The
Higher
Education
Academy

CENTRE FOR
bioscience

## Define employability in the context of teaching bioscience
(small group discussion and plenary).

The Forum groups identified a number of elements that might be encompassed by a definition, namely, that to be employable a graduate should be able to demonstrate:

- In-depth subject knowledge. This was particularly emphasised by employer delegates who suggested that the knowledge base and intellectual skills demonstrated by in-depth study could be at threat if the course curriculum was too broad and included non-science subject
- Knowledge of the real world – the working world – gained especially from work experience
- Skills of various kinds including: subject specific skills. This could include the ability to use specified scientific techniques and methods;
- generic skills, e.g. communication, team-working and problem solving. Although vital for generalist, i.e. non-technical, careers it was emphasised by employer delegates that these were as important as scientific subject knowledge for science based work
- professional, i.e. the ability to work within professionally accepted guide-lines, e.g. being able to work as a scientist within the framework of Good Laboratory Practice and Good Clinical Practice. This was regarded as especially important by academic staff delegates who were preparing students for work in particular professions, e.g. the health sciences such as biomedical science;
- career management skills, referred to as the ability to secure suitable "graduate level" employment in any career and to manage a career spanning a number of employers and possible changes in occupations
- Personal attributes, e.g. self-confidence, self-awareness ("self-reflectiveness"), flexibility and emotional intelligence;
- Personal attitudes (there was debate about the differences between attributes and attitudes).

The beneficiaries of good employability should include not only individual graduates but employers who should be able to expect "excellent" performance from their graduate recruits.

Keeping it as simple as possible, a definition of employability for bioscientists that encapsulates these elements is:

> **"Employability is a combination of in-depth subject knowledge, work awareness, subject specific, generic and career management skills, and personal attributes and attitudes that enable a student to secure suitable employment and perform excellently throughout a career spanning a range of employers and occupations"**