



CENTRE FOR

**bioscience**



Event Report

## **Differentiated Learning Forum**

12<sup>th</sup> - 13<sup>th</sup> June 2007, Weetwood Hall, Leeds

Twenty invited delegates from institutions across the UK gathered at Weetwood Hall in Leeds to discuss the issues surrounding differentiated learning, hear how students may already be stretched and discuss how differentiated learning may be progressed in the biosciences. The main output of the Forum will be a report, released nationally, identifying the current state of play, the issues and difficulties in this area and a realistic appraisal of how this important aspect might be progressed. This document contains a short summary of the day's presentations and activities.

### **Welcome and aims of the Forum**

Ian Hughes, Director of the Centre for Bioscience welcomed delegates to the Forum, and spoke briefly about the purpose and aims of the Forum, including uncovering practice and looking at ways in which differentiated learning might be progressed.

### **Group exercise**

The group exercise asked delegates to consider what was meant by the term "differentiated learning", whether differentiated learning was appropriate and justifiable. Delegates were also asked to discuss the two barriers they thought would be most difficult barriers to providing differentiated learning within UK higher education.

### **Practitioner presentations:**

#### ***Differentiated learning***

Ian Hughes, Director, Centre for Bioscience

Ian discussed some of the issues surrounding differentiated learning including; what exactly is differentiated learning? Why is it important? How could differentiated learning be delivered, assessed and accredited?

#### ***Summer Schools***

Aurora Levesley, Gatsby Plants Summer School

The Gatsby Plant Summer schools are one of several projects funded by the Gatsby Foundation to try and increase interest in the Plant Sciences among undergraduates. Aurora spoke about the range of activities on offer to students who attend the summer schools, how these could encourage gifted students to take up plant sciences at university and the impact the summer school has had on students.

#### ***Summer Vacation Studentships***

Jim Deuchars, University of Leeds

Jim spoke about the summer vacation placements available to students at the University of Leeds, how they were funded and how they could benefit undergraduate and postgraduate students and lab groups. He discussed how students had found working in a lab enlightening and how it had encouraged some students to consider a career in research.

### **The ethics of differentiated learning**

Rob Lawlor and Georgia Testa, IDEA CETL

Rob and Georgia looked at the arguments surrounding a potential issue in stretching the more able students, that if students pay the same fee for university education should they receive the same learning experiences and have the same resources allocated to them?

### **Differentiated learning scenario exercise**

Delegates were divided into two groups and asked to consider two scenarios. The first focused on the advice that could be given to the tutor of an able / high achieving student, the second considered the support that could be offered to the top 20% of undergraduate bioscience students across a department or to the top 2% of bioscience undergraduates across the UK.

### **Facilitated discussion**

The discussion session focused on the support that both the Centre for Bioscience and the bioscience community could support differentiated learning. The outcomes of the session will be included as part of the final report.

A report on the Forum, which brings together all the discussion and presentations for the forum as well as discussing the issues surrounding differentiated learning, is available to download from:

<http://www.bioscience.heacademy.ac.uk/ftp/events/dlforum07/difflearnreport.pdf>