

Accreditation Frequently Asked Questions

What types of project are acceptable for accreditation?

A wide range of projects are acceptable, they do not all have to be based in a laboratory or field. But projects must have a research objective and include analysis of data; literature review projects do not meet the criteria. For further information see Guidance Note 1 and Appendix B of the Accreditation Handbook.

Can project work be carried out in teams?

Projects can be carried out in a team setting but the students must generate their own data and the report must be their own. Group projects where there is one set of data and a single report do not meet the criteria. For further information see Guidance Note 1 and Appendix B of the Accreditation Handbook.

Does the project need to be relevant to the degree title?

Yes. For awards with a very general title, such as “Biosciences” then there will be potentially a wide range of projects, but for very specific awards such as “Pharmacology” the Society would expect all graduates to have done a pharmacology project. But this does not necessarily mean it has to be a laboratory pharmacology project. See Guidance Note 1 and Appendix B of the Accreditation Handbook.

Is there a minimum credit value required for the final year project?

The criteria state that the project must be substantial, that is 30 credits or more. For further information see Guidance Note 1 and Appendix B of the Accreditation Handbook.

Does the project have to be in the final year?

No. The project must be level 6 (level 10 in Scotland) which is why the term “final year” is often used, but there may be cases where a student has some study in the academic year following the project (e.g. as a part-time student or due to personal circumstances)

Can joint honours awards be accredited?

Yes, if the biosciences component meets the criteria; the project must be in the biosciences.

Is a placement year required?

No. The HEI may wish to consider Advanced Accreditation for programmes with a placement year in a research environment.

Can applications for Accreditation and Advanced Accreditation be covered in the same visit?

No, the criteria and panel members differ. Separate visits and panels are required but the Society will endeavour to put the visits on consecutive days if required.

If we submit more than one award or several separate routes for accreditation, is there still one visit?

Yes, the Society will assess all undergraduate degrees at the same time. However the Society will only consider one type of accreditation in a single visit (Accreditation and Advanced Accreditation are assessed separately).

Can Biomedical Sciences degrees be accredited by the Society of Biology?

Yes, providing they meet the Society's criteria. If a degree already has IBMS accreditation then it will meet IBMS criteria which differ from the Society of Biology's criteria. It might not be possible to gain joint accreditation without minor amendments to the programme (e.g. by reference to the Biosciences Benchmark Statement not just the Biomedical Sciences Benchmark Statement). For example some reference in the programme to biodiversity and evolution is a requirement of Society accreditation but is not required for IBMS accreditation.

Degree programmes may come under several subject specific criteria, how does the Society cope with that on a visit?

We expect the application to clearly present the evidence that the subject specific learning outcomes are met, and the Society put a team together that can cover all of the areas.

We may have a broad biology degree or a multi-disciplinary degree that covers more than one subject specific area and it may be that none of them fully fit into a category for the Expression of Interest form?

It helps if you can indicate to us the range of subject matter in the programme(s); you can tick more than one box on the form.

What type of conditions and recommendations do you set and what time scale is set for compliance?

These can cover any criterion that is not met. They may include aspects of degree regulations, assessment strategy, learning outcomes, omissions within certain named routes etc. The conditions normally need to be met within six weeks, but ratification by formal academic quality committees does not need to be within this timescale if the dates of the committee meetings fall outside this timescale.

Can new degree programmes be put forward that have no current graduates?

Yes, this is interim accreditation see Appendix F in the Accreditation Handbook.

What do the students gain by graduating from an accredited degree?

They have the confidence in knowing that they have studied a course that meets a set of criteria determined by bioscience professionals independent of the University where they have studied, informed by employers and rigorously applied in the accreditation process.

They are able to become Members of the Society of Biology and join associated networks. Graduates from Accredited programmes will receive one year's free membership of the Society; thereby opening up these networks at the time when they are perhaps applying for their first employment.

Membership of the Society gives students and graduates a feeling of belonging to a wide community of biologists, interested in biology for its own sake but also to contribute their knowledge and skills to help meet challenges such as world health care, climate change and loss of biodiversity.

The annual fee is related to the number of programmes accredited, how do you define a programme?

The Society defines a programme as a coherent learning experience followed by an individual, the successful completion of which results in the conferment of a named HE award. The Society aims to have an open and fair pricing policy; we advise that you contact the Accreditation Manager at the Society in order to obtain advice and a quotation on Society fees.

Why do the accreditation criteria include physics?

The criteria are not highly prescriptive, the requirement for, and content of physics will vary greatly from degree to degree. Many biological processes can be better described if there is an understanding of physical principles (e.g. photosynthesis, electrophysiology etc.). Employers have told us that they wish to see graduates who have some understanding of the underlying physical science and mathematical principles. Also it is the case that many undergraduates enter university with no post 16 education in physical sciences. The degree course needs therefore to provide the appropriate background science in the context of the biology being studied.

If a programme gains accreditation and then there are major changes to the programme, what is the process for retaining ongoing accreditation?

The Society operates a "light touch" approach, the HEI informs us of the anticipated changes (it helps if this is as soon as possible) and keep up informed. We will advise as necessary. A visit to the HEI is unlikely to be necessary.

Does the Society require a specific number of contact hours to deliver technical skills?

No. The course must have acquisition of technical skill (at sufficient depth and appropriateness to the discipline in order to meet the criteria) as a learning outcome (and the students must be assessed) but the principle is that it is outcomes based not time dependent.

We run programmes overseas that are identical to our UK programmes, are the overseas programmes also eligible for accreditation?

Yes, contact the Accreditation Manager if you are seeking accreditation of overseas franchises.

How does accreditation scheme fit with the credit transfer system (e.g. direct entry at higher levels, student exchange etc.), will those students coming onto the courses still be eligible as graduating from an accredited course?

Yes, but the HEI will need to demonstrate how these graduates have met the criteria.

What are the accreditation requirements with respect to equality, diversity and equal opportunities?

For accreditation the assessment panel will require confirmation that there is an up to date equality and diversity policy. The panel may ask to see the policy and may ask questions (during the accreditation visit or at re-accreditation) about how it is implemented. The HEI applies their policy as it sees fit, the Society does not make judgements about individual students. We expect the HEI to make realistic, practical and fair judgements in knowledge of the relevant facts and to apply its policies in order to come to fair and just decisions about both able and disabled students.