



An Integrated Eradication Programme

**TBSPG Background Thinking
Paper**



**CULTURE AND
COMMUNICATION**

Thematic area: CULTURE AND COMMUNICATION

1. Issue

We are aware that DAERA currently provide a range of information both through its web site and also in a wide number of leaflets aimed at providing advice and guidance to farmers. We have heard through discussion with industry representatives in a number of meetings that this has not been effective in communicating key messages. The perception still persists that bTB is a government issue and one for government to resolve. From listening to farmers and from the consultations undertaken we have concluded that generally, farmers' interest relates to the bTB testing and compensation regime rather than in working alongside DAERA and vets to eradicate the disease. In many ways the existing system and approach has reinforced this.

Our task has been to consider ways to change this perception and effectively communicate a new strategic approach to ensure buy in from all bodies to a new way which will engage stakeholders particularly those from the farming community.

We recognise that in order for our Strategy and recommendations to have meaningful effect, that a change in culture by both the farming community and government will be required.

We are attempting to deliver a new approach and understanding, and a new way in which bTB can be addressed. It is important that a line is drawn under what has gone before and that our proposed new way forward is communicated effectively to all stakeholders and their 'buy in' to this new approach is secured.

There is a need to communicate clearly what will change, and to build the cultural change in attitudes and approach required to effectively deal with the problem of bTB.

2. Recommendation

As outlined above, many of the individual recommendations contained in the Strategy would contribute to the necessary culture change in addition to their key stated purpose, particularly when implemented as a package. The theme running through all of these is our recommendation that all stakeholders, including Government, work in partnership and share the responsibility for eradicating bTB.

We recommend that a vigorous publicity, communication and knowledge transfer plan should be developed by the proposed TB Eradication Partnership (TBEP) and implemented in conjunction with key stakeholders.

The purpose of this plan would be to:

- a. initially promote the new bTB Eradication Strategy;
- b. raise awareness of its key recommendations and actions;

- c. ensure that stakeholders receive relevant, timely and appropriate information to allow them to mitigate risks;
- d. provide stakeholders and the public with key information on bTB control and eradication; and
- e. promote best practice in prevention of disease and good farm biosecurity.

The Plan would aim to do this through:

- a. providing regular updates to ensure that the work of the new oversight governance structures working with all partners to eradicate bTB is kept to the fore;
- b. ensuring that there is an effective flow of communication within DAERA from local office to policy and veterinary management and vice versa;
- c. ensuring that messages are delivered in a format which is appropriate to the audience; and
- d. the use of new and innovative methods to provide farmers, in particular, with information to allow them to benchmark their performance against others.

We also recommend that action is taken by all stakeholders to support a change in attitude and approach, from a position where bTB is seen as an unavoidable feature of farming life, to one which focuses on a concerted effort to eradicate bTB as a disease. This will be reflected across all recommendations which will contribute to this change in culture. We must ensure that there is commitment from all, but particularly from the farming community, to work towards disease eradication and play their part in achieving this. The mind set must change from one where testing and bTB is consciously, or sub consciously, seen as part and parcel of farming life, to one where the risk of bTB infecting a herd can be challenged and reduced by positive actions. Better and more frequent communication will play a role in this, as will more direct ownership through new governance arrangements; changes to the compensation system; improved farmer / vet relations; commitment by government to work in partnership; encouragement and enforcement of effective biosecurity measures on farms; being better informed about cattle purchasing and being better informed about the disease. All of these are part of a Plan that would lead to changes in attitudes and culture. The key message would have to be that bTB can, and will, be eradicated.

3. Rationale for change

We recognise that one of the key challenges is to change culture, mindsets, approach and attitudes across all stakeholders, including government, to ensure that there is a strategic shift from what has taken place previously in terms of bTB management, testing, control and eradication, and that this is properly

communicated. There should be a sense that this is a new approach, and a substantial shift, rather than simply a repackaging of old processes and methods.

The previous communication programmes were criticised for a variety of reasons including the use of generic leafleting, a lack of local engagement, access to relevant and current information and the absence of input to the communication by the industry itself so that it is relevant and appropriate to the target audience.

If the new communication plan is to work, it must be understood and accepted by all those with an interest in eradicating bTB in cattle. Effective communication is vital in achieving this. It also must be locally relevant and appropriate. The TBEP which would have representation from all stakeholders would, alongside DAERA, play a key role in the development and review of how, when and what is communicated. It is recommended that all means of communication are maximised including the use of new media.

It will be important to try to harness the diversity of opinions across the many stakeholders and direct it towards a supportive position, ensuring that key stakeholders are aware of both the work of the new oversight body and their responsibilities in relation to the implementation of the Strategy.

The various recommendations presented in our Eradication Strategy will each have an influence and an impact on how stakeholders view bTB, their role in terms of influence and how they will contribute to bTB eradication. Pivotal recommendations in this regard include changes to oversight and governance; taking responsibility for improved farm practice and biosecurity; and shared ownership of the way in which the bTB Eradication Strategy is resourced; all of which will collectively represent, in our opinion, a sea change in role, responsibility and approach.

4. Evidence

We understand, through both of our consultations (in January 2015¹ and June 2015²) the issue of culture and attitudes both within the farming community and government and how these need to change if the issue of bTB is to be properly addressed. We have heard from many respondents of the need for effective communication, the criticism that too much of what happens is unclear, and that farmers are unsure, or ill informed, as to why certain things are done.

We have also met with representative bodies of farmers, private vets and DAERA staff and has heard from them about how the communication process could be improved; the potential role that private vets and DAERA staff could play when

¹ Initial public consultation and briefing sessions:

<http://webarchive.proni.gov.uk/20160504071623/http://www.northernireland.gov.uk/index/media-centre/news-departments/news-dard/news-dard-january-2015/news-dard-140115-have-your-say.htm>

² Consultation on the Interim Report of the TB Strategic Partnership Group:

<https://www.dardni.gov.uk/consultations/consultation-interim-report-tb-strategic-partnership-group>

visiting farmers to carry out testing; and how farming representative organisations could assist in the promotion of the key recommendations and actions arising.

Importantly, we met with both DAERA policy and field staff and noted concerns about the flow of information within the organisation; how local intelligence and understanding is communicated to influence decision making; and equally how policy changes and decisions are delivered to staff in the field.

It has also been evident from our engagements, particularly with those close to or directly involved in the industry, that too much energy and effort relates to bTB control, testing regimes and issues of compensation, rather than the disease itself.

We have considered how information is communicated in other jurisdictions including England, Wales, the Republic of Ireland and New Zealand and found that up to date, simple information clearly displayed can be key to getting messages appropriately conveyed and understood and to promoting engagement.

As an example we have looked at the Welsh 'TB eradication dashboard' which summarises in a simple way on one page the progress being made in Wales in terms of eradicating bTB. We see this as a potential model for how the TBEP might communicate key messages.

We have also met with representatives from nature conservation groups and has heard about their ideas for the way forward. The evidence that we have gathered from other countries makes it obvious to us that success in tackling bTB is predicated on there being a shared commitment by Government, PVPs, farmers, the agri-food industry and nature conservationists. Achieving eradication will take time, resources, industry discipline and a united focus on the desired outcome. We hope too that nature conservationists would recognise the need for targeted action on badgers as a disease reservoir, as well as the benefits which would accrue for the health of the badger population.

Analysis by Dr. Philip Robinson of our recommendations robustly supports the need for cultural and attitudinal change, if the Strategy is to be effective.

5. Detail

We see the communication plan happening in a number of sequential stages.

The initial promotion and publicising of the Eradication Strategy and Implementation Plan along with its key recommendations will be done through a formal launch event, press briefings, interviews. Consideration may be given to regional launch events led by the TBSPG to cover each DVO area dependent on DAERA plans regarding consultation on the Strategy.

There would be a need for us in the TBSPG, and our successor the TBEP, in our monitoring role, to provide reports on progress on implementation and to keep the

new Strategy to the fore. Further meetings with key bodies would be required to address any outstanding matters and work through some of the detail of the recommendations.

As part of the work on achieving cultural shift the TBSPG members would engage with key representative bodies to ensure on-going understanding of the out-working of the recommendations.

Once the new oversight body (TBEP) is established it would take control of the communications plan and keep this under review.

We have considered the Welsh dashboard model and see this as a means which could be adapted to present summary, clear communication which provides an update on progress towards eradication and underpins the drive for better communication and cultural change. The responsibility for the provision of the information to populate the dashboard should reside with DAERA.

We have also considered the UK web-based TB Hub, (this currently has a NI link), and again there is much to admire in this as a very helpful means of getting key messages across. Enhancement and adaptation for Northern Ireland should be pursued. This would require development and design costs, plus on-going maintenance.

A key part of the cultural shift will be the new governance arrangements as they, for the first time, will give direct input by key stakeholders into the ongoing development and implementation of policy relating to bTB eradication. It will no longer be a case of a government driven programme/strategy but an approach based on shared responsibility and ownership. It will be important to drive this cultural shift through the new governance arrangements. The governance bodies will set the example and tone for the new approach.

6. Impact

The desired impact would be a cultural shift in ownership and engagement in relation to the issue of bTB eradication. This would be demonstrated by genuine acceptance and participation in the active implementation of recommendations, particularly around biosecurity and new local Disease Response Teams.

Eradication of bTB must be a shared issue and action on it a shared responsibility. At present, for many, bTB is perceived as being a government problem and farmers are frustrated by the lack of progress in eradication and the burden of testing/restriction regimes. This would change to shared ownership of the effort to eradicate bTB by accepting and adopting the recommendations supporting a new

Eradication Strategy. Across all of the recommendations presented is an underlying theme of seeking a change in practice and approach to reduce disease risk.

This would be evidenced through a greater acceptance by farmers of their own personal responsibility to protect their herd, and that of their neighbours, through informed purchasing practice, improved farm practice, utilisation of their vets and DAERA for information on how to minimise exposure and risk, engagement in the new governance structures, and bringing peer pressure to bear to effect change where practices by other farmers create a risk of disease spread.

A measure of the impact would be the desire of farmers for more information and a wish to contribute to the discussion through engagement in local Disease Response Teams.

7. Timeline

Following publication of an agreed final Strategy there will be an intensive period of publicity to promote the new bTB Eradication Strategy.

DAERA will give consideration to public consultation on the bTB Eradication Strategy.

Following acceptance of the Strategy by DAERA, we and our successor group (the TBEP), should monitor the progress of implementation of the Strategy's various recommendations, under a range of individual themes, which are considered to contribute to both culture change and to improvements in communication.

In 2017a comprehensive publicity, communications and knowledge transfer plan should be developed by the TBEP, and implemented in conjunction with key stakeholders.