



Introduction

For a number of years we have developed and supported a network of named Bioscience Representatives ('Reps') in bioscience units. This network was created largely to help the Centre stay in touch with changing practice in the large number of departments and institutions we support, inform us of important issues in learning and teaching, identify how we may be able to support staff in addressing these needs and possibly, identify when changes in higher education policy may be indicated or desirable. In addition, the network provides us with a means of communicating with staff not only currently engaged with the Centre, but also those who may be unaware of the Centre or have yet to register their details with us.

The Centre's interaction with individual Reps varies greatly with some very active and proactive in their role and a number who are rather more reactive and possibly less active overall (although we may not be fully aware of their activities). Distribution of mail from the Centre is only intended to be a part of what being a Rep is all about; which is why, wherever possible, we seek to identify bioscience academics for the task. Reps too, will have a range of expectations of what they signed up to and what they are in a position to contribute to and gain from the role. Therefore we would like to agree with Reps a shared view of the expectations and responsibilities of all members of the Reps Network (including the roles of Centre staff).

While the Reps network clearly has benefit to the Centre (although we also believe this can be further enhanced) we are not sure if the perceived benefits are being experienced by all members. One of the key benefits we believe should arise from being a Rep is that their own work will be well supported by being fully informed and having a sound awareness of Centre activities and aspirations. We therefore want to clarify with Reps what they believe are the personal and departmental advantages to participation in the Reps network and determine how these can be consistently experienced or improved for all Reps.

We are also unclear what value the bioscience community places on the role of Reps, whether by the Rep's line manager, colleagues or other members of the bioscience learning and teaching community. Equally, each Rep and the work they do in association with the Centre should be recognised and valued by their Department and or Institution. Our perception is the role of Reps may need to be better promoted and publicised across the bioscience learning and teaching network.

The Reps network is very important to the work of the Centre and the contributions made by Reps are highly valued by Centre staff. We fully appreciate that individuals who volunteer (or are volunteered) as Reps are already busy people and are very aware of the need to ensure the network runs smoothly and effectively with the time burden on Reps kept to a minimum. We also feel the original purpose of the Reps network may have been lost and we need to clarify the roles of all involved (including the role of Centre staff in responding to the needs of Reps and their colleagues). Therefore we would like to use the opportunity of the Reps Forum to begin to assess the functioning of the Reps Network to ensure at the end of this review all involved are getting the most from their contribution.

To answer the above questions and clearly develop, agree and communicate the function of the Reps network (and the roles of those within the network) we present the following discussion paper.

Discussion Paper

The Reps Network is a key element of the national bioscience learning and teaching network developed by the Centre. The network needs to possess strong communication channels to and from the Centre (and at times independent of the Centre) and operate without the need for continuous direction and input from Centre staff. A successful Reps Network will consist of a clearly identifiable group of active individuals, with a clear, shared purpose and possibly a defined set of minimum activities. Below is an outline of current practice followed by suggestions aimed at:

- *Improving two-way communication, cross-institutional communication and communication across the wider bioscience learning and teaching network*
- *Better recognising and rewarding the role of Rep*

Current Centre for Bioscience responsibilities/activities:

- Keep all Reps informed of Centre activities via email and periodic mailings.
- Periodically send Reps printed materials and ask for these to be distributed to colleagues (where possible targeting those individuals we are not in contact with)
- Supply printed materials for notice boards, and wherever possible supply additional materials and copies of publications upon request
- Arrange an annual get together (Forum) to which all Bioscience Representatives and key contacts will be invited. This will take place each September
- Invite Reps to provide feedback on Centre activities

Suggestions for future Centre for Bioscience responsibilities/activities:

- Publish a list of mailings and other instances of community-wide communication on our web site so that Reps are aware of the direct contact we have with colleagues in their institution
- The Centre acknowledges that to date it has not been straightforward for Reps to identify the individuals we are in direct contact with. In due course we will periodically send each Rep a list of the individuals from their institution that we are in contact with (where permission has been granted)
- Invite Reps to share learning and teaching news, practice, issues from their department/unit
- Seek to ensure that Heads of Department (or equivalents) and other senior staff in universities are aware of and understand the contributions of individual Reps (provided you have granted permission for us to discuss your role with staff from your institution)
- Seek information from new contacts and registered contacts (who register with the Centre, for events or apply for funding) on the impact of publicity circulated via the Reps network, and inform individual Reps of such findings.
- Explore the possibilities of providing a facility for Reps (and other Contacts) to update their details and provide us with other information or communicate with others via our web site.
- Prioritise enquiries from Reps
- Review possible rewards for Reps
- Host Bioscience Learning and Teaching Showcase (see later section)

Current Bioscience Rep responsibilities/activities:

- Acquaint themselves with the work of the Centre and its staff (where these are not already familiar), and maintain an active interest in changes and developments at the Centre
- Inform the Centre of (local) learning and teaching issues and resources

- Deliver/forward Centre communications to colleagues in their bioscience unit, and in particular to new staff and other individuals who aren't registered with the Centre for Bioscience
- Agree to their name (and contact email or telephone no.) being published by the Centre (<http://www.bioscience.heacademy.ac.uk/network/ltsnrep/deptconabout.htm#list> list to be updated Sep06, and regularly thereafter, as the need arises)
- Agree to become a member of the Centre's main jiscmail email list
- Agree to become a member of the Centre's Bioreps jiscmail list (to facilitate communication with the Centre and amongst the Reps network – assuming this will continue to exist and be used other than by the Centre)
- Agree to contact the Centre when they no longer wish to be a Rep and identify an eager replacement, if at all possible.

Suggestions for future Bioscience Rep responsibilities/activities:

- Agree to their details being shared with their institutions (via the Higher Education Academy) and/or other Subject Centres in the Subject Network
- Provide information and material for the Bioscience Learning and Teaching Showcase (see below)
- May volunteer to coordinate their own events (on a regional basis and direct/lead on the annual Reps Forum)
- May apply to act as a Regional Coordinator for one of the two Pilot Regional Bioscience Reps Networks

Bioscience Learning and Teaching Showcase

A large part of the Centre's work revolves around the identification and sharing of current and emerging practice, and over the last few years the Centre has collated a considerable bank of information and materials pertaining to bioscience learning and teaching. Over the next year or so, we will be taking various steps to make this resource more accessible to members of the bioscience learning and teaching community. One aspect of this work will be developing a showcase of bioscience learning and teaching practice, with links to pages detailing practice, developments, news etc. from every UK bioscience unit – we will be seeking **input from Reps** and other contacts to ensure this information is up to date and highlights the most important aspects of their colleagues/students activities. This 'News from the Network' will complement the current Centre for Bioscience news and promote the greater two-way communication the Centre is aiming to achieve.

Benefits of being a Bioscience Rep

Currently

- Part of an identifiable sub-community of bioscience learning and teaching professionals
- Teaching informed and supported by full knowledge of Centre's activities and resources
- Annual opportunity to attend an invitation-only event which brings together the Centre's key contacts to be wined and dined, and to discuss bioscience learning and teaching in an informal setting
- Access to greater networking and collaboration opportunities (over and above those available to the Centre's 'regular' contacts)*
- The opportunity to learn about and influence Centre activities in advance and to initiate and lead-on Bioscience Rep Network activities

Following suggested activities/responsibilities

- Increased visibility and profile/recognition across the Bioscience Learning and Teaching Community: e.g. the Centre plans to expand the Reps content on its web site

- Increased recognition within institutions (via Centre's contact with HODs or equivalents)
- Improved communication with others with learning and teaching interests
- The Centre is exploring other possible rewards for Reps (e.g. pay registration fee for those Reps who have a paper accepted at the next Science Learning and Teaching Conference)
- In future, it is possible that there may be limited financial remuneration for a select group of Reps who act as regional coordinators^Φ

***Establishing a regional dimension to the Reps Network**

The Centre has made a commitment (in its 2006/07 operational plan) to the piloting of two regional Reps networks. We envisage such regional networks will facilitate greater networking amongst Reps and create better, yet informal opportunities for the exchange of practice and ideas, and the identification of shared issues. Such groups (perhaps led by a Regional Coordinator) might also coordinate their own events (with support from the Centre) or meet periodically, either face to face or virtually, to discuss the work of the Centre and our activities or to issues affecting bioscience staff and students or policy matters, etc. Potentially such groups might also be able to bid for funding for self-directed activities provided these were in line with the aims of the Centre and the Reps Network.

^ΦThe role of Regional Coordinators has yet to be decided: It is likely the Centre would award the role to a small number of individuals, following an application or nomination process.

Constructive Criticism and Feedback

As a Rep, we would genuinely value your comments on what you have just read and also invite your response to the following questions:

1. What are your aspirations for the Reps Network?
2. Do you consider there to be other advantages or disadvantages to being a Rep?
3. Are there other non-financial incentives the Centre should consider offering to Reps?
4. Is there anything else the Centre could do to make things easier for Reps?
5. Is there anything more the Centre should do to improve communication in either direction?
6. Is there anything else the Centre might do to improve the Reps Network?
7. Any other comments?