



Policy and Principles for Accreditation of Prior Learning

Introduction

Following the publication of the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) Guidelines on Accreditation of Prior Learning (September, 2004), a review of the current Undergraduate and Taught Postgraduate regulations was undertaken. As part of this review it was decided to produce a single framework for accreditation of prior learning across the University. The Framework acknowledges that the uses of accreditation of prior learning vary between Departments and that the needs of the Departmental programmes and the student body may differ accordingly. Although it is desirable that there should be flexibility within the Framework, it is also essential that procedures be documented.

The University recognises the value of learning wherever it occurs, either to meet programme entry requirements or to achieve credit towards specific awards. However, accreditation of prior learning will only be possible where learning, appropriate to the outcomes of the relevant entry requirements, module(s) or award level, can be assured to be academically valid.

Definitions

The following definitions are adapted from the QAA Guidelines on Accreditation of Prior Learning.

Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL): a process for accessing and, as appropriate, recognising prior experiential learning or prior certificated learning for academic purposes. This recognition may give the learning a credit-value in a credit-based structure and allow it to be counted towards the completion of a programme of study and the award(s) or qualifications associated with it. APL is used to encapsulate the range of activities and approaches used formally to acknowledge and establish publicly that some reasonably substantial and significant element of learning has taken place.

Accreditation of Prior Certificated Learning (APCL): a process through which previously assessed and certificated learning is considered, and if appropriate, recognised for academic purposes.

Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL): a process through which learning achieved outside education or training systems is assessed and, if appropriate, recognised for academic purposes. It is recognised that the process of APEL is more resource intensive than that for APCL. APEL will usually involve an applicant consulting an adviser on the production and submission of an APEL claim and building up a portfolio of evidence. An assessor, the member of staff who will exercise academic judgement in assessing an APEL claim, will then consider the portfolio.

Prior learning which may be capable of assessment and accreditation may have been gained in a number of ways, including paid or unpaid work, as a result of courses attended in

educational establishments or at work, through self-directed study or through leisure pursuits

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL): a process that acknowledges and establishes publicly that some reasonably substantial and significant element of learning has taken place and can be assessed to have done so. In the context of the University, RPL will be used for entry to a course, and will be guided by the APL procedures. This is distinct from the procedures relating to the admission of students who do not meet the usual entry requirements specified for a course, which are guided by standard admissions procedures.

Principles

1. Credit is given for learning, and not for experience alone, and where the level, standard and content are relevant to the particular course. The award of credit is a matter of consistent application of academic judgement, and must result from a transparent and demonstrably rigorous and fair decision making process.
2. Credit will not normally be given for learning that has taken place more than six years previously, and will be allocated according to Table 1 below. Credit can only be given for whole modules and no more than one third of credit awarded should be experiential. Credit may not be counted twice for the same award level.

Table 1

| Award | Credit required for award | Maximum credit allowed | NQF Level |
|---------------------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------|
| Certificate of Higher Education | 120 | 60 | 4 |
| Higher National Certificate | 150 | 75 | 4/5 |
| Diploma of Higher Education | 240 | 120 | 4/5 |
| Higher National Diploma | 240 | 120 | 4/5 |
| Foundation Degree | 240 | 120 | 4/5 |
| Degree | 300 | 240 | 4/5 |
| Degree with Honours | 360 | 240* | 4/5/6 |
| Postgraduate Certificate | 60 (M) | 30(M) | 7 |
| Postgraduate Diploma | 120 (M) | 60 (M) | 7 |
| Master's Degree | 180 (M) | 120 (M) | 7 |

*Students who have gained level 6 credits on professionally recognized, mandatory awards (such as NMC approved mentorship programmes), or students who are required, as a professional requirement, to undertake level 6 study outside of UW, where UW does not run the required module of study, may be awarded additional credits to those identified above for Honours Degree programmes up to a maximum of 40 credits. More information on the National Qualification Levels can be found in the Undergraduate Regulatory Framework.

3. APL that has been accredited by the University will be clearly identified on students' transcripts.
4. All credit awarded will be relevant to identified modules or awards. Accreditation for non-specific 'free' modules is allowed, where equitable. Detailed assessment of credit whether based on certificated or experiential learning, can only be made by subject specialists since the assessment can only be made in the light of detailed subject knowledge. These specialists should ensure that the experience represents the achievement of learning outcomes comparable to those which would have been achieved had the course of study against which credit is claimed been taken. This may be assessed by any method appropriate to what is being assessed, and should be verified by another specialist.
5. It is the responsibility of the student to prepare an application and submit adequate documentation. Applicants should identify in advance whether they wish to apply for

admission to a course or credit. Guidance and counselling may be sought from the University, where appropriate.

6. The role of the *adviser*, the member of staff who advises a student on the production and submission of an APEL claim, must be separate and distinct from the role of *assessor*, the member of staff who exercises academic judgement in assessing the claim. In order to maintain the objectivity and rigour of the APEL Portfolio assessments, the assessor(s) should be subject specialists able to evaluate the evidence offered and to establish the authenticity of the claim. All staff associated with the support, guidance and assessment of claims for the accreditation of prior learning will be expected to undertake appropriate training.
7. Students should be fully informed by the adviser of the range of evidence that would be considered appropriate in a submission. The portfolio of academic/professional evidence presented should be appropriate to the proposed programme, sufficient in length, depth and level, authentic and recent. Evidence should be included of underpinning knowledge. Where a submission of learning from experience has demonstrated learning equivalent to that of an existing course unit the credits and level allocated for the submission will be the same. Candidates may be offered the opportunity to complete an independent learning module based on their past experience. This module may, where appropriate, be included in the credit requirement for the award, and may be graded and count towards the classification of the award.
8. Credit awarded through APCL will count towards the attainment of the award, but will not count towards the classification of the award.
9. Students may pass some modules without having obtained all the learning outcomes associated with it. Students seeking APL should be awarded credit for modules on a comparable basis.
10. The Head of Registry Services will be responsible for co-ordinating the APL application process. Heads of Department are responsible for ensuring that University staff are equipped to provide appropriate information for students making enquiries about APL.
11. The University will charge an appropriate fee for the processing of APL claims. Applicants will be advised whether a fee will be charged. Fees for APL claims are reviewed annually, and current charges can be found on the University website.

Process

The following process will apply as appropriate:

1. Application

1.1 Applications for credit should be routed through the Admissions Office in Registry Services. Applications for full-time undergraduate courses should be made through UCAS, whilst all other applications will be made directly to the University. Application and APL claim forms will be available on the University website, so that applicants may download them directly.

2. Advice and Guidance

2.1 On initial enquiry, the applicant will be provided with an explanatory leaflet, which will include advice on the cost of applying for APL and any advice required on procedure. Applicants will be required to complete a claim form detailing the prior learning they wish to accredit, and to provide appropriate evidence. The Admissions Office will handle queries at this stage. If more subject detail or advice on evidence is required, the Admissions Office will consult the relevant Admissions Tutor, who will appoint an *adviser* if appropriate. The adviser will:

- Advise students on strategies open to them in preparing an APL claim.
- Assist students to identify appropriate ways forward.
- Begin to help students identify their prior learning
- Assist students in completing the appropriate claim form

2.2 The *adviser* will explore with the student the appropriateness of either taking a preparatory module or submitting a portfolio direct. The advisor will be separate and distinct from the individuals who finally assess that student's claim (the *assessor*).

2.3 Each subject area will identify a named individual or individuals who will provide advice/guidance about APEL Portfolio construction. Following the submission of a completed claim form, the Admissions Tutor(s) and relevant Head of Department(s) will designate an *adviser* to provide support to an individual student in respect of advice and guidance concerning a claim for APEL Portfolio construction.

3. Submission of claim

3.1 Following the submission of a completed APL Claim form, the Admissions Office will advise the prospective student if further evidence and/or the appropriate fee is required. If certification has already been supplied, assessment of the claim may take place at once. If certificates, transcripts and references are required the student will be advised and, if necessary, will be given advice on the submission of further evidence.

3.2 If additional information is required, applicants may be required to provide it to the Admissions Office. All applications must normally be submitted at least four weeks before the student commences the programme of study against which credit is sought. Claims submitted late will not be considered unless the Assistant Registrar

(Recruitment & Admissions) is satisfied that the claimant has provided an acceptable reason for late submission.

- 3.3 The Admissions Office will distribute copies of the application and supporting documentation to the appropriate Admissions Tutor together with general guidance on appropriate credit ratings where this available. The Admissions tutor will normally be responsible for initial assessment of APL claims.
- 3.4 Admissions Tutors will determine the specific academic credit that would, in their view, be appropriate with regard to their respective course and subjects and may request that the student submit additional documentary evidence. Applicants may be invited for a formal interview in support of their claim. It is the individual student's responsibility to make the claim in respect of the number and the level of credits being sought within the claim for APL.
- 3.6 Admissions Tutors decisions will be co-ordinated and recorded by the Admissions Office, who will advise the applicant formally in writing of the decision reached.

4. **Assessment of documentation**

4.1 Applicants may be asked to submit for assessment, any or a mixture of the following:

- copies of transcripts, syllabi, references
- a portfolio of evidence
- attendance at an interview
- a simulation or practical exercise
- a diagnostic test(s)

- a piece of work or special assignment

- 4.2 In order to maintain the objectivity and rigour of the APEL Portfolio assessments, the assessor(s) should be subject specialists able to evaluate the evidence offered and to establish the authenticity of the claim.
- 4.3 The Admissions Office and Admissions Tutors will use precedents and previous experience of students with similar qualifications to determine whether the prior learning is acceptable. If further advice is needed, Course/Module Leaders or, if appropriate, the relevant Scheme Director may be consulted. Staff who have acted as advisers may be asked for their recommendation, but the decision about the amount of credit (if any) to be awarded will be taken by an *assessor*.
- 4.4 In assessing the documentation, the Admissions Tutor should take into account the level, standard, content, relevance and recency of the prior learning.
- 4.5 Where appropriate, a second assessment of the credit awarded may be undertaken by a suitably qualified assessor. This will always be considered appropriate where APEL is claimed, or where claims are based on non-standard APCL.

- 4.6 Normally, claims will receive a response within six weeks of the lodging of the application.
5. **Decision-making**
- 5.1 In most instances, Admissions Tutors are the best judges of whether prior learning is of a suitable type and standard for entry to a programme at this level. Students may be required to attend for interview to assist the decision making process.
- 5.2 The criteria to be used in judging a claim for the accreditation of prior learning should be made explicit to applicants, academic staff, stakeholders and assessors and examiners.
- 5.3 Assessors of the documentation should objectively assess portfolio claims using the following checklist:
- Validity – That the assessment does identify the knowledge and skills it purports to assess.
 - Reliability – That the assessment can be repeated with the same outcome.
 - Sufficiency – That the evidence provided is appropriate in terms of quality and quantity.
 - Authenticity - That it is the applicant’s own experience and subsequent learning for which accreditation is being sought.
 - Relevance – That the learning to be accredited represents up to date knowledge and skills.
6. **Monitoring**
- 6.1 The assessment of learning derived from experience should be open to internal and external scrutiny and monitoring within institutional quality assurance procedures for moderation of assessment. All APEL claims should be internally moderated and a sample presented for external examination.
- 6.2 It is important that Departments monitor the progress of students admitted with APL, so that information is built up on the suitability of particular qualifications or patterns of experience for the granting of advanced standing or credit exemption. Relevant information should be included in the Annual Monitoring Report
- 6.3 The Admissions Office will present an annual report to the June meeting of the Academic Quality and Standards Committee. This report should cover the number of APL claims submitted and accepted by any course, and any issues relating to the principles, process or procedure.

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Revision History

| Committee | Date | Change |
|------------------|-------------|-------------------------|
| AQSC | 2007 | Revised policy approved |