

ACTION PLAN IN RESPONSE TO FEEDBACK ON THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE: SESSION 2013-14

Faculty of Biological Sciences - School of Biology

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY																		
Aspect	National Student Survey						Undergraduate Programme Experience Survey						Postgraduate Programme Experience Survey					
	2012-13		2011-12		2010-11		2012-13		2011-12		2010-11		2012-13		2011-12		2010-11	
	School	Uni	School	Uni	School	Uni	School	Uni	School	Uni	School	Uni	School	Uni	School	Uni	School	Uni
Overall satisfaction	92	87	90	87	n/a	86	82	85	84	85	n/a	83	79	87	69	84	n/a	82
Teaching	91	89	91	90	n/a	88	82	85	86	84	n/a	83	84	87	76	85	n/a	84
Assessment & feedback	62	71	57	69	n/a	65	49	59	52	61	n/a	56	48	75	38	69	n/a	68
Academic support	81	81	75	80	n/a	77	67	72	75	72	n/a	68	82	85	72	80	n/a	79
Organisation & management	87	84	80	83	n/a	82	72	73	72	74	n/a	83	64	85	57	80	n/a	77
Learning resources	93	90	84	88	n/a	87	80	81	75	78	n/a	77	90	86	72	83	n/a	82
Personal development	79	81	77	81	n/a	78	67	69	58	68	n/a	65	66	77	55	71	n/a	70
Sector position		57/147		51/150		46/151												

Scores in each category are expressed as a percentage of the number of respondents who mostly or definitely agreed with a range of statements (score 4 or 5)
n/a where comparison with previous years is not possible

Impact of 2011-12 actions	<p>This is the first School of Biology action plan as previously separate action plans were written for the Faculty of Biological Sciences Undergraduate and Graduate Schools. As a consequence, prior listed actions were directed broadly across all programmes delivered within the Faculty and drawn up in response to feedback from students across the faculty. This action plan will be able to consider more specifically the highly integrated suite of Whole Organism Biology programmes delivered primarily within the School of Biology. This includes BScs and MBiols in Applied Biology, Biology, Ecology & Environmental Biology, Genetics and Zoology, as well as the MRes / MSc in Biodiversity and Conservation.</p> <p>The 2012-13 National Student Survey (NSS) scores for BSc programmes and the Postgraduate Programme Survey (PG PES) scores for the Masters have increased on the previous year in all categories, dramatically so for the Masters. This is a reflection of the effort applied by all university staff contributing to our programmes. While Assessment and Feedback scores remain rather low, these also saw strong improvement from 2011-12 suggesting some progress has been made. In contrast many of the scores for the Undergraduate Programme Survey (UG PES) have decreased, despite our efforts being directed equally across all years, and the aspects where improvement was seen in these scores we had identified as areas where we were still weak. These inconsistencies in the feedback from the students in these surveys are difficult to reconcile but we will continue to seek to improve the quality of our learning experience.</p>
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<p>Achievements in 2012-13</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Feedback quality and timeliness has been improved. The DSE has spoken to individual lecturers where a few specific failings in this regard have been identified. 2. The COPA has been further modified in minor ways in response to events that revealed further clarification was necessary. 3. The quantity and form of assessment in individual modules has been reduced after careful consideration of the merits of any change. 4. Employability was high on the agenda and numerous developments came into effect seeking to enhance our students' graduate prospects. 5. The Faculty Blended Learning Champion was identified from amongst School of Biology lecturers and is anticipated to enhance use of blended learning methods within the School of Biology.
<p>Main actions for 2013-14</p>	<p>The School of Biology will continue to focus on the following key areas:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Assessment and Feedback/feedforward – We will continue to monitor the timeliness of feedback using routine monitoring. We will continue to encourage staff to enhance the quality of feedback/feedforward provided. We will also challenge students both to identify how they have utilized feedback/feedforward in subsequent assessments and to consider what is appropriate feedback/feedforward at university level. 2. Employability - Personal Development and Employability Skills training will be further developed to better prepare students for graduate positions after Leeds. This will include emphasizing where within modules these training aspects are present, providing the new BIOL2223 Employment, Career planning and Professional Development for Life Scientists as an optional module and introducing mock interviews into tutorial modules. 3. Blended learning – We will further embed blended learning strategies into our teaching provision. Our newly appointed Blended Learning Champion will encourage this through presentations at School of Biology academic staff meetings. Podcasting will be trialled by more than half of our academic staff and other novel methods of blended learning will be explored. 4. Securing student input – The strong role of student representatives in discussions at School of Biology student::staff fora will be further enhanced by reminding, in good time, all our students both of these fora and the need to deliver their input via their representatives beforehand. Student input to the School of Biology action plan will also be sought from an early stage with discussion at a student::staff forum. Students will be reminded periodically that any issues they have should be brought to the attention of their tutor in a timely fashion, or directly to the attention of the DSE if this proves necessary. 5. Assessment activities – We will continue to consider whether the amount and form of assessment is appropriate within our modules. Consideration will also be given as to whether the range of assessments any individual experiences on a programme is appropriate.
<p>Summary of student involvement in the production of this Action Plan</p>	<p>A draft of this action plan, generated by the School of Biology Director of Student Education, was provided on 18Nov'13 to all student representatives for comment, prior to the student::staff forum on 22Nov'13. Programme leaders were also provided with the draft copy. No specific comments on the draft action plan were delivered before or at the forum. It was decided to allow an extra two weeks for comments and the draft action plan was resent to forum members. As there was still no response to the document, however, it was taken that all were happy with the action plan as drafted.</p>

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	School:	Faculty:	
Aspect	Progress with actions in response to 2011-12 feedback and indication of impact	Issues raised in 2012-13 feedback	Planned response in 2013-14
Overall satisfaction	<p><i>We concentrated efforts on:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continuing to improve the quality of feedback and introducing initiatives to make sure students engage with feedback (e.g. documented response to feed forward) • Monitoring and reviewing the impact of the feedback booklet and assessing whether this had addressed issues around student expectations of feedback. • Engaging our student representatives more and revisiting our local Partnership Expectations document. • Continuing to review and embed employability skills into the curriculum and to highlight the benefits to students of careers/employability based activities i.e. internships, research placements and reflection (living CV). • Continuing to encourage the use of innovative technologies to enhance the overall student experience. 	<p><i>The NSS results show an increase from 90% to 92% and the PG PES results show an increase from 69% to 79% in overall satisfaction from 2011-12. However, UG PES results have dropped, from 84% to 82% suggesting that Level 1 and Level 2 students are still not seeing/feeling an improvement from all the effort applied in the School. Effects of the FBS restructure ought to be dissipated by now, but the effects are still clearly apparent in the most severely affected area, namely Genetics, suggesting more minor effects in other areas also remain. With the influx of new lecturers this may provide the extra teaching capacity needed to improve student satisfaction further. Several students in the programme survey suggested that their feedback on programme / module delivery had had no influence for subsequent years. A similar sentiment was expressed in the additional / optional questions in the NSS.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Improving feedback scores in the NSS remains our top priority. Further efforts will be made to improve the depth of feedback provided and students will be engaged in discussions as to what can be expected in the way of feedback at university. <input type="checkbox"/> Our second priority will be further developing graduate employability prospects by incorporating more employability and employment application skills into the curricula. <input type="checkbox"/> Student input into the student::staff fora and feedback via tutors will be more specifically encouraged. Consequences of such feedback will be more widely disseminated. Student input into the School of Biology action plan will also be solicited. <input type="checkbox"/> Podcasting of lectures will be encouraged with the majority of our staff expected to provide some learning resources of this type.
Teaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> There has been quite substantial further discussion, during academic staff meetings, of the values of and concerns about following the rest of the faculty in introducing podcasting of our lectures. In recent meetings the balance of opinion has shifted to a willingness to try this technology for 2013/14. • The School of Biology was already providing examination script 'exemplars' for students through module specific pages in the VLE, tutorial seminars and elsewhere, to enhance clarity of assessment expectation. Therefore this action, 	<p><i>The PG PES showed an increase of 6%, NSS results held steady at 91% but there was a drop of 4% in the UG PES score. This drop could reflect the desire of students at more junior levels for podcasting of lectures that students on other programmes in the faculty are provided with.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> The majority of academic staff do plan to try podcasting for 2013/14. To that end recording devices have been purchased for all lecturers. <input type="checkbox"/> The Blended Learning Champion will give regular presentations at the School of Biology academic staff meetings to further develop use of blended learning in our modules. • Feedback on the level 5 Advanced GIS module has been discussed with the module manager. (This is an external module taught by Geography). Some changes have been made to the Introduction to GIS module to aid students'

	<p><i>listed in the 2011/12 Faculty Action Plan, was not relevant here.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Staff were encouraged to respond to student enquiries in a timely manner. This included the DSE speaking to some lecturers individually when students had raised specific concerns.</i> • <i>Staff have been encouraged to embed blended learning strategies into modules and programmes. A faculty level blended learning officer has been appointed and the faculty academic identified as the “Blended Learning Champion” is from the School of Biology.</i> • <i>Specific changes to the content, delivery and organisation of the level 5 Conservation Genetics module were implemented and monitored.</i> 		<p><i>preparation for the Advanced module.</i></p>
<p>Assessment and feedback</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ <i>The Undergraduate School and Graduate School continued to monitor coursework and examination marking. The few instances where staff failed to comply with quality and timeliness of feedback / marking were reported to the DSE who then spoke with the staff concerned.</i> • <i>The refinements in the qualitative marking criteria as presented in the COPA continue to be considered but only minor changes were felt needed this year.</i> • <i>Tutors were encouraged to engage students in tutorials with the feedback they have received and to challenge students to reflect on how they have interacted with the feedback / feedforward.</i> • <i>Module managers have been encouraged to consider the number and type of assessments in their modules. Staff and students are keen to reduce the amount of assessment, while maintaining the high academic standards we set ourselves.</i> • <i>We undertook a comprehensive review of assessments across the Biodiversity & Conservation programmes, including assessment types and number, distribution of assessment deadlines, guidelines provided to students,</i> 	<p><i>This area has seen a dramatic increase of 5% in student satisfaction in the NSS results and of 10% in the PG PES and yet UG PES results have declined by 3%. The explanation for this difference in opinion is not apparent as our substantial efforts to improve on feedback and assessment have been made equally at all levels. Scheduled feedback surgeries were introduced at Masters level. However, even when just considering the PG PES and NSS scores, there is still substantial room for improvement. Issues continue to arise regarding the timeliness and quality of feedback and it is clear that a single issue on one particular module can influence the students’ perspectives of the entire provision.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ <i>Feedback remains our primary concern, based on the NSS scores, although Biology students do appear to have high expectations, in this regard, across the country.</i> □ <i>All academic staff are encouraged to seek to provide even more detailed feedback using alternative methods where this might be more effective.</i> □ <i>The feedback return target has been changed from 3 teaching weeks to 3 working weeks to speed up provision of feedback.</i> □ <i>As virtually all feedback/marking is provided by the target set by the Faculty, this achievement is to be maintained although perfection is aimed for.</i> □ <i>Tutors are encouraged to discuss with their tutees what is appropriate for university level feedback to students. This is also to be raised by programme leaders at induction presentations, and by the DSE at the introduction to the NSS.</i> □ <i>Programme leaders are to consider the balance of assessment methods taken by their students according to the optional module choices made.</i> □ <i>The mode of assessments specific to the MBIols will be reviewed as these programmes are further established.</i>

	<p>marking and criteria and form of feedback. We revised the project marking criteria and consolidated the oral presentation marking scheme.</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We have redistributed the assessment deadlines for the Masters programmes and discussed with students about managing multiple assessment deadlines when these occur. • Guidelines for each assessment type within the Masters programmes will be published as part of the module outlines. • We will continue to review our level 5 marking criteria and develop these for non-standard assessment types.
<p>Academic support</p>	<p>□ The School continued to use the LfL web forms as part of the Personal Tutorial system.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The School continued to develop and embed career planning at an earlier stage in the curriculum to enhance student employability. All BSc/MBiol programmes offered the new Faculty wide module BIOL1223 Career and Professional Development for Life Scientists as an option. Employability was specifically addressed in the tutorial modules at levels 1 and 2 taken by all students. • We continued to encourage staff to respond to student enquiries in a timely manner. The DSE spoke to a few academics individually where concerns were brought to his attention. • We reviewed and revised the Partnership Expectations document with student input. • We developed and implemented specific guidelines/agenda to support the preparation and discussion at Masters personal tutorials (for staff and students) however, preparation by the students and implementation by tutors was variable. 	<p>There has been a larger increase in satisfaction in this area in the NSS scores (+6%) and PG PES scores (+10%) whereas at L1 and L2 there has been a big decrease (-8%). Again the reasons for this difference are not apparent. Accessibility of some academic staff / tutors for students may be an issue but why this is felt specifically at levels 1 and 2, and not at levels 3 or 5 is unclear as student needs with projects at levels 3 and 5 are probably greater. Perhaps greater independence has been established in the older students.</p>	<p>□ Programme leaders are to consider the balance of employability skills taken by their students according to the optional module choices made.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All BSc/MBiol programmes will offer the new Faculty wide level 2 module BIOL2223 Employment, Career planning and Professional Development for Life Scientists as an option for students who did not take BIOL1223 at level 1. • Tutors will explore with students at levels 1 and 2 why there is such a difference in these opinions. The scores may reflect the extent to which School of Biology staff have been stretched and with the 6 new lecturers appointed in the past year perhaps more time will be available to provide students with more academic support. • Instructions to personal tutors and students will be strengthened to increase engagement with the revised tutorial agenda in the Masters programmes. • Guidelines for students and project supervisors will be introduced to improve the support provided in the level 5 projects.
<p>Organisation and management</p>	<p>□ We continued to ensure that module choice meetings were supported by module synopses and detailed module information.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We reviewed and continue to review assessment strategies at the programme level. 	<p>There was an even larger increase in the NSS score for this area (+7%), with the same increase in the PG PES scores (+7%) and at least the UG PES results for this aspect remained static. This may reflect a better appreciation of how the whole</p>	<p>□ As stated above, programme leaders are to consider the balance of assessment methods taken and employability skills acquired by their students according to the optional module choices made.</p>

		<p><i>organism Biology programmes fit together, belong and are delivered within the School of Biology.</i></p>	<p>□ <i>The structure of the MBIols will be carefully considered, with feedback from students, as these new programmes are further established.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Academic staff will go through their VLE areas to delete any out of date material.</i> • <i>Communications between academics and the administrative staff will be reviewed so that communication with Masters students will be more accurate, clearer and more timely.</i>
<p>Learning resources</p>	<p>□ <i>We continued to encourage staff to provide better access to blended learning resources assisted by the newly appointed Blended Learning Officer and by our Blended learning Champion.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The School continued to work with Library services to improve availability of journals/texts for students.</i> • <i>Discussions were held with the Library about on-line journal access. Part of the issue was a pdf reader problem, which now appears to have been resolved with a different version of the software. The library subscribed to 4 additional Biodiversity & Conservation journals this year.</i> 	<p><i>Remarkably, NSS, UG PES and PG PES learning resources are the scores that have increased the most dramatically from 2011-12 (+9%, +5%, +18%). This is despite the concerns about lack of podcasting for our programmes, that developing blended learning initiatives is at an early stage and that the opening of new laboratories would have had little impact for us as our practical teaching occurs in the un-refurbished level 5 laboratories sandwiched between those that have been refurbished.</i></p>	<p>□ <i>As stated above, the Blended Learning Champion will give regular presentations at the School of Biology academic staff meetings to further develop use of blended learning in our modules.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>IT Facilities for Masters students will be discussed with the Faculty Executive Team.</i>
<p>Personal development</p>	<p>□ <i>We continued to work with the Careers service and promote internships, research placements, and Industrial and International years.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>We continued to embed and review employability skills and opportunities into our curricula and promoted the weekly drop in sessions. The employability modules (BLGY1223/BLGY2223) were made optional for our programmes.</i> • <i>We encouraged involvement with the various employability activities organized by the Faculty Employability Officer, including the Careers fair in June 2013.</i> • <i>We continued to review the opportunities on Leeds for Life and to raise awareness of the value of the 'living CV'.</i> 	<p><i>This area showed an increase in the NSS score (+2%) and in the PG PES score (+11%) and the biggest increase of the UG PES scores (+9%). Perhaps this reflects our efforts to introduce employability skills specifically into tutorial modules for the undergraduate programmes although the take up of the opportunities within the seminars in these modules has actually been poor. Although employability does receive a lot of attention on the masters, it has not changed appreciably since last year.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Graduate level employability of our graduates, according to the DLHE (Destinations of Leavers in Higher Education) statistics, remains lower than we would like. This appears to reflect the nature of the career paths pursued by many of our graduates in the ecology / conservation area which, as some of our alumni emphasized at our careers fair, typically involves extensive periods of voluntary or low paid work. Nevertheless, we should continue to seek to enhance the employability of our students.</i> • <i>Mock interviews will be incorporated into the tutorial modules to improve performance in our graduates' employment application success.</i> • <i>Lecturers are encouraged to emphasize where employability skills are particularly evident in their</i>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We continued to work closely with the Industrial Advisory Board to identify gaps in provision and help refresh curricula to enhance graduate employability. • We enrolled all final year students that opted for it into their scientific society of choice to enhance career planning resources and opportunities for students. • We revised the agenda for level 5 personal tutorial sessions so that there is greater emphasis on discussions around future career planning, employability and articulation of skills developed. However, preparation by the students and implementation by tutors was variable. • We provided Masters students with the opportunity to engage in practice job interviews, but the uptake by the students was poor. 		<p><i>subject-specific teaching such that students can incorporate the evidence in their living CVs.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will offer to pay for Society of Biology membership for level 3 students and level 5 MBIol students, as this provides specific help with regard to graduate employment opportunities and adds to our graduates CVs. • We will continue to encourage involvement with the various employability activities organized across the faculty and from within the School of Biology. • We will continue to support the Industrial Advisory Board as it seeks to enhance our graduate employability. • A new “Masters Careers Development” programme, which includes practice job and/or PhD interviews, has been introduced.
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