

SOCIETY OF BIOLOGY DEGREE ACCREDITATION PROGRAMME



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With a more market-based approach to university finance, students are likely to become increasingly demanding in return for the investment they make in their education. Among other things, their interest in employability will grow. The Society of Biology is keen to enable students to make informed choices and to be more certain of the employability prospects they can expect from their university education. This has been one of the contributing factors to the development of the Society of Biology's Degree Accreditation Programme for the biosciences.

With a strong emphasis on academic rigor and research experience, the Society's Accreditation Programme is specific in its aims:

- to highlight degrees that provide graduates with the skills and experience required to progress to employment in academic or industrial research, and

- to ensure a pipeline of skilled graduates into areas of particular national need and international importance.

The rigorous assessment procedure will recognise outstanding courses across the UK that focus not only on core knowledge but also on experimental and analytical skills. The accreditation criteria put a strong emphasis on academic excellence and, critically, time spent in an active research environment. We recognise that higher-level research skills can only be gained through a period of practice, and so the scheme focuses on four year undergraduate degrees with substantial research placements either in academic or industrial research groups, eg a BSc with Year in Industry course or Integrated Masters programme.

Through the Accreditation Programme we hope to highlight and share best practice and we see that accreditation has the potential to drive up the already high standards of teaching and learning in biology higher education, cementing the UK's position as a leader in life science training and research.

This scheme doesn't only stand to benefit students. The Society of Biology has consulted a full range of stakeholders in the biosciences, including academics and universities, industry, learned societies, funding bodies, sector skills councils and students. A survey carried out by the Society of Biology¹ indicated that employers ranked 'lack of work experience' as the main reason for not employing a graduate with a BSc or MSc qualification.

The Accreditation Programme will enable employers in both industry and academia to better identify graduates with the required research experience, skills and interest. Sarah Jones of the Association of British Pharmaceutical Industry, said: 'We believe that accreditation of bioscience degrees will enable employers to feel confident that recruits from UK universities will have the skills and knowledge required to make substantial contributions to the research and development of new medicines'. The Accreditation Programme also benefits employers by targeting bioscience disciplines where reports^{2,3} have highlighted national graduate skills gaps. The project has the backing of the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) and the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC), and was highlighted in HM Treasury's Plan for Growth⁴ as a key strategy for growth of UK industry.

In June 2011, the Society launched a pilot of the Accreditation Programme, initially focusing on two key areas of graduate skill shortages - biochemistry and *in vivo* (animal) sciences. The pilot is due to finish in February 2012 and the degree courses which have successfully achieved accreditation will be announced at an award ceremony on the 20 March in the Members' Dining Room, 4-6pm. The first students will graduate from accredited degrees in summer 2012. This will help ensure that skills demands are better met in both academia and industry, and

supports the Government's recommendations for a growth agenda.

Since the early stages of development of the Accreditation Programme, we have received much interest from higher education institutes in taking part. Following a successful outcome from the pilot, we will open the scheme to all UK higher education institutions in 2012. In-built flexibility ensures that the Accreditation Programme also remains inclusive of a range of the bioscience disciplines, and we aim to expand it into a wider range of strategically important research disciplines with identified skill shortages in the future, covering a wide range of the biosciences.

For more information please visit www.societyofbiology.org/education/hei/accreditation.

We look forward to celebrating the announcement of the first courses to be awarded Accreditation by the Society of Biology in March 2012.

Footnotes

1 Report of the 2010 Industry survey on bioscience graduates, Society of Biology (2011) <http://www.societyofbiology.org/documents/view/832>

2 Skills needs for biomedical research, ABPI (2008) <http://www.abpi.org.uk/our-work/library/industry/Pages/skills-biomedical-research.aspx>

3 Life Sciences and Pharmaceuticals: A Future Skills Review with Recommendations to Sustain Growth in Emerging Technologies, Semta, Cogent, Skills for Health (2010) <http://www.cogent-ssc.com/research/Publications/LSPReport.pdf>

4 Plan for Growth, HM Treasury (2011) - http://cdn.hm-treasury.gov.uk/2011_budget_growth.pdf