

## Accreditation of Prior Learning

## Standard Operating Procedure

Scope of Policy: Academic staff and students

Policy Owner: Quality Assurance

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# Introduction

Prior informal/non-formal learning is learning based on experience. It includes all learning which you have done up to this point which has not already been formally assessed. This includes prior learning gained through life and work experiences (paid and voluntary), as well as prior learning gained through community-based learning, workplace learning and training, continuing professional development and independent learning. The APL process will allow the learning you have gained from experience to be recognised and counted.

Two forms of prior learning are recognised:

1. **Accreditation of 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. **Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL)** – this is learning acquired through life, work experience and study not previously attested through formal education or certification.

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

The procedure is informed by the DfE working group on APL and QAA (Quality Assurance Agency) UK Quality Code for Higher Education, the general principles apply to all HE candidates, but processes may be shaped by awarding body requirements.

# PRINCIPLES

APL is about getting evidence and explaining how it allows you to meet the knowledge and skills requirements for a course of study. This means that you must reflect on that experience and on the learning that you have already achieved as a result. Before you go through the process of APEL there is an important guiding principle you should remember. It is what you have learned that is being recognised, not what you have done. Learning shall be recognised irrespective of the context in which it is achieved.

* It is the achievement of learning, or the outcomes of that learning, and not just the experience of the activities alone that shall be accredited.
* Learning must be evidenced in writing and authenticated at the appropriate level.
* The APL process shall be transparent to all stakeholders and demonstrably rigorous and fair.
* All claims shall be subject to the same rigour and be comparable in terms of evidence and effort.
* The College will ensure that procedures are in place to ensure the equitable and consistent treatment of all claims.
* Decisions regarding the accreditation of prior learning are a matter of academic judgement, informed by professional bodies and other stakeholders.
* Subject/Course Teams shall make explicit any modules where an APL claim cannot be considered and make explicit the rationale and justification.
* 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.
* A student may be awarded recognition for prior learning (certified, experiential or uncertified), towards the requirements of a named award up to two-thirds of the total credit requirements for that award. *\*two-thirds of APL is only permitted for full, three-year bachelor’s degrees (360 credits) or full master’s degrees (a minimum of 180 credits) and not sub-awards, where the usual maximum is 50%".*
* Approved exemptions shall be recorded on the candidate’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 not be used to calculate the candidate’s overall result.
* The College APL Board shall take decisions on claims for APL. This will include at least two members of staff and should normally include the Course Director/Co-ordinator, the APL Coordinator, Curriculum Area Manager. The College APL board will monitor APL decisions on an annual basis at a College level as well as at course and student level as progress and examination boards.
* APL can only be awarded against level 4 study.
* The APL Board shall have due regard for the authenticity, currency, validity, reliability, and sufficiency of the evidence provided.
* Claims must be evidenced by certification or in writing.
* Academic schools shall have due regard for core elements of the programme to ensure that applicants have met the requisite learning outcomes within APL claims.
* Academic schools shall appoint an APL Adviser(s) to provide advice and guidance to applicants on claims for APL, this will normally be the Course Director/Coordinator.
* Appropriate training and support shall be available to all staff associated with the guidance and assessment of claims for the accreditation of prior learning.
* Feedback shall be provided to applicants at each stage of the process.

## APEL for Admission

1. 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.
2. Admission to undergraduate programmes is based upon prospective candidates, 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.

## APEL for exemptions from individual modules

1. The APL Adviser shall advise applicants on whether an APEL claim is appropriate and against which module(s) exemption may be sought.
2. 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.

# APL PROCESS

## Stage 1 submission of evidence of prior certificated and/or experiential learning to APL adviser.

* All initial enquiries regarding APL should be directed to the APL adviser, normally the course director or coordinator who will advise the applicant on the process and its requirements.
* All applications for APL must be made prior to the candidate enrolling in the College and before 12 August.
* All APL applications must be submitted using the APL form (Appendix 1)
* All applications for the accreditation of prior experiential learning shall be presented in the form of a portfolio of evidence. The portfolio should contain written material which clearly demonstrates how the candidate’s prior experience is evidence of his/her achievement of the requisite learning outcomes. The assessment criteria included at Appendix 2 to these guidelines may be used to assess and award a mark for the portfolio.

Your claim for APL for entry is to be supported by a Portfolio of Evidence of Learning including a Personal Reflection and examples of evidence to authenticate your claim. Additional material may be required. Your 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 statements

## Stage 2 Feedback from APL Adviser

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.

* **Currency:** Your 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.
* **Reliability:** The extent to which there is inter-assessor agreement or consistency in the assessment of claims.
* **Sufficiency:** There should be sufficient written evidence to demonstrate fully the achievement of the learning being claimed.
* **Validity**: There should be a clear and transparent link between the learning being evidenced and the outcomes against which recognition is being sought.

## Stage 3 Assessment by the APL board

All applications shall be formally considered by an APL Board including at least two members of staff and should normally be drawn from:

1. Faculty Partnerships Manager (Ulster Programmes only)
2. Quality Manager
3. Course Director/APL Adviser
4. Subject Expert
5. Curriculum Area Manager

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 (example included at Appendix 3). All claims will be decided as follows: Approved/ Insufficient Evidence/Not approved.

## Stage 4 Candidate informed of board decision

Applicants shall be informed of the outcome following the Board’s decision in a timely basis.

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’.

Where the decision is of insufficient evidence, there shall be one opportunity for the candidate to provide additional evidence to the Board if this is considered necessary and appropriate, within a timeframe determined by the Board.

All successful claims for admission to a programme or exemption from a module(s) or part of a programme shall be reported to the relevant Subject/Course Committee and shall be reported by the Course Director/coordinator at the January/June Progress/Examination Board.

The decision of the Board shall be final (no right of appeal except on grounds of procedural irregularity). Students should follow the Academic Appeals Process.

# DEFINITIONS

**Accreditation**: the process of identification, assessment and formal acknowledgement of prior learning and achievement.

**Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL)**: a process for assessing 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 of qualifications associated with it.

The term ‘accreditation of prior learning’ is used here to encapsulate the range of activity and approaches used formally to acknowledge and establish publicly that some reasonably substantial and significant element of learning has taken place. Such learning may have been recognised previously by an education provider described as ‘prior certificated learning’; or it may have been achieved by reflecting upon experiences outside the formal education and training systems, described as ‘prior experiential learning’.

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

**APL Board**: a duly constituted body to consider all APL applications.

**APL Adviser**: person with subject expertise to provide advice and guidance to applicants. Normally this role would be performed by a Course/Subject Director.

**APL Co-ordinator**: person appointed with responsibility for the overview of APL activity in the College and who may chair the APL Board, who is normally the Quality Manager.

**Authenticity**: the evidence should clearly relate to the applicant’s own effort and achievements.

**Credit**: is an educational currency which provides a measure of learning achieved at a given level.

**Currency**: the evidence should relate to current learning. Where the subject/course teams 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 shall be made clear and transparent.

**Exemptions**: is the awarding of academic credit against specific outcomes on a modular basis.

**Level**: the standard of achievement reached on completion of the specified outcomes for which accreditation is being claimed.

**Module**: a module is a component of a course with its own approved aims and learning outcomes and assessment methods. Modules are assigned a credit value and level.

**Reliability**: the extent to which there is inter-assessor agreement or consistency in the assessment of claims.

**Sufficiency**: there should be sufficient written evidence to demonstrate fully the achievement of the learning being claimed.

**Validity**: there should be a clear and transparent link between the learning being evidenced and the outcomes against which recognition is being sought.

# APPENDIX 1 APL APPLICATION FORM

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Part 1 – Personal Information | | | | | |
| Surname: | | |  | | |
| Forename(s): | | |  | | |
| Title: | | |  | | |
| Student ID (if applicable) | | |  | | |
| If you have already applied for full-time study via UCAS, please insert your UCAS number here: | | | | | |
| Contact Details  Home Address:  Postcode:  Email Address: | | | | | |
| Telephone Number(s)  Home: Work:  Mobile: | | | | | |
| Employer Name and Address (if applicable): | | | | | |
| Part 2 – Proposed Course of Study | | | | | |
| Programme title:  Mode of attendance:  Month or year of entry: | | | | | |
| Please tick the level of APL for which you are applying: | | | | | Tick as appropriate |
| (i) | APL to satisfy Entry Requirement(s); | | | |  |
| (ii) | Modules – please list the modules(s) for which you are seeking exemption.  1.  2.  3.  4.  5.  6. | | | |  |
| Part 3 – Outline of APL Claim | | | | | |
| I enclose the following documentation: | | | | | Tick as appropriate |
| (i) | | APL Application Form | | |  |
| (ii) | | Certificated evidence | | |  |
| (iii) | | Portfolio of Evidence | | |  |
|  | | Please return this form and evidence to the Course Director. | | |  |
| Signature: | | | | Date: | |

# APPENDIX 2 CRITERIA FOR ASSESSMENT OF APEL PORTFOLIOS

BELFAST METROPOLITAN COLLEGE

PROGRAMME:

1. Description of experience (10%)
   1. **Clarity** in terms of:
2. Specification of amount of time devoted to the activity.
3. Precision of description of activity
   1. **Relevance** in terms of:
4. Linkage to learning outcomes of Teaching and Training Studies course units.
5. REFLECTION ON EXPERIENCE (30%)
   1. **Depth**, in that the reflection:
6. Moves from the anecdotal/personal to make generalisations.
7. Moves from the descriptive to the analytical and evaluative levels.
8. Demonstrates change in behaviour because of reflection on experience.
   1. **Breadth** in that it:
9. Relates to each of the learning outcomes identified.
10. DESCRIPTION OF LEARNING OUTCOMES (30%)
    1. **Specificity** in terms of:
11. Clear identification of changes in knowledge, understanding or competence
12. Currency: the learning outcomes are relevant now
13. EVIDENCE (20%)
    1. **Relevance** insofar as it:
14. Is clearly linked to the learning outcomes identified above.
15. Is relevant today: evidence of *recent* application where learning outcomes were acquired some time ago.
    1. Authenticity in that:
16. The evidence demonstrates that the student did what is claimed.
17. PORTFOLIO (10%)
    1. **Organisation** in terms of:
18. Clear mapping of experience è reflection è learning outcomes è evidence
    1. **Clarity** in terms of:
19. Accessibility to non-specialists

* Only for subject-specific credit

# APPENDIX 3 APL ASSESSMENT / INTERVIEW PRO-FORMA

BELFAST METROPOLITAN COLLEGE

INSTRUCTIONS TO 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, B, E & F 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)\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**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.

# APPENDIX 4: EVALUATION OF INTERVIEW – APEL APPLICATION

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 and from the evidence produced. A score of between 1 and 5 should be awarded under each heading.

The APL Board / Subject Selectors shall have due regard for the authenticity, currency, validity, reliability, and sufficiency of the evidence provided.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Criteria | Assessment of candidate’s ability to meet the criteria based on evidence presented | Score  (1–5) *\** |
| Relevant experience (professional, industrial or education)  Please explain how the candidate’s prior experience is relevant to the selected course of study. |  |  |
| Academic skills (e.g., critical thinking, reflective writing, knowledge of subject area etc). Please outline how the candidate shows an appropriate understanding of the academic skills required for the selected course of study |  |  |
| Awareness of course expectations  Please outline how the candidate shows an appropriate understanding of the content and workload for the selected course of study |  |  |
| TOTAL SCORE:  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. | | /15 |

\*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.

# APPENDIX 5: 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 6: RECOMMENDATIONS OF APL BOARD

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: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Position: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

# CHANGE HISTORY

| Guidance no. | Effective Date | Significant Changes | Previous no. |
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