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University's Biosciences degree awarded prestigious accreditation

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The University of Birmingham has been recognised by the Minister for Universities and Science, David Willetts, as it becomes one of the first universities in the UK to be awarded accreditation for its undergraduate Msci degree course in Biochemistry.

The recognition is part of a new degree Accreditation Programme developed by the Society of Biology to address the gap between the skills graduates possess and the skills employers need.

Rachel Lambert-Forsyth, Head of Education at the Society of Biology, explains*: "Our Accreditation programme is unique as the criteria are based on learning outcomes instead of providing a list of knowledge and techniques that students must be taught. It externally recognises academic excellence in the biosciences, highlighting degrees which educate the research and development leaders and innovators of the future."*

After hearing of the accreditation, Head of Biochemistry Programmes at the University of Birmingham, Dr Frank Michelangeli, commented: *"To be one of the first Biochemistry degree programmes to be awarded the status of accreditation by the Society of Biology is a real honour for us. It recognises the quality of our teaching in a research-led environment. Our students are not just taught about the latest developments in the molecular biosciences, they are also extensively trained in using the latest technologies and methods, which is essential in educating the next generation of research bio-scientists'.*

The Society of Biology's Accreditation Programme has been developed with the support of the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC), and the Department for Business Innovation & Skills, and through partnership between the Society of Biology, higher education, industry, and the Society of Biology's Member Organisations.

On 20th March the Rt. Hon. David Willets MP spoke at the Accreditation Award Ceremony, where four courses including the University of Birmingham's Msci in Biochemistry, gained accredited status. Congratulating the universities, Mr. Willets said: "*Well-informed students are at the heart of our higher education reforms. The Society of Biology's Accreditation Programme will signpost students to the degree courses recognised by industry as providing the essential scientific and practical skills needed for a career in life sciences. This will further support one of Britain's most important growth sectors."*

A lack of practical skills and experience of working in a research lab or field environment are common reasons stated by employers for not employing a graduate. As a result, the Accreditation criteria put a strong emphasis on academic excellence, research experience and, critically, time spent in an active research environment.

Dr Celia Caulcott, Director of Innovation and Skills at the BBSRC, said: *"We encourage universities to consider Society of Biology Accreditation as one way in which they can demonstrate, to students and industry partners, their commitment to providing the scientific training needed for future research and scientific careers."*

Rachel Lambert-Forsyth added: "*Through the Accreditation Programme we hope to ensure a pipeline of skilled graduates into research and innovation roles and further enhance the UK's position as a premier location to develop the bioscientists of the future."*

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