

Frequently Asked Questions for Accredited HEIs

Will our Accreditation be affected by reduced laboratory teaching?

Not directly, but the Accreditation Committee does consider the delivery of practical skills an essential element of a biosciences degrees – employers need graduates with these skills, and the practical learning environment has many educational benefits.

While we recognize the current difficulties, accredited degrees must continue to deliver on *Criterion 2: Demonstration of the acquisition of technical skills*. We understand that changes will need to be made but we still expect students to meet the learning outcome surrounding technical skills acquisition as normal.

What if we can't offer any/enough laboratory Capstone Experiences?

The RSB does not require the capstone experience to take place in a lab. In fact, we actively encourage the inclusion of a variety of 'dry' options for student. These may include projects focused on bioinformatics, science education, science communication and industrial problems.

The key part of *Criterion 1: The Capstone Experience* is that all project must include 'analysis, synthesis and critical evaluation' which can be achieved in all the above examples. The number of these 'dry' projects should be unlimited by COVID-19 and can be used if lab space is still limited.

What if we can't offer external Advanced Accreditation placements?

We recognise that many external companies may well be unable/unwilling to accept project students in the coming academic year. The criteria for the Period of Practice states that it needs to be 'an evaluated working experience in an appropriate environment' with a research component of at least 80 credits effort.

This allows for some flexibility and it is important to remember that the HEI itself would be considered an 'appropriate environment' that can be utilised. It might be that students are accepted into organisations and will have to work remotely for at least the start of the year.

This is not inherently a problem as they will still gain lots of useful experience in working life but it is very important that the idea of a 'working placement' is encouraged and students are not just left to carry out a project without sufficient support.

What if we can't offer Work Based Learning in our Foundation Degree?

Work Based Learning (WBL) is considered a defining characteristic of Foundation degrees by the RSB.

The Society's criteria for accreditation do not state a minimum period for WBL in order to encourage course teams to consider what is most appropriate to the programme and beneficial for the students, rather than simply meeting a minimum threshold. It may be that work placements have to occur remotely.

It is important to realise the important skills that can be learnt in such a situation and to not dismiss working remotely as an option.

We are delaying all the laboratory teaching until the second semester. Is that alright?

We understand that some delay might be unavoidable in certain circumstances. However, we would advise against this being the only way you approach technical skills teaching. Infection rates may come in waves so there is no guarantee the second semester will be unaffected by further lockdowns and restrictions.

We suggest employing the techniques described above on this page and in the papers so that your students are able to learn the technical skills they will need throughout the year, even if the pandemic persists into the new year.

Is it ok to delay teaching skills until future years?

Again this may work in some circumstances. However, it is important to consider timetabling and what sacrifices will have to be made in the future years to incorporate the delayed skills.

Clearly, this will not work for final year students but it is also important to consider whether the skills delayed may affect a student's understanding of future theoretical modules or their ability to go on a placement in following years.

Do you have a list of technical skills that we should prioritise?

RSB accreditation has never prescribed a list of technical skills that all students must learn. This is due to the variety of courses that fall under our remit; ecology students will need a different set of skills to a biomedical sciences student, for example. It is down to the HEI to decide on the skills their students should learn.

The teaching of these skills should be maintained as far as possible through COVID-19 though some prioritisation may have to occur as to which are taught in person and which may be taught theoretically.