



# Training in Beekeeping

FOR RECREATIONAL BEEKEEPERS

Monica du Plessis | Online Survey Results | March 2023

## Background



My name is Monica du Plessis, although, as the owner and operator of Mondees Bees, I am known as Mon. Mondees Bees is a small beekeeping venture in metropolitan Adelaide, South Australia. I have been keeping bees since 2018, growing steadily from one hive to four, then eight and sixteen, and currently I manage 20 hives, but it is threatening to explode to an even larger number soon! (Parting with splits and swarms is like asking me to give away one of my children, I just can't!)

My hives are mostly located in backyards across the western coastline of metropolitan Adelaide, with some so close to the beach you can taste the sea salt in the honey (salted caramel anyone?) and others are located further inland, including the foothills of Adelaide. These varying environments provide a diverse blend of circumstances that impact upon individual hives in various ways. It has certainly helped me develop my hive management skills to suit the location and local environment, rather than simply following the generic view of what is to be expected just because it is a certain time of year.

To date the business has mainly been focussing on small scale beekeeping and sale of products harvested from the hives and curated for discerning lovers of quality local honey and beeswax products.

The other arm of my business which focusses on personalised mentoring services, particularly to other recreational beekeepers, has been operating for about twelve months and demand for this service is steadily growing. With my educational background and a passion for sharing my knowledge, I thoroughly enjoy equipping other beekeepers with the tools to manage their hives with confidence.

Over the past five years I have been surprised at the number of beekeepers who have admitted to having completed a short course which was somewhat helpful but not sufficient to instil confidence and ensure good practice. More people than I care to remember have told me they feel a sense of apprehension when opening their hives because they don't know what they are looking at.

As part of recent studies in small business management, I decided to focus my research topic on identifying the gaps in current training to obtain some quantifiable data to confirm the anecdotal evidence. I will use the results from the survey to develop a suite of training opportunities tailored to the expressed needs of aspiring and/or new beekeepers, as well as established beekeepers who are interested in developing their skills further or doing a refresher course.

My goal is to ensure that as many recreational beekeepers as possible are equipped with the knowledge and the skills to manage their hives with confidence and enjoy their bees.

## Executive Summary

Data was gathered over a period of six weeks from February to March 2023 via an online survey using Google forms. The survey was circulated to Beekeeping specific Facebook groups and via an email containing a link to the online survey to members of the Beekeeping Society of South Australia (BSSA). A total of 83 responses were received across both platforms.

Approximately two thirds of recreational beekeepers who answered the survey said they have paid for training in beekeeping. However, close to a third (27%) of beekeepers said the training was not sufficient to equip them to handle their hives with confidence.

When asked what they would have liked to see included in the training they had completed, most responses indicated more hands-on practice and courses that were delivered over a longer period were desired.

Seasonal hive management and management against pests and disease were the topics that most respondents would like to attend if it were available to them. Responses indicated that face to face training is preferred, although there is a small tolerance for some online training if it were followed by practical sessions. Participants are willing to travel between 30 and 50km to get to training and are willing to invest up to \$200 for a training session.

Sessions of three to five hours, held over weekends are preferred, with strong opinions on multiple sessions being required to achieve a level of confidence in managing a hive.

When asked where people would seek information on available training opportunities, it was evident that word-of-mouth referrals were trusted, with 83% of respondents saying they would seek information from other beekeepers. The second most popular referral source is the local beekeeping society.

Whilst the survey responses are not a representative sample, from the responses received it is obvious that there is a need for quality training that comprises sound theory that is then embedded through ongoing practice to ensure that recreational beekeepers feel equipped to manage their hives with confidence.

## Methodology

An online survey was developed using Google forms. It was then made available on Facebook pages that are targeted to beekeepers for a period of one month in February 2023. The survey consisted of 13 questions, of which 10 were structured with multiple choice responses. The remaining questions gathered data not directly related to the survey.

As a token of appreciation for completing the survey, participants were offered a voucher for 20% discount on any future training that is offered through Mondees Bees.

Participants were also given the opportunity to join the Mondees Bees mailing list for monthly newsletters and special offers and were asked if they would like a copy of the results. The answers to these questions are not included in this report as they are not relevant to the data.

Participants were reassured that all personal information would be kept confidential and that the results would be deidentified, then collated into a report.

A second (separate but almost identical) survey was sent to the local Beekeeping Society of South Australia (BSSA), due to the relatively low number of South Australian responses to the Facebook survey. A few minor changes were made to the BSSA survey, following feedback from Facebook participants. This included an additional question, which did not make a significant difference to the survey results. The changes made are as follows:

Question 2 – added an option to tick ‘not applicable’

Question 4 – added an additional training option – ‘It’s All About the Queen’

New question 11 – ‘how many hives do you own and/or manage?’

The new question in the BSSA survey took the number of questions to 14. The second survey was available for a period of six weeks from February to mid March 2023. For clarity, the report is structured around responses to fourteen questions, with clear indication where the Facebook survey did not include the question.

The individual results from each survey are provided in table format, with the aggregated data from the combined surveys displayed as a pie chart where the results were very similar and as a line graph when clear delineation is evident.

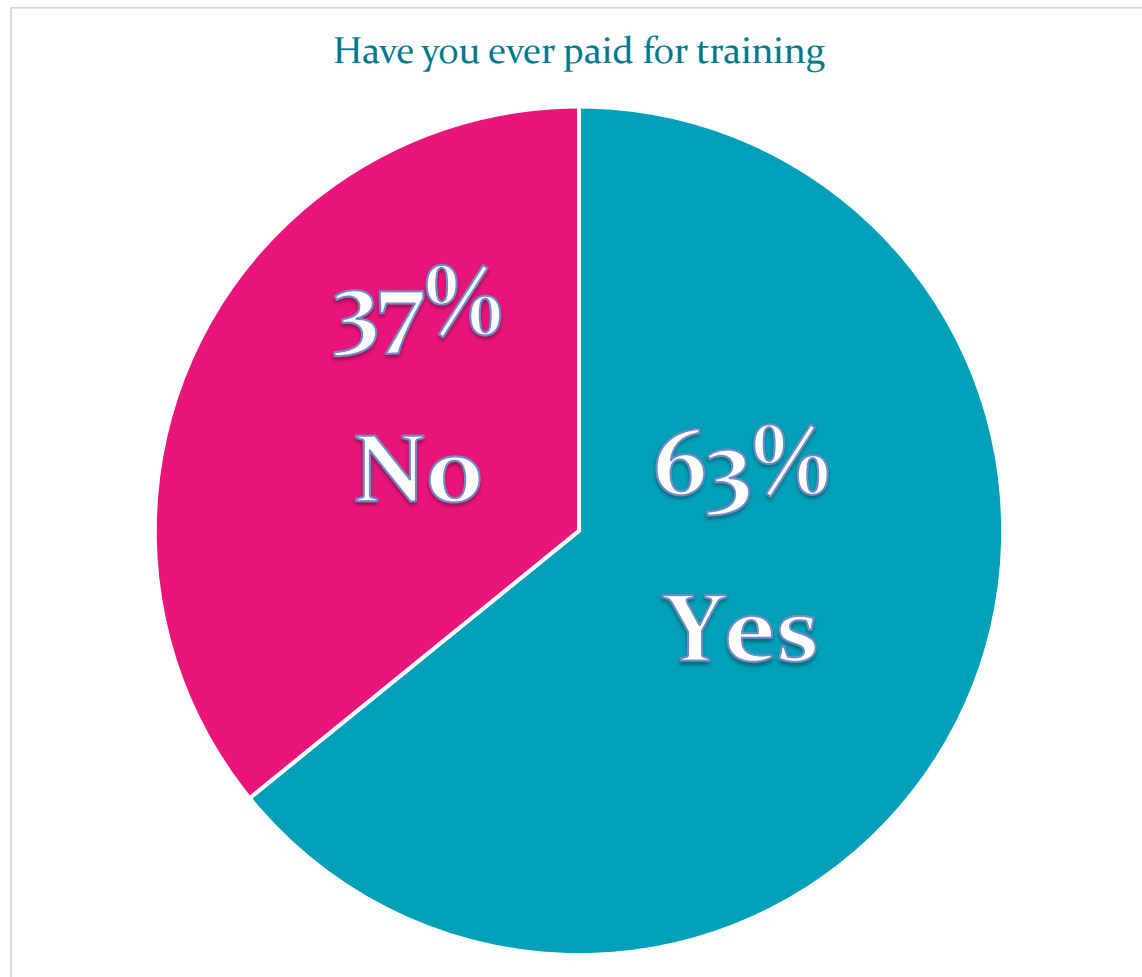
There were 52 responses to the survey that was circulated via Facebook, and 31 responses from members of the Beekeeping Society of South Australia (BSSA), making a total of 83 responses to the survey. It is to be noted that the total number of responses is not considered a representative sample of recreational beekeepers in Australia.

# Report

## Question 1

Have you ever paid for a beekeeping training session?

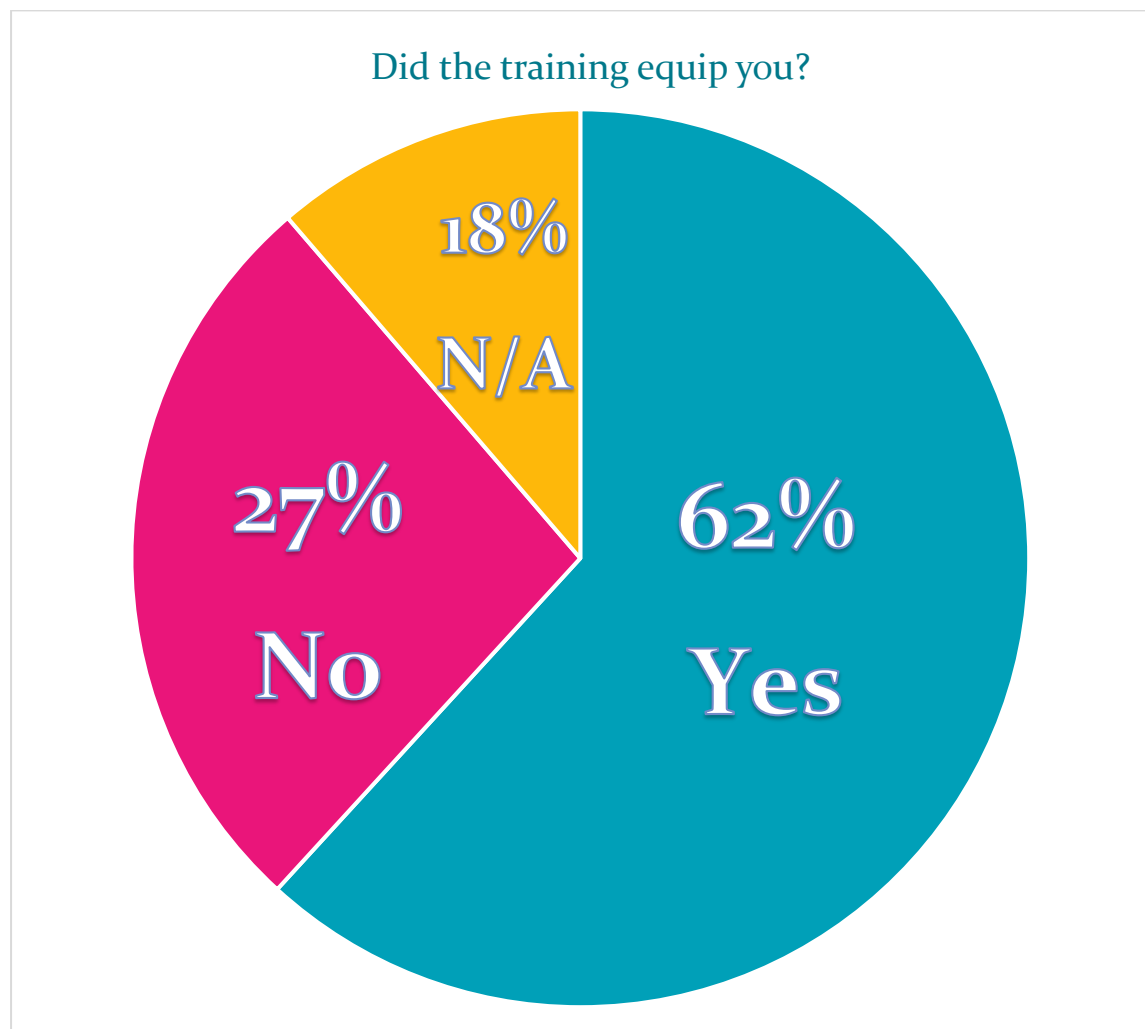
	Facebook Survey	BSSA Survey
Yes	(34) 64.2%	(19) 61.3%
No	(19) 35.8%	(12) 38.7%



## Question 2

Did that training equip you to manage your bees confidently?

	Facebook Survey	BSSA Survey
Yes	(33) 62.3%	(19) 61.3%
No	(20) 37.7%	(5) 16.1%
N/A	This option was not available	(7) 22.6%



### Question 3

What (if anything), would you have liked to see included in the training, or done differently?

Individual comments on what people would have liked to see included in the training they completed is varied, which may indicate a subjective training approach where the subject matter reflected the trainer's (limited) knowledge; or that the topics covered in the training were not focussed on the information the participant would have liked to learn about.

It is clear from the wide-ranging responses that training is not a static one-off occurrence and that there needs to be a wide selection of training opportunities that beekeepers can choose from to broaden their knowledge as they feel ready to progress.

Responses in both surveys also overwhelmingly indicated that training needs to consist of theory plus a *significant* amount of practical, hands-on time to translate the theory into practice.

Where responses indicated 100% satisfaction with the training that had been completed, the training had taken place over a longer period and included plenty of practical application as well as availability of help and advice, even if only online.

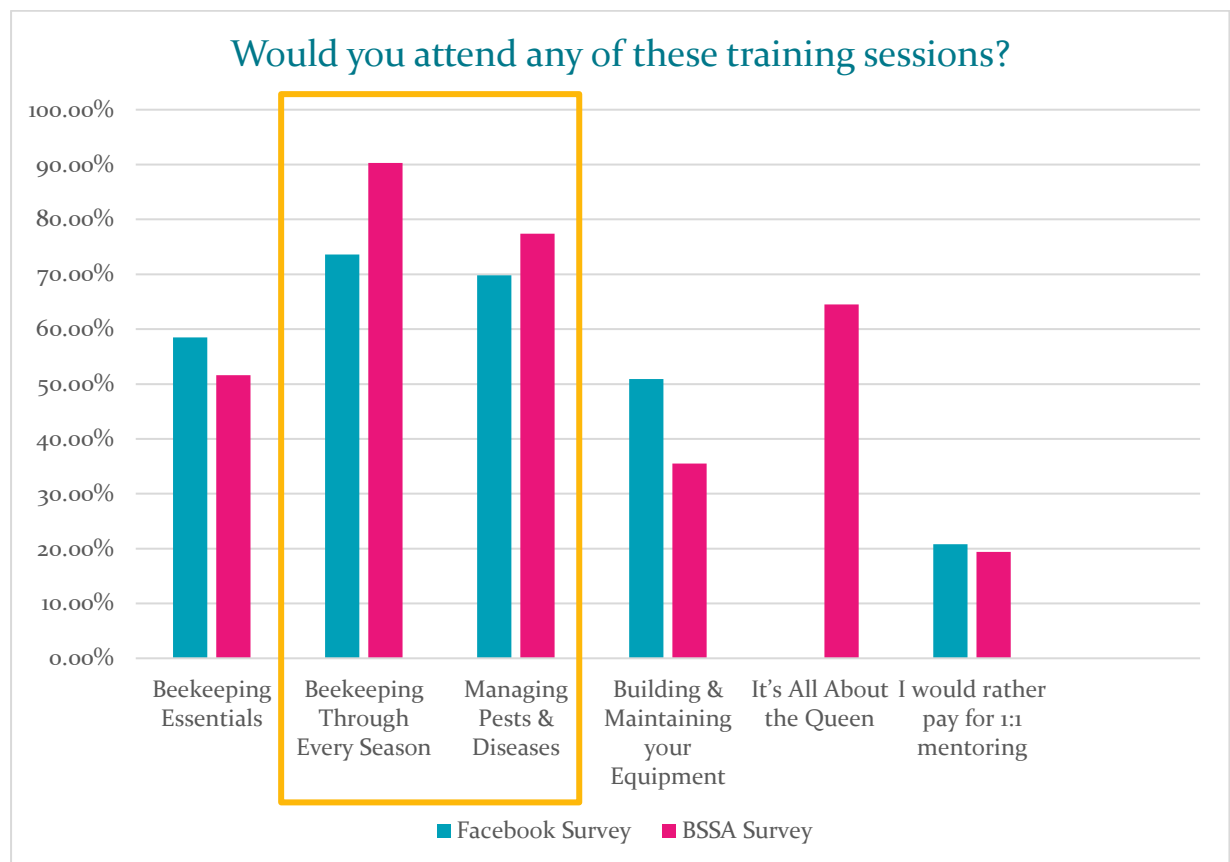
It is clear from the survey responses that the greatest confidence in managing hives is achieved when there is solid theory as well as hands-on practice plus the availability of resources that can be accessed on a needs basis.

*The full list of comments is included at the end of the survey in Appendix A.*

## Question 4

Would you attend a training course that focussed on any of the following topics?

	Facebook Survey	BSSA Survey
Beekeeping Essentials	31 (58.5%)	16 (51.6%)
Beekeeping Through Every Season	39 (73.6%)	28 (90.3%)
Managing Pests & Diseases	37 (69.8%)	24 (77.4%)
Building & Maintaining your Equipment	27 (50.9%)	11 (35.5%)
It's All About the Queen	Not available in the survey	20 (64.5%)
I would rather pay for 1:1 mentoring	11 (20.8%)	6 (19.4%)

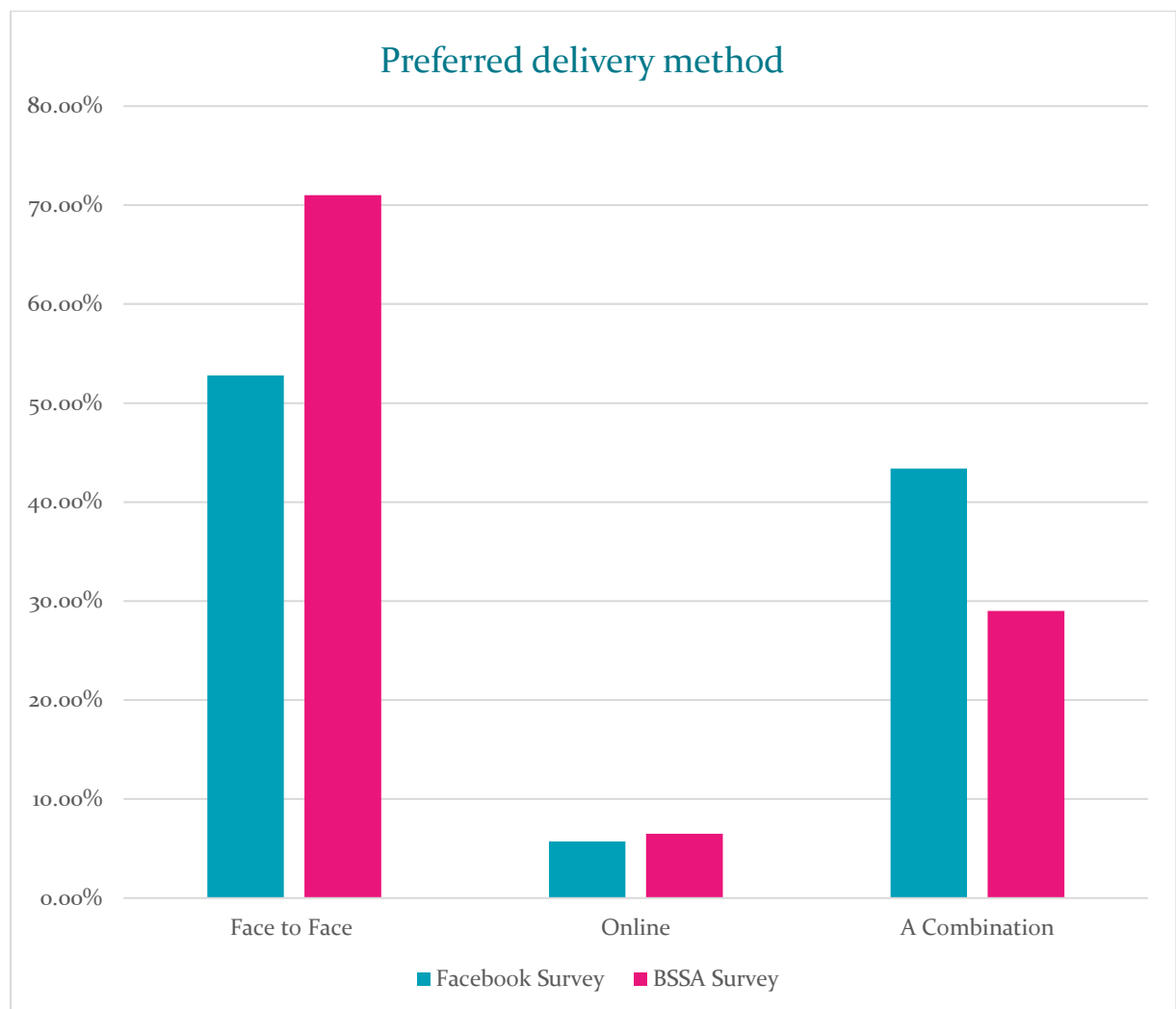




## Question 5

How would you prefer the training to be delivered?

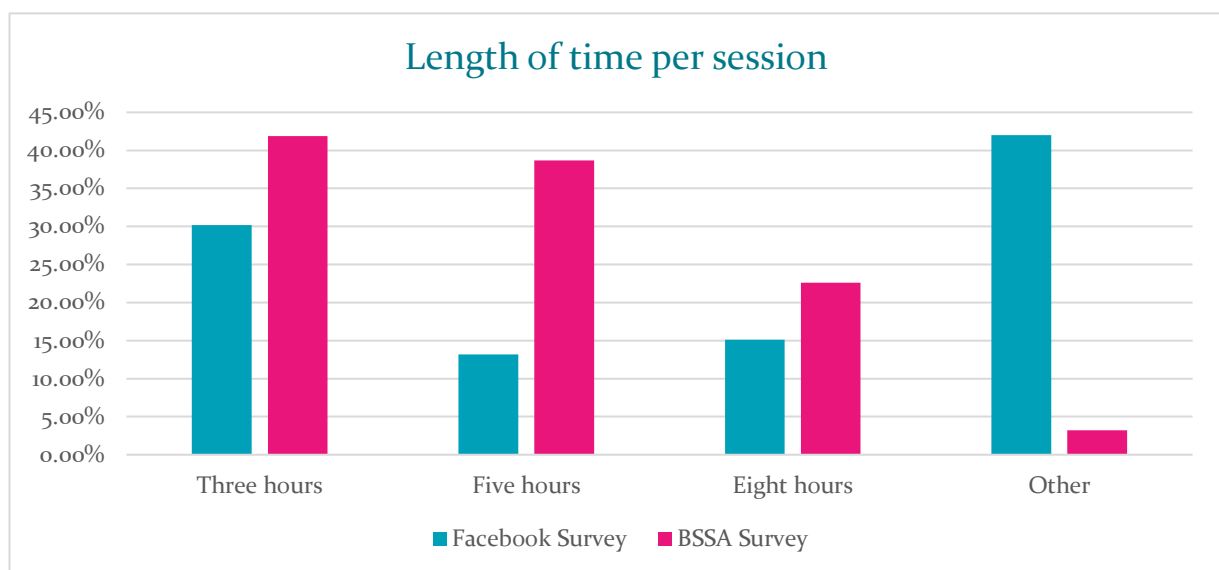
	Facebook Survey	BSSA Survey
Face to Face	(28) 52.8%	(22) 71%
Online	(3) 5.7%	(2) 6.5%
A Combination	(23) 43.4%	(9) 29%



## Question 6

What length of time are you willing to commit to?

	Facebook Survey	BSSA Survey
Three hours	16 (30.2%)	13 (41.9%)
Five hours	7 (13.2%)	12 (38.7%)
Eight hours	8 (15.1%)	7 (22.6%)
Other	(42%)	1 (3.2%)



It was evident from the significant percentage of responses who selected “other” and left comments, that even an eight-hour session would not be sufficient to ensure confidence in managing hives. Overwhelmingly the opinion of the respondents is that a full two-day course is the absolute minimum requirement and that the most preferred method includes plenty of hands-on practice. Respondents who stated that they were satisfied with the training they received, commented that their training included significant amounts of hands-on practice under the supervision of a mentor, and/or were conducted over a longer period, ranging from five days to six weeks to a comprehensive twelve-month program.

## Question 7

When would you prefer to attend training?

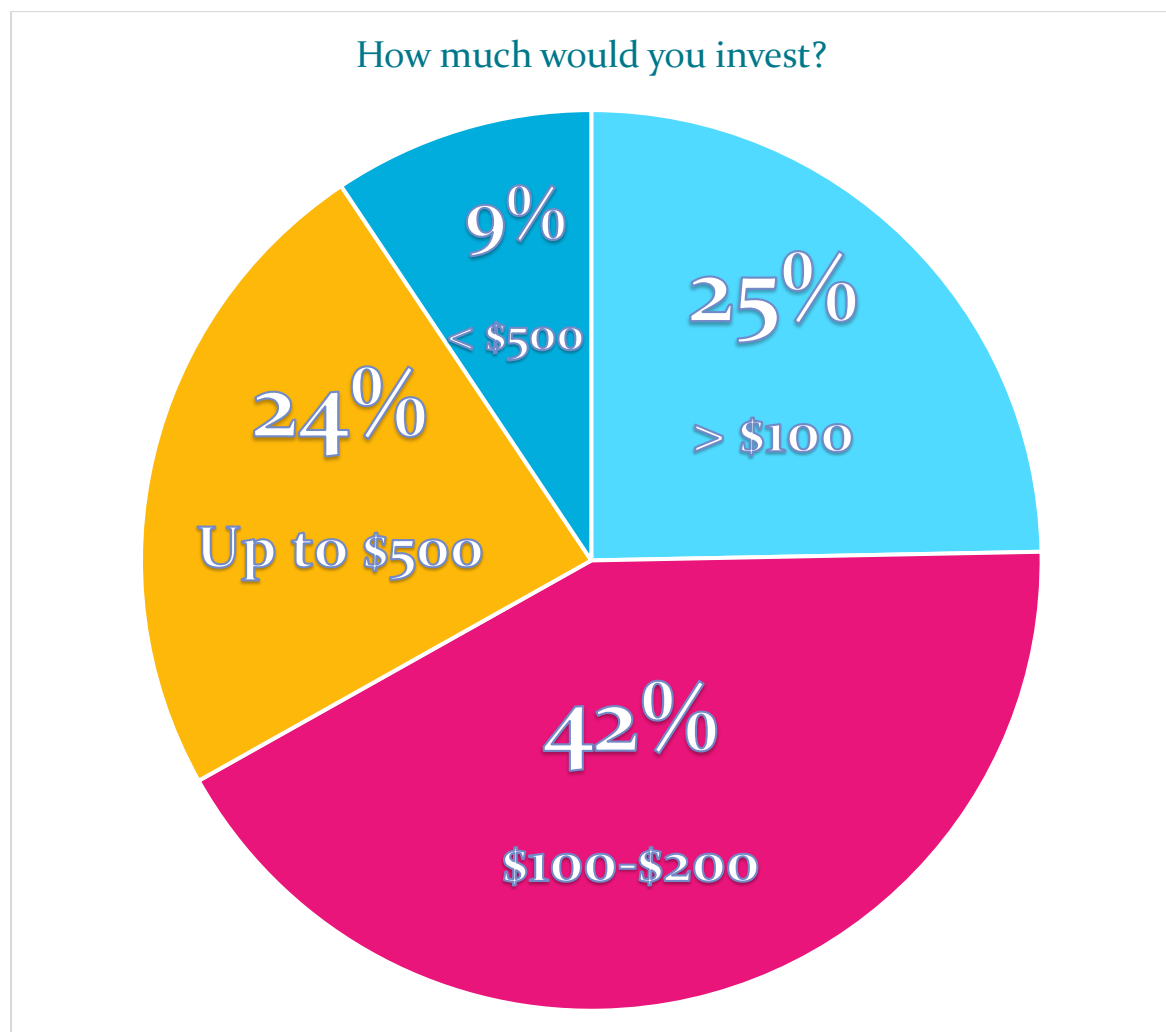
	Facebook Survey	BSSA Survey
Weekdays	(17) 32.1%	(14) 45.2%
Evenings	(17) 32.1%	(14) 45.2%
Saturday	(35) 66%	(17) 54.8%
Sunday	(23) 43.4%	(17) 54.8%



## Question 8

How much are you willing to invest into training?

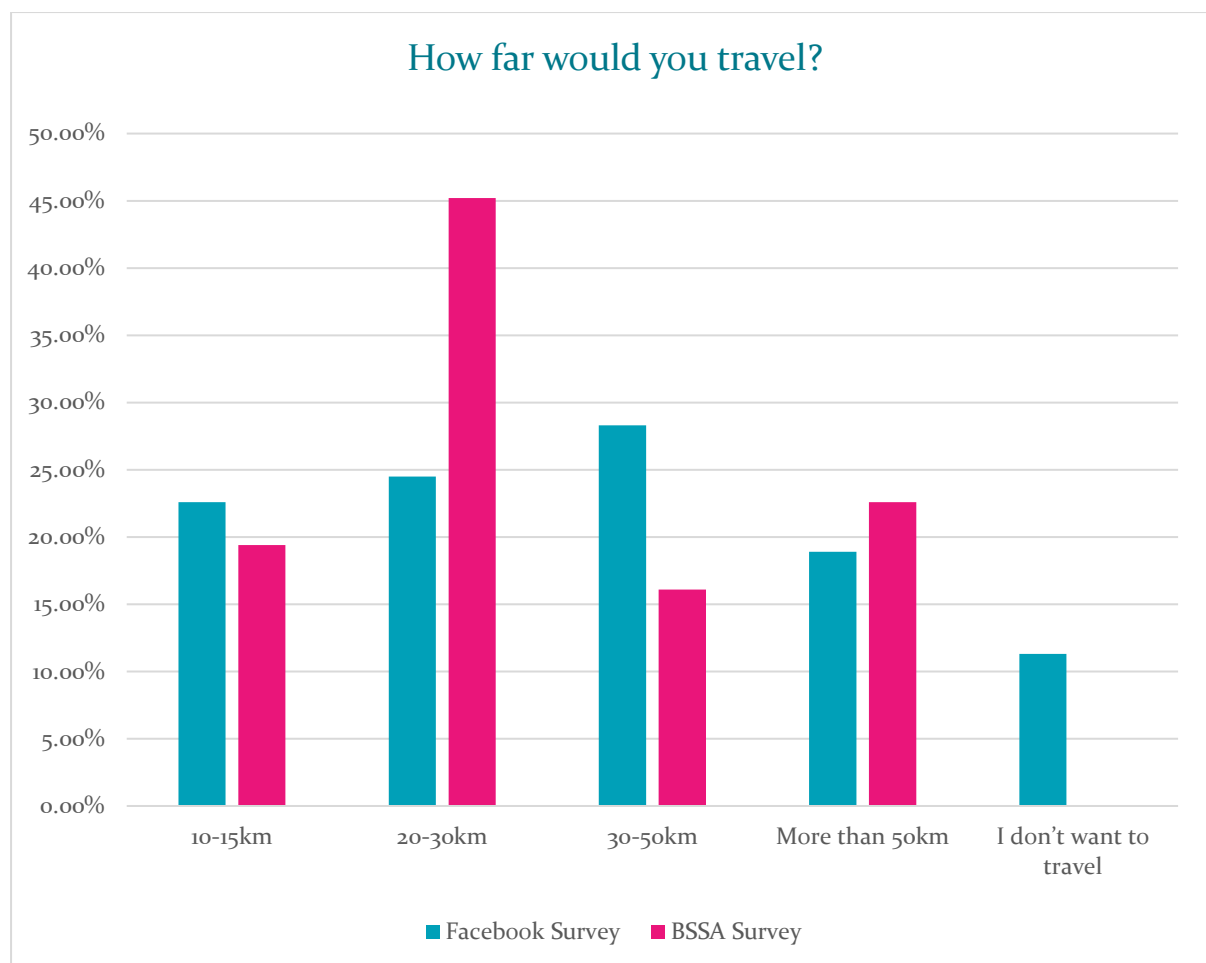
	Facebook Survey	BSSA Survey
Less than \$100	13 (24.5%)	8 (25.8%)
\$100-\$200	25 (47.2%)	12 (38.7%)
Up to \$500	12 (22.6%)	8 (25.8%)
More than \$500	5 (9.4%)	3 (9.7%)



## Question 9

How far would you be willing to travel for training?

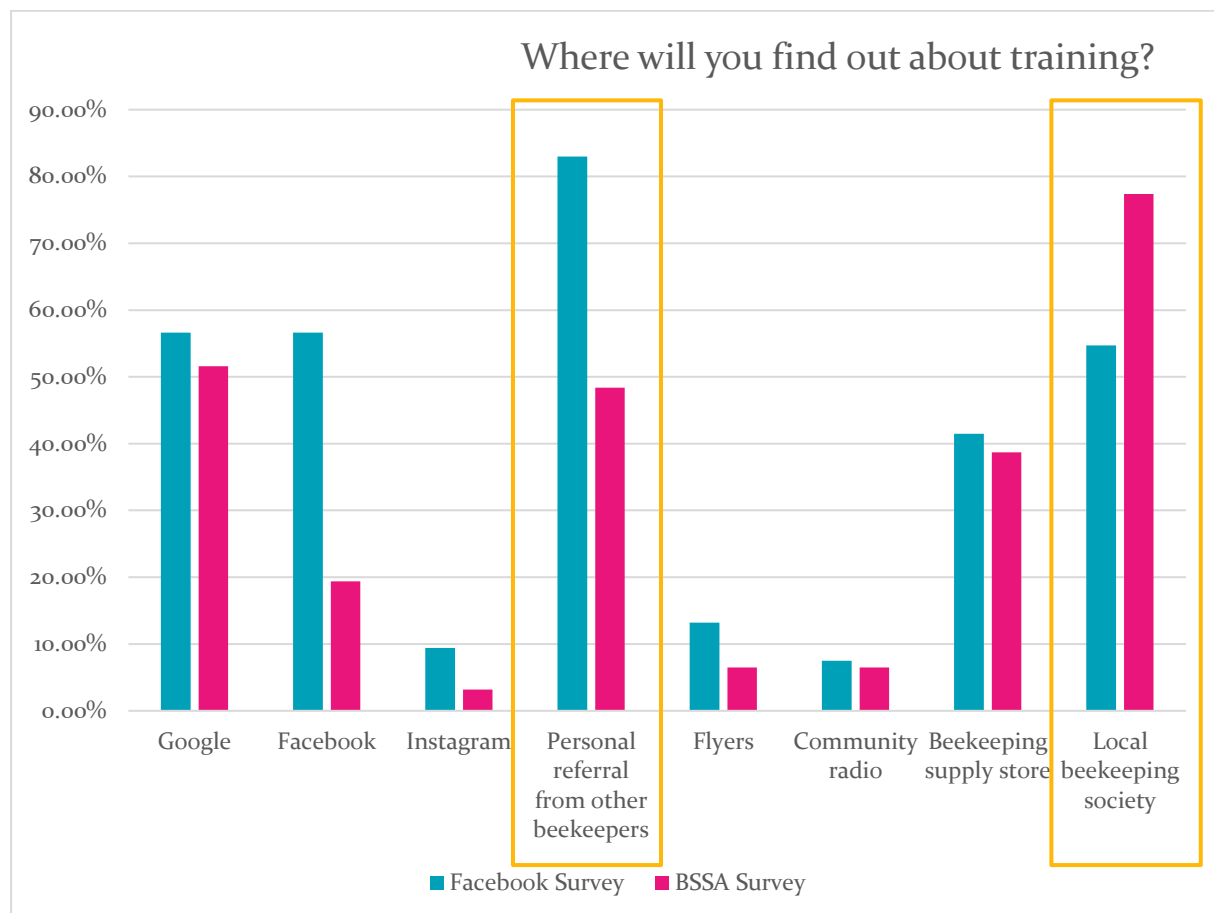
	Facebook Survey	BSSA Survey
10-15km	12 (22.6%)	6 (19.4%)
20-30km	13 (24.5%)	14 (45.2%)
30-50km	15 (28.3%)	5 (16.1%)
More than 50km	10 (18.9%)	7 (22.6%)
I don't want to travel	6 (11.3%)	0



## Question 10

Where would you look to find training courses?

	Facebook Survey	BSSA Survey
Google	30 (56.6%)	16 (51.6%)
Facebook	30 (56.6%)	6 (19.4%)
Instagram	5 (9.4%)	1 (3.2%)
Personal referral from other beekeepers	44 (83%)	15 (48.4%)
Flyers	7 (13.2%)	2 (6.5%)
Community radio	4 (7.5%)	2 (6.5%)
Beekeeping supply store	22 (41.5%)	12 (38.7%)
Local beekeeping society	29 (54.7%)	24 (77.4%)
Other	Beekeeping newsletter YouTube Tafe Word of Mouth	YouTube Commercial Beekeepers WEA



## Question 11\*

How many hives do you own and/or manage?

No of Hives	Facebook Survey	BSSA Survey
0	This question was not available in the Facebook survey	6
1		6
2		13
3		2
4		1
5		1
14		1
16		1

## Question 12\*

Please enter your postcode

	Facebook Survey	BSSA Survey
South Australia	17	31
Western Australia	2	
New South Wales/ACT	7	
Victoria	5	
Queensland	5	
Tasmania	11	
NT	0	
International	3	
Did not answer	3	

Results from the remaining two questions are not directly related to the survey and therefore not included in the report for confidentiality purposes.

## Question 13\*

Please tick the relevant boxes below

## Question 14

Please leave your full name and surname, and email address below

## Appendix A

### Verbatim responses to question 3

*Comments that identified individuals or organisations were edited.  
Comments expressing a personal experience (positive or negative) were removed.*

*Profanity was removed.*

*Grammar and spelling was not edited.*

An option for one-on-one q&a, checking hives, etc...even if virtual visits.
Bee breeding
Bee nutrition
Better understanding of how to re queen a hive.
Disease awareness and management.
Expected annual activity for hive. What to watch out for
Follow up mentorship or further training in more advanced management techniques
Have a advance level course too
Honey harvesting and extraction
I was lucky to participate in a 12-month training program but most on offer are only 1 or 2 days
A longer program spread across the season with hands on learning opportunities was excellent
I've been lucky enough to be involved in commercial operations, but I would love to see backyard beekeepers give queen breeding a whirl. It's not hard to graft and will give them a better understanding of their hives and enhance their knowledge of bees.
It was just an overview course so not enough info for confidence. Needed more hands on work.
I've done a couple – an introductory course of 4 sessions, and the year long monthly program. Both were helpful but I think longer term is necessary so you get to encounter different things in your own hives and relate them to your learning.
More practical
More bee biosecurity training
More handling of frames for the students
More hands on experience on inspections and swarm prevention
More hands on training
More hands on
More practical hands on experience with bees
More time to practice what was taught
More training on manipulation of the frames
Practical experience



Swarm management, queen breeding.
The 12-month program was outstanding – timely, ongoing support and creation of a friendly, non-judgemental community where there are no dumb questions, wonderful women supporting each other face to face and online.
The sessions I attended covered everything I needed to know, but refresher follow ups would be good to validate all learning
Visual how to's e.g. find a queen on a frame, stop cross bracing, ensure frames are filled flat rather than irregular so cannot decap with hot knife, how to extract without centrifuge. Recovering wax.
Warnings about unusual weather and support to know what to do
We had some hands-on time which was great, but I really could have done with another couple of hours (on a different day).
Feeding bees in winter
More information on hive inspections
Field trips
More emphasis on floral sources
More field work, requiring longer duration (over a longer time period).
All the training was good and precise, but too short.
More hands on hive work.
More practical exercises and collaborative opportunities with other beekeepers
More practical hands on guidance
More practical included
More practical sessions
Notes from the trainer are always welcome. This helps to follow up on recommended reference material and some of the key points from the training.
Practical basics, catch a swarm etc.
Smaller groups
The training I did was of a very high standard, so it answered all my questions and gave me a lot more confidence in handling my hives.
Wax, propolis processing, queen rearing
When to renew the Queen and how to go about it
You need to be trained on the job. With bees flying around you and hampering your efficiency.