

Skyblue Evaluation Summary (précis)

Introduction

The Advanced Degree Accreditation Programme was initiated by the Royal Society of Biology in October 2012 with co-investment from the UK Commission for Employment and Skills. Advanced Accreditation places a strong emphasis on providing students with industry experience and learning outcomes that enhance their employability.

HEIs are increasingly being benchmarked on graduate employability, and Advanced Accreditation has provided a framework to improve this metric. For the leading HEIs, Advanced Accreditation could be seen as an additional badge of quality gained through the external validation of already strong degree programmes. For the newer HEIs in this space, scope exists to use Advanced Accreditation to design new programmes, with industry input, to differentiate themselves in the marketplace.

To date over 160 programmes have been accredited, and there is evidence that HEIs are also designing new degree programmes to meet the Advanced Accreditation criteria in the future. They expect Advanced Accreditation to be popular with students, particularly those from overseas or those from more disadvantaged backgrounds who place a key emphasis on future employability.

Impacts

Influencing industry recruitment practices is an enormous task, and Degree Accreditation can, at best, only be one additional criteria for employers to take into account during candidate selection. Nevertheless, early evidence indicates that employer's awareness of Advanced Degree Accreditation is increasing. Employers do not lack applicants for their roles, but have typically reported that graduates lack the skills necessary for the role. Advanced Degree Accreditation seeks to address such recruitment challenges. Seven in ten HEIs expect that Degree Accreditation will lead to higher quality applicants who may, in time, become high quality bioscience employees.

Knowledge of the benefits of Advanced Accreditation is starting to reach the sector's estimated 4,500 employers. Marketing the benefits of Advanced Accreditation is a significant task and, to date, over 150 organisations have been contacted in a targeted strategy to access the key industry influencers. The majority of employers who have engaged with the programme (over 90%) have been supportive of the concept of Advanced Accreditation. A recent independent evaluation estimated a training cost saving of over £400 for every graduate who arrives in the workplace equipped with key laboratory skills. If the Society's target of producing 4,500 graduates is achieved, this represents a potential cost saving of over £2 million. Over a longer time period, it will be possible to compare the employability of graduates from Accredited programmes to other graduates. The programme of engagement is ongoing, and accredited HEIs and graduates are also being encouraged to promote Advanced Accreditation.

A plan to engage students and recent Advanced Accredited graduates is in place. The accreditation team is working with HEIs to speak with students, and organise events that bring employers together with graduates (which are proving to be popular with both employers and graduates).

Summary

The Royal Society of Biology has shown strong leadership and organisation to work effectively with the academic community to pilot, define and execute the Advanced Degree Accreditation Programme. Advanced Accreditation has created a strong infrastructure to recognise the degree programmes that develop graduates with well-rounded research and employability skills.

Building on this success, a recent pilot of accreditation for three-year degree programmes (four years in Scotland) has demonstrated the scope of Accreditation to access a far greater pool of bioscience degree programmes. With HEIs often acknowledging the challenges of maintaining strong industry links, the Royal Society of Biology has brought together graduates, HEIs and employers in a series of well received events.