-test the register.
6. Prof Nicola Spence will launch the register at the British Society for Plant Pathologists in Bristol (Sept 13-15th 2015).

Summary of Recommendations

1. Focus the competency framework to work for Plant Health and Seed Inspectors (PHSI) in all UK government departments for launch of the pilot.
2. Redraft the competencies and descriptors with greater alignment to the Defra report (April 2014) Protecting Plant Health-a Plant Biosecurity Strategy for Great Britain.
3. Continue the Plant Health Register Steering Group to evaluate the pilot and launch the full register in April 2016.

Background

This work is timely in bringing together a number of UK-wide organisations and reports addressing Biosecurity with the established framework within the Royal Society of Biology (recently awarded Royal status) for acknowledging the professional status of its members.

The proposed Plant Health Register follows an action from the joint report from the Government Office of Science and Defra (Dec 2014)¹ to generate a plan for developing appropriate plant health skills and career pathways.

My role in this work was to work with the key players to develop an effective competency framework to establish the register.

Prof Nicola Spence (Defra's Chief Plant Health Officer) will launch the Plant Health Register at the British Society for Plant Pathologists in Bristol (Sept 13-15th 2015). Pilot testing the register using a redrafted competency framework with PHSI volunteers will take place in the autumn.

Progress Report

1. Milestone 6: Developing a Competency Framework

a. Who is the Plant Health Register for?

Early discussions established that the Plant Health and Seed Inspectorate were a defined group suitable to pilot the register. Ged Hayward (APHA) canvassed interest within the English regions with an encouraging response of 24 volunteers, across the range of bands from a workforce of 150, to take part in beta-testing the pilot register.

The register will ultimately be useful for a much broader group than the inspectorate, including diagnosticians, industry and research scientists. Rachel Lambert-Forsyth (Director of Education and Training, RSB) recommended that the competency framework be designed to suit the needs of all relevant roles. Consequently, I had discussions with the following to involve them in building the competency framework:-

- John Kerr, Gerry Saddler and David Avery at Science and Advice for Scottish Agriculture
- Nia Meddins at the Welsh Government Office
- Sean McIntyre at the Northern Ireland Office (DARD)
- Nick Mainprize at the Forestry Commission
- Shireen Chambers at the Institute of Chartered Foresters
- Jon Knight (AHDB Horticulture), representing industry
- Various academic tutors at The Gatsby Plant Science Summer School (28th June – 3rd July, 2015)

All of these contacts from government offices, Forestry and industry were very interested in the register and considered it relevant to their members. Government officers were keen to participate in building the competency framework for inspectors. A key utility of the involvement of SASA is that the Scottish Skills for Success competencies includes those relevant to scientists, which is not the case for the Civil Service Competency Framework used by England and Wales. Foresters were interested but as they already have their own professional body (ICF), future dialogue needs to consider the overlap. Industrial contacts need to be consulted in detail still. The register as presented to the academic tutors at the Gatsby Summer School was not seen as directly relevant to them at this stage.

Recommendation: Focus the competency framework to work for Plant Health and Seed Inspectors (PHSI) in all UK government departments for launching the pilot register.

b. How should the Plant Health register competencies and descriptors be presented?

Following meetings in London and Edinburgh and teleconferences, a competency framework was generated covering the 9 competencies of the Civil Service Competency Framework (2012-

2017) in the 3 clusters (Setting direction, engaging people, delivering results). The competencies were reviewed by colleagues from SASA to also comply with their SfS framework.

The draft version of competencies (copies available) was presented at a workshop meeting in York on July 14th, attended by: Celia Knight (CKC), Charles Lane (Fera Science), Ged Hayward (APHA) Richard Harris (Defra), John Kerr and Gerry Saddler (SASA), Nia Meddins (Welsh office); Sean McIntyre (NI-DARD), Joanne Needham and Rachel Lambert-Forsyth (RSB). A very productive meeting generated a recommendation for version 2 and a commitment from this group to take the register forward as the Plant Health Register Steering Group.

Recommendation: Redraft the competencies and descriptors with greater alignment to the Defra report ²

The rationale behind this revision is that considerable work has gone into the Report terminologies and with wide stakeholder consultation. The report, which is in the public domain, will be used widely by plant health professionals and alignment to the Plant Health register should further reinforce this.

2. Milestone 9: How can the competency framework lead to professional recognition?

Work on this milestone is in progress. Interest and commitment from the UK-wide Government departments signals that the revised competency framework (in preparation) and the PHSI volunteers will inform us how the register will work for the inspectorate.

At the next meeting of the Plant Health Register Steering Group (in September at the BSPP in Bristol), the group will address how to evaluate the pilot, how to recruit assessors and the timetable for launching the full register from April 2016.

¹Defra/GoS (Dec 2014) Animal and Plant Health in the UK: Building our science capability

²Defra (April 2014) Protecting Plant Health-a Plant Biosecurity Strategy for Great Britain