

How can a bioscience department best steer the student experience to enhance employability?

small group discussion and plenary

The Forum groups made a number of proposals for consideration by a bioscience department. These were debated in plenary.

General Advice

The steer towards enhancing employability should start very early in a course, in the first year, and should be embedded. It should be a common thread running through teaching and student support activities and should apply to the whole student experience, from studies to extra-curricular activities and work experience. It would be helpful to appoint an employability coordinator to oversee the process, ensure a joined-up approach and support its continuing development. It is important to work closely with other campus agencies, especially the careers service and, where they exist, skills and employability units.

Student Ownership

Students should be encouraged to take responsibility for developing their own employability and provided with the skills to do this. Assessed skills development modules could be offered. Within a personal development planning framework they should be encouraged to engage in skills profiling, planning and reflection. This will help them with career relevant decisions such as module choices and career decision making. Tutor support in this process is very important

Work Awareness

Departments could help to make students more aware of graduate career options and the nature of occupations by harnessing existing study activities. Visiting speakers should be asked to include information about their careers and employment sector in their presentations. Career case studies and graduates' CVs could be collected and made available to students. Work experience, especially curriculum linked and supported by departments is regarded as important. This could be supplemented by work shadowing opportunities and real work related case studies. Students should be encouraged to share their experiences of work with their peers through tutor supported group activities. The importance of accessing careers information through their careers service was stressed. There was a suggestion that academic staff could develop their own work awareness by undertaking work placements but some delegates thought this to be unworkable.

Labour Market Information

Although students could build labour market awareness through campus information events and work experience, this could be achieved more thoroughly by bring in speakers. Employer representatives could perhaps be persuaded to do this, but carefully selected recruitment agencies might be better placed to offer the necessary objective and comprehensive coverage needed. Careers services, of course, are also usually able to provide this.