



## Higher Education Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL) Procedure

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# 1. Introduction

1.1. This Procedure sets out the key principles and procedures that the College follows in relation to **Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL)** and **Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)** for Higher Education provision (depending upon terminology used by Awarding Body (AB)). The procedural processes are the same for APL and RPL in that they formally recognise and validate learning that students have acquired outside of traditional educational settings and will be referred to as **APL** throughout the documentation.

1.2. The APL process involves various activities and methods which formally acknowledge and publicly confirm that reasonably substantial and significant learning has taken place, either from prior learning or experiences gained outside formal education.

## **Two forms of prior learning are recognised by this procedure:**

1. **Accredited Prior Certificated Learning (APCL).** This is learning associated with a structured, formal course of study, which has already been assessed and accredited, either in higher education or by a professional body.
2. **Accredited Prior Experiential Learning (APEL).** This is learning acquired outside the formal education and training systems, achieved from experiences such as work or life experience, or through non-credit bearing courses, such as in-house training. Applicants may gain APEL by evidencing the knowledge gained from (but not limited to) work experience, self-directed study or through leisure pursuits. This is often evidenced through production of a portfolio of evidence.

## **2. Overview**

2.1 The College Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL) process therefore is one which aims to recognise learning in whatever context it has taken place. It is based on the premise that learning can be identified, measured, assessed and accredited within academic courses, regardless of the context in which it is acquired.

2.2 This recognition may give the learning a credit value within a credit-based structure and allow it to be counted towards the completion of a course of study and the attainment of associated qualifications.

2.3 To be given credit on a programme, such previous learning needs to be at the appropriate level or have the potential to reach that level with further study and reflection.

2.4 The procedure is informed by the DfE working group on APL and QAA (Quality Assurance Agency) UK Quality Code for Higher Education.

2.5 The general principles apply to all HE students, but processes may be shaped by Awarding Body requirements.

## **3. Principles**

3.1 The following principles are fundamental to the achievement of awards that meet nationally recognised standards of achievement. APL involves gathering evidence and demonstrating how it meets the knowledge and skills criteria for a course. This requires applicants to reflect on their experiences and the learning outcomes they've achieved.

- **Recognition of Learning:** Learning is recognised irrespective of the context in which it is achieved
- **Focus on Learning Outcomes:** It is the achievement of learning outcomes, not just the experience of the activities alone that shall be accredited
- **Evidence and Authentication:** Learning must be evidenced in writing and authenticated at the appropriate level. Claims for APL must be made using the application form (Appendix 1)
- **Rigour and Comparability:** All claims for APL are considered with the same degree of rigour and must be comparable in terms of evidence and effort
- **Academic Judgement:** Decisions regarding the accreditation of prior learning are based on academic judgement, informed by professional bodies and other stakeholders
- **Transparency and Fairness:** The APL process shall be transparent to all stakeholders and demonstrably rigorous and fair
- **Feedback:** Feedback shall be provided to applicants at each stage of the process.
- **Board Outcomes:** Applicants shall be informed of the outcome following the Board's decision in a timely basis.
- **Staff Support:** Appropriate training and support shall be available to all staff associated with the guidance and assessment of claims for the accreditation of prior learning.
- **Limitations:** Limitations to APL are clearly defined. These will be reviewed in light of the Awarding Body requirements. Subject/Course Teams shall make explicit any modules where an APL claim cannot be considered and make explicit the rationale and justification.
- **Calculation of award:** Approved exemptions shall be recorded on the student's record. Where required, in accordance with programme regulations, marks achieved in prior studies or awarded for experiential learning through assessment of a portfolio of evidence, shall be used to calculate the student's overall result.

- **The College APL Board** shall have due regard for the authenticity, currency, validity, reliability, and sufficiency of the evidence provided.

## 4. General Policy

- Exemptions will be considered for a minimum of one module only.
- Exemptions may be granted for whole modules only, save in the exception where a module is clearly defined into theoretical and practical elements. In this case, claims may be considered for either the theoretical or practical components.
- Exemptions will only be considered for a maximum credit value or programme percentage in line with Awarding Body requirements. This is summarised in the table below:

Awarding Body	Maximum Credit Exemption and Stipulation
Ulster University	<p>For programmes of 180 or more credit points, students must register for modules amounting to at least the final third of the credit value of the award at the highest level.</p> <p>For programmes of up to and including 120 credit points, students must register for modules amounting to at least the final half of the credit value of the award at the highest level. Exemptions shall not be permitted for these modules. Approved exemptions shall be recorded on the student's record. Where required, in accordance with programme regulations, marks achieved in prior studies or awarded for experiential learning through assessment of a portfolio of evidence, shall be used to calculate the student's overall result.</p> <p>The FPM will have final approval of all APL applications.</p>

Open University	A student may be awarded APL towards the requirements of a Foundation Degree (FD) up to a maximum of 50%. For a FD (240 credits) this equates to a maximum of 120 credits and for a CertHE (120 credits) this equates to 60 credits. <b>APL is not permitted at level 6 of a Bachelor Honours Degree or for the thesis/dissertation module where students are expected to complete 120 credits in order to gain the award.</b> Performance in work for which an award of credit for prior learning has been made is not taken into account in the calculation of the final award.
Pearson Higher Nationals	APL processes should not be used for any more than 50% of the total credit value of a Higher National award.

- iv) Duly constituted College APL Board shall take decisions on claims for APL. This will include at least two members of staff and should normally include:
  - APL Adviser(s) (normally the Course Director / Subject Expert)  
APL Coordinator (The Higher Education Coordinator)
  - Head or Deputy Head of Department
- v) The APL Board shall have due regard for the authenticity, currency, validity, reliability and sufficiency of the evidence provided.
- vi) Subject/Course Teams shall make explicit any modules where an APL claim cannot be considered and also make explicit the rationale and justification.
- vii) Claims must be evidenced by certification or in writing.
- viii) Curriculum Departments shall have due regard for core elements of the programme to ensure that applicants have met the requisite learning outcomes within APL claims.
- ix) Curriculum Departments shall appoint an APL Adviser(s) to provide advice and guidance to applicants on claims for APL. This will normally be the Course Director/Subject Expert.

- (xii) Learning from a higher level can be counted down where appropriate (E.g. Credit from a Level 5 programme can be used to award credit to a level 4 qualification),
- (xiii) Prior study gained at an external institution will be considered providing the requested evidence is met,
- (xiv) Any APL exemptions granted will be recorded on the learners Transcript against the module, upon completion of their qualification at SWC.

#### **4.1 APCL for exemptions from individual modules**

- i) Regard shall be taken in relation to the currency of the certificated evidence.
- ii) Qualifications and/or HE credits that have been achieved within the previous five academic years will be considered for exemptions.
- iii) The APL Board shall determine whether the certificated evidence is commensurate with the learning outcomes within the module(s) for which exemption is sought.
- iv) It shall be the responsibility of the student to furnish the APL Board with the requisite information of the learning achieved within a certified claim by providing evidence such as full certificates and academic transcripts.
- v) Applications for exemptions for individual modules via APCL will only be considered from applicants who have secured a place on an HE programme at SWC. All applicants must meet the entry requirements for individual programmes before an APCL request will be considered.
- vi) The most common form of advanced standing at SWC is internal progression from an HNC to a Foundation Degree. The College welcomes applications from students from alternative institutions wishing to apply for advanced standing.
- vii) Applications for APCL will only be considered prior to commencement on the programme and up to 5 weeks after commencement on the programme.

#### **4.2 APCL for direct entry via stage exemption of a programme without award**

**of OU credit. This applies to OU provision only.**

- i) The APL policy allows for candidates to enter stage 2 or stage 3 of an undergraduate qualification on the basis of completion of an appropriate certificated qualification from a recognised UK HE programme of study.
- ii) With stage exemption of this kind, it will be recorded on the student's transcript that stage exemption was awarded, but credit for the stage(s) from which the student was exempted would not be transferred to OU validated awards.

#### **4.3 APEL for Admission**

- i) Admission to undergraduate programmes is based upon prospective students, with considerable life and work experience, demonstrating evidence of their ability to undertake the programme. A portfolio of evidence shall be presented for consideration. Course Committees shall specify the minimum outcomes to be demonstrated for admission to the programme.
- ii) The APL Adviser shall, in consultation with the applicant, determine whether the evidence presented is likely to meet the criteria of being authentic, current, valid, reliable and sufficient.

#### **4.4 APEL for exemptions from individual modules**

- i) The APL Adviser shall advise applicants on whether an APEL claim is appropriate and against which module(s) exemption may be sought.
- ii) The APL Adviser shall, in consultation with the applicant, determine whether the evidence presented is likely to meet the criteria of being authentic, current, valid, reliable and sufficient.
- iii) Applications for APEL will only be considered prior to commencement on the programme and up to 5 weeks after commencement on the programme.

## 5. The APL Procedure

### 5.1 Stage 1: Consultation with APL Adviser and submission of evidence of prior certificated and/or experiential learning to APL adviser.

- i) All initial enquiries regarding APL shall be directed to the APL Adviser (Course Director) who shall advise the applicant on the process and its requirements.
- ii) All APL applications shall be made using the form (Appendix 1).
- iii) All applications must include evidence of the prior certificated and/or experiential learning.
- iv) All formal written applications shall be made in the first instance to the APL Adviser to determine whether the evidence to be presented is likely to meet the required criteria of being authentic, current, valid, reliable and sufficient before forwarding to the APL Board for consideration.
- v) All applications for APEL shall be presented in the form of a portfolio of evidence. A typical portfolio should be presented as indicated below. Additional material may be required. The portfolio shall contain written material which clearly demonstrates how the student's prior experience is evidence of their achievement of the requisite learning outcomes. The assessment criteria included at Appendix 2 may be used to assess and award a mark for the portfolio.

#### **A typical portfolio should contain:**

- Title Page
- Table of Contents
- Curriculum Vitae
- Employment History (including a detailed workplace reference)
- Education and Training History (including a description of training)
- Training and Professional Qualifications (certification)
- Personal Reflection

- Other evidence – this may include informal Learning Activities, e.g., conferences/workshops etc.

**Additional information to support your submission can include:**

- Practice-based documents
- Reports on observation of practice.
- Video/audio files, with commentary and analysis related to the achievement of learning outcomes.
- Analytic and evaluative description of practice
- Statements from supervisors in relation to aspects of practice
- Continuing Professional Development (CPD) records and appraisals
- Reports of professional discussions
- Reflective statement

**A typical portfolio should include the following sections**

Section	Guidance
Introduction	Setting the context of the claim in the overall academic and career plans of the student
Experience	An expansion on a curriculum vitae or other significant life events including a description of experiences including informal learning activities e.g. conferences/workshops
Learning Account	An account of the learning that has resulted and reflections on what has been learned from the experience.
Learning Outcomes	Clear statements of demonstrable behavioural change/performance resulting from the learning together with a list of demonstrable learning outcomes
Evidence	Evidence of the achievement of each learning outcome
Authenticity	Evidence demonstrating that the prior learning claimed was completed by the applicant
Claim	Claim This needs to be realistic, based on sound advice

## 5.2 Stage 2: Feedback from APL Adviser

The APL Adviser will determine whether the evidence to be presented is likely to meet the required criteria (below) before forwarding to the APL Board for consideration.

- i) **Current:** Evidence should relate to current learning i.e., within the last five years. Where the course/subject and/or professional, statutory, or regulatory bodies have specific requirements and/or time limits for the currency of evidence, certification, or demonstration of learning, these should be made clear and transparent.
- ii) **Reliable:** The extent to which there is inter-assessor agreement or consistency in the assessment of claims.
- iii) **Sufficient:** There should be sufficient written evidence to demonstrate fully the achievement of the learning being claimed.
- iv) **Valid:** There should be a clear and transparent link between the learning being evidenced and the outcomes against which recognition is being sought.

## 5.3 Stage 3: Review and Assessment by the APL Board

- i) All applications shall be formally considered by an APL Board: APL Adviser(s) (Course Director / Subject Expert), APL Coordinator (HE Coordinator), Head or Deputy Head of Department.
- ii) Applicants seeking exemption based on prior experiential learning may be invited to attend for interview by the APL Board. A record of the interview shall be made using a form - Appendix 3.
- iii) Recommendations of the APL Board will be recorded on the form in Appendix 4. All claims will be decided as follows: Approved / Insufficient Evidence / Not approved. For UU programmes recommendations of the APL Board will be

recorded on the form in Appendix 5 and sent to the FPM for confirmation.

#### 5.4 Stage 4: Candidate informed of Board decision

- i) Applicants shall be informed of the outcome following the Board's decision in a timely basis.
- ii) Where a claim has been determined as a) 'insufficient evidence' or b) 'not approved', applicants shall be provided with detailed feedback including, in respect of a), identification of those areas where the claim has been deemed deficient and, in respect of b), clear explanation for the claim being determined 'not approved'.
- iii) Where the decision is of insufficient evidence, there shall be one opportunity for the student to provide additional evidence to the Board if this is considered necessary and appropriate.
- iv) All successful claims for admission to a programme or exemption from a module(s) or part of a programme shall be reported by the Course Director/Co-ordinator at the Subject/Course Committee and subsequently noted at February/June Progress/Examination Board.
- v) The decision of the Board shall be final (no right of appeal except on grounds of procedural irregularity). Where applicable, applicant must submit and appeal using the Academic Appeals process within 10 days of receiving a decision.

#### 5.5 Timeline

Stage	Activity	Maximum Duration
Stage 1	Consultation with APL Advisor and submission of application / evidence	6 weeks
Stage 2	Feedback from APL Adviser	2 weeks
Stage 3	Submission of application and review / assessment by the APL Board	3 weeks
Stage 4	Candidate informed of Board decision	1 week

## Change Log / Document Control – Revision History

Location	Change from deletion/addition	Change to
24/25 Document	APL process has been removed from the Admissions Policy and changed to a 'stand-alone' procedure	New procedural document

## Communication

Communication requirements	
Who needs to know	All SWC Course Directors, Admissions staff and prospective students

### Communication Plan

Action	By Whom	By When
Upload to Gateway and website	Nicola Nugent	On approval
Circulation to all staff	Nicola Nugent	On approval

## APPENDIX 1: SWC APL Application Form

PART 1: PERSONAL INFORMATION	
Surname:	
Forename(s):	
Title:	
Date of Birth:	
Home Address:	
Post Code:	
Email Address:	
Mobile Number:	
Home Tel number:	
EMPLOYER DETAILS	
Company Name	
Employer Contact Name:	
Employer Contact Number:	
Employer Address:	

PART 2: PROPOSED COURSE OF STUDY	
Programme Title:	
Mode of Attendance:	
Month/Year of Entry:	
Proposed Start Date:	



## APPENDIX 2: Criteria for Assessment of APEL Portfolios

<b>Programme Title:</b>	
<b>Applicant Name:</b>	
<b>Panel Members:</b>	
<b>Date:</b>	

CRITERIA FOR ASSESSMENT	PANEL COMMENTS
<b>1. DESCRIPTION OF EXPERIENCE (10%)</b> <b>1.1 Clarity in terms of:</b> a) Specification of amount of time devoted to the activity. b) Precision of description of activity <b>1.2 Relevance in terms of:</b> a) Linkage to learning outcomes of Teaching and Training Studies course units.	
<b>2. REFLECTION ON EXPERIENCE (30%)</b> <b>2.1 Depth, in that the reflection:</b> a) Moves from the anecdotal/personal to make generalisations. b) Moves from the descriptive to the analytical and evaluative levels. c) Demonstrates change in behaviour because of reflection on experience. <b>2.2 Breadth in that it:</b> a) Relates to each of the learning outcomes identified.	
<b>3. DESCRIPTION OF LEARNING OUTCOMES (30%)</b> <b>3.1 Specificity in terms of:</b> a) Clear identification of changes in knowledge, understanding or competence b) Currency: the learning outcomes are relevant now	
<b>4. EVIDENCE (20%)</b> <b>4.1 Relevance insofar as it:</b> a) Is clearly linked to the learning outcomes identified above. b) Is relevant today: evidence of recent application where learning outcomes were acquired some time ago. <b>4.2 Authenticity in that:</b> a) The evidence demonstrates that the student did what is claimed.	
<b>5. PORTFOLIO (10%)</b> <b>5.1 Organisation in terms of:</b> a) Clear mapping of experience - reflection - learning outcomes - evidence <b>5.2 Clarity in terms of:</b> a) Accessibility to non-specialists (Only for subject-specific credit)	

## APPENDIX 3: APL Assessment / Interview Pro-forma

### Instructions to SWC APL Board /Interviewers

Where an applicant is **not** to be interviewed, the pro-forma should be used for recording assessment of the evidence presented and the decision of the APL Board / Subject Selectors. The form shall be signed by each participating member of staff.

Where an applicant **is** to be interviewed, at least two members of academic staff should be present, and the form signed by each.

Sections A and B should always be completed. If an applicant is interviewed, section C must be completed. If the applicant is seeking exemption from an individual module(s) or entry via Advanced Standing, section D must also be completed.

Section A: Candidate Details	
Name of candidate:	
Title of course applied for:	
Mode of attendance (P/T or F/T)	
Date of interview (if applicable):	
Evidence presented (certificated / experiential):	
Exemption sought - admission / module(s)/direct entry:	

Section B: Evaluation of evidence presented (certificated or experiential learning)
NOTE: Appendix 2 may be used for detailed assessment of a portfolio of evidence. A copy of the evidence produced for interview should be retained by the APL Board.

Section C: Evaluation of Interview (APL Application)		
<p>The APL Board should assess the candidate's suitability for the course based on the criteria outlined below. They should base their decision both on evidence from the interview <u>and from the evidence produced</u>. A score of between 1 and 5 should be awarded under each heading.</p> <p>The APL Board / Subject Selectors shall have due regard for the authenticity, currency, validity, reliability, and sufficiency of the evidence provided.</p>		
Criteria	Assessment of candidate's ability to meet the criteria based on evidence presented	Score (1-5)*
<p>Relevant experience (professional, industrial or education)</p> <p>Please explain how the candidate's prior experience is relevant to the selected course of study.</p>		
<p>Academic skills (e.g., critical thinking, reflective writing, knowledge of subject area etc).</p> <p>Please outline how the candidate shows an appropriate understanding of the academic skills required for the selected course of study</p>		
<p>Awareness of course expectations</p> <p>Please outline how the candidate shows an appropriate understanding of the content and workload for the selected course of study</p>		
<p><b>TOTAL SCORE:</b></p> <p>An aggregate score of 11 is normally necessary for admission to a programme. Where the number of applications for places exceeds the number of places available on programme, the score awarded in this interview may be used to rank candidates in order of preference.</p>		<p>/15</p>

\*A score of between 1 and 5 should be awarded for each of the criteria listed above, where 1 suggests the candidate does not show enough merit in the area and 5 suggests the candidate shows considerable merit in the area.

**Section D: Module Exemption**

**ONLY to be completed for candidates applying for APL to gain exemption from an individual module(s).** Please indicate how the candidate's prior learning or prior experiential learning meets the relevant learning outcomes for each module for which an exemption is sought.

Title and code of module for which an exemption is sought:	Outline of evidence presented by candidate that he/she has met the learning outcomes of the module	Module exemption recommended? Yes/No

## APPENDIX 4: Recommendation of APL Board

Please add any additional information you feel may be relevant when considering this applicant's request for APL.

Recommendations of APL Board	
Applicant Surname:	
Applicant Forename(s):	
Title of course applied for:	
Mode of attendance (P/T or F/T)	
Date of interview (if applicable):	
Evidence presented (certificated / experiential):	
Exemption sought - admission / module(s)/direct entry:	

Please add any additional information you feel may be relevant when considering this applicant's request for APL.

### Overall Recommendation:

Approved	
Insufficient evidence	
Not approved	

Signature:

Position:

Date:

Signature:

Position:

Date:

Signature:

Position:

Date:

## APPENDIX 5: Ulster University SWC APEL Summary

Section A: Candidate Details	
Name of candidate:	
Title of course applied for:	
Mode of Attendance (P/T or F/T):	
Date of interview (if applicable):	
Evidence presented (certified / experiential):	
Exemptions sought- admission / module(s) / advanced standing:	

Section F: Overall Recommendation	
Approved:	
Insufficient evidence:	
Not approved:	

Signature:		Position:		Date:	
Signature:		Position:		Date:	
Signature:		Position:		Date:	

Confirmation of College Decision	
FPM:	
Date of Confirmation:	