

**Statement on the *Wakeham review of STEM degree
provision and graduate employability***

July 2016

The Biochemical Society welcomes Sir William Wakeham's review of STEM degree provision and graduate employability, which is a step forward in assessing the barriers STEM graduates face and how they might be overcome.

Prof. Steve Busby, Chair of the Biochemical Society Executive Committee, commented: 'The review highlights important issues that the UK needs to get right, as the bio economy grows. Looking forward, the UK needs to build on its amazing contribution to basic biology, in order to recapture bio markets, and training and skills are clearly central to achieving this.'

We support the Review's call for better data and the interrogation of the data at detailed discipline level. The biological sciences subject area used in the Wakeham Review is extremely broad and diverse, in both the materials taught and the career choices that students might make on graduation. As a result, the Wakeham Review is unlikely to truly reflect the employment outcomes for biochemistry/molecular bioscience graduates. We would recommend that the disciplines within this group are looked at separately.

We are concerned about a very short timescale (6 months) to sample employment statistics for molecular biosciences graduates, many of whom move on to postgraduate qualifications and other training specifically aimed at particular career pathways. We believe that the 3.5 years should perhaps be extended up to 5 years to allow capture postgraduate students who have yet to graduate and take up employment.

Furthermore, the report acknowledged that it takes no account of gender differences. Biological sciences have a higher proportion of female graduates in comparison to other STEM areas. It is clear that gender influences both average salary and employment opportunities for graduates and this may play some part in the relatively poor performance of biological sciences in comparison to the other STEM areas within the Wakeham Review. We would recommend that this area is reviewed in more detail.

We are also concerned about a real lack of graduate level jobs for bioscience graduates across the UK. There has been a significant increase in the number of students enrolling on biological sciences course since 2007/8 yet there is little difference in the 2007/8 and 2013/14 unemployment rates. This is not the case for many of the other STEM areas in the report. Further investigation and more evidence are needed to determine the causes of the high numbers of biological science graduates in non-graduate and low paid unemployment.

Finally, the Society welcomes the use of Degree Accreditation programmes as means to encourage the industry's input into the curriculum. Accreditation programmes provide a valuable way to increase STEM graduate employability and develop a range of skills in addition to science training, such as, critical thinking, problem solving, communication and leadership skills.

We would welcome the opportunity to contribute to future discussions on STEM graduate employability, and in particular to feed into consultations and focus group work on bioscience graduates.