



Guidance for the accreditation of prior (experiential) learning (AP(E)L)

1. Introduction

The Credit Framework working group has requested that a School-wide procedural framework for the application of Accredited Prior Learning (APL) be developed in order to enhance local good practice and address the requirements of the 2004 QAA Guidelines on APL which recommend:

- That policies and procedures for administering APL are fair; are to be applied consistently and that decision making is transparent.
- That a claimant making an APL claim is appropriately supported and advised of the requirements to demonstrate their experience and analysis of their learning. Appropriate feedback to the claimant regarding the outcome of the claim is also required.
- That all policies and procedures for APL are monitored and reviewed under the current quality assurance arrangements.
- That all APL documentation is subject to rigorous quality assurance arrangements.

2. What is APL?

APL Accredited Prior Learning is used 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 educational provider and is 'AP(C)L' or it may have been achieved by reflecting upon experiences outside the formal education and training systems and is 'AP(E)L'.

The QAA recognise 6 different types of APL, of which only two will be considered for offer by the School of Advanced Study¹:

AP(C)L Accredited Prior Certificated Learning - a process, through which previously assessed and certificated learning is considered and, as appropriate, recognised for academic purposes.

¹ '2004 QAA Guidelines on APL' accessed in April 2006 at <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/apl/APL.pdf>
SAS: November 2008

AP(E)L Accredited Prior Experiential Learning - a process through which learning achieved outside education or training systems is assessed and, as appropriate, recognised for academic purposes.

3. Incorporating APL at the School of Advanced Study

The following outlines the procedures that should be followed in order to comply with QAA recommendations to give a fair and transparent decision making process and provide support for all APL claimants. It is advisable that Institutes consider all parts of section 3 and claimants for APL should be directed to section 3.3, although claimants will also benefit from reading all parts of section 3.

3.1 Identifying opportunities for APL

- (i) Every Institute should identify the credits from which an exemption can be given for a successful APL claim. It is at the Institute's discretion whether the application for exemption should be considered only if there is substantial similarity in the module that has been taken and the module for which exemption is being claimed.
- (ii) If APL is offered it will provide exemption from participation and assessment for the entire credit and the final mark for the credit will be recorded as 'passed' on the student's transcript.
- (iii) However, rather than offering APL, the Institute may, at its discretion, require the applicant to take another module from the programme. This decision should be clearly indicated in any information that the Institute sends to applicants or that is in the public domain (websites).
- (iv) It may not be possible to give exemption on the grounds of APL for a particular credit if it is accredited by a Professional Body and the student must study the credit as normal.

3.2 Guiding principles

- (i) The School of Advanced Study will only give credit for prior learning where it is supported by documentary evidence.
- (ii) Knowledge acquired from external sources once the student has already begun their studies at the School of Advanced Study does not constitute APL. Such knowledge may enhance a student's studies, but it does not merit exemption as it was not acquired prior to starting the degree programme.
- (iii) The Credit Framework working group recommends that the Institute has a nominated member of Institute staff (or several where a Institute receives a large number of APL claims) to serve as the Institute APL Assessor(s) to consider the APL documentation supporting an

APL claim. For example these staff may be drawn from and form a sub-committee of the Institute's Examination Board, who would act as the Appeal Body for the Institute².

- (v) For an APEL claim, Institutes should identify the level of support and guidance in developing a claimant's evidence which is appropriate, and beyond which, continued support would disadvantage other students.
- (vi) Exemptions cannot be given for dissertation and/or projects stipulated in the regulations for Master's degrees, as an APL exemption can only be given for the taught part of a programme.
- (vii) Credits that are exempted by APL should not be included in the calculation of the degree classification as the credit result will not have a numerical value. Upon receipt of the APL acceptance, Registry will update the student's record and transcript to record the credits as 'passed'. In the Notes section, the record will show that the credits were awarded by APL

To complement the School's credit framework the following table shows the maximum amounts of credit for each type of programme that can be counted as accredited prior learning.

Award Type	Number of credit points for award	Total amount of AP(C)L or APEL³ allowed
Masters degree	180	60
Postgraduate Diploma	120	40
Postgraduate Certificate	60	20

3.3 Information that students submitting a claim for APL should receive from the relevant Institute. ⁴

In exceptional circumstances, a student about to start their studies at the School of Advanced Study may have knowledge, qualifications or experience of an advanced level that is equivalent to credits offered by the School of Advanced Study. The School of Advanced Study seeks to recognise legitimate claims of Accredited Prior Learning (APL) where possible and an exemption from the assessment or even participation from the relevant credit(s) may be given if the prior learning is acceptable to the relevant academic Institute. If a student is unsure whether to proceed with a claim after consulting the guidance, the individual should contact the appropriate APL contact in the

² This could be the Mitigating Circumstances Committee or a centralised APL committee with representatives of the Home Institute plus 2 representatives from other Institutes, or 1 representative plus an external examiner for the module for which credit is claimed.

³ A student can only make a claim of one type of APL.

⁴ This section will be provided as a separate document for students. It will be downloadable from the website alongside the application form.

Institute. It is good practice that a student with potential APL should discuss their claim with the Institute contact first, to ensure they receive adequate and correct guidance on proceeding with an APL claim.

(i) To make an APL claim, students must accurately complete the APL form (attached) and adhere to the following guidance:

- a. Acceptability – you must demonstrate there is an appropriate match between the evidence presented and the learning achieved to merit accreditation by prior learning. You should clearly identify which credit(s) you are seeking exemption from due to APL and you must match claims of prior learning to the learning outcomes of the credit(s) offered by the School of Advanced Study. You must ensure the use of APL is acceptable for the credit from which you are seeking exemption as there are two types of exemption that can be given (see 3.1(i) above). Furthermore, you can only use your APL if it is permitted by the regulations of the programme of study that you are registered for.
- b. Sufficiency - sufficient evidence is required to demonstrate the achievement of learning for quality assurance. You must provide sufficient documentation as evidence, including a completed form (attached) and appropriate certification (for APCL) or documented evidence such as a portfolio (for APEL). You should consult the Institute offering the credit from which you are seeking an exemption to ensure you provide appropriate evidence to support your APL claim.

For example, evidence could be authenticated transcripts and certificates from previous institutions or professional bodies. References from Employers will also be considered for APEL as long as they are submitted alongside other evidence.

- c. Authenticity – the evidence you provide must demonstrate that you have already achieved the knowledge or ability described in the programme specification for the credits from which you are seeking exemption from studying. Your evidence will be subject to scrutiny for plagiarism and should be the original certificates (if these are requested by the Institute).
- d. Currency – you should check with the relevant academic Institute that your knowledge was acquired within a suitable timeframe, as knowledge in some disciplines quickly becomes outdated. As an indication, Institutes may wish to only accept prior learning that occurred within a maximum of 5 years ago. However, the acceptable timeframe is a matter of academic judgement and you should contact the relevant Institute to ensure your APL was accumulated within an acceptable timeframe. Furthermore, some Institutes may feel it is appropriate to test your knowledge and applying your knowledge to the Institute's curriculum and a small fee to cover the administration of such a test may be charged by the Institute.

- (ii) **All APL applications must be made prior to 30 July of the year in which you are seeking admission, and no claim received after the deadline will be considered.**
- (iii) You may wish to consider the financial implications associated with APL, for example, APL may impact upon the support that your Loan Company is willing to provide and it is recommended that you seek their advice before making an APL claim.
- (iv) It is not permitted for a student to be registered simultaneously at two institutions.
- (v) Where multiple assessment methods are used, a student cannot be exempted from a percentage of the credit using APL where the overall credit mark is the average of component assessments, as it would be difficult to quantify the APL component; for example if the credit were made up of a short examination and coursework, exemption could not be claimed for the examinable part of the credit (see 3.1(i) above for the possible exemptions that can be given)
- (vi) You can only make an APL claim for the taught elements of a credit (dissertations must be wholly original and cannot have been previously submitted as part of another qualification, award or learning experience).
- (vii) If a student wishes to transfer from another institution part-way through the year, they must first be accepted through the Admissions procedure and also indicate at the time of application their intention to seek APL exemptions. APL can only be granted where the previous curriculum can be mapped sufficiently on to existing School of Advanced Study credits with evidence. No applications will be considered after 1 November 2010.

To make an APL claim you must submit **a completed form and full documentary evidence** when accepting your offer or at the latest 30 July of the year in which you are seeking admission to the Registry who will forward it to the Institute responsible for the credit you are seeking an exemption from studying. If your APL claim is unsuccessful, it is your responsibility to adhere to the regulations for your programme of study and ensure you have registered for the correct number of credits for your programme of study.

Please note:

- That it is a matter of academic judgement whether the Institute accepts or rejects your APL claim and that an application for exemption does not constitute an entitlement to an exemption. However, if you feel there has been a procedural error or that there is new evidence concerning mitigating circumstances that was not made available to the APL Assessors, please let us know.

- To be awarded a degree from the School of Advanced Study, you must achieve a minimum number of credits while studying here. This means that you cannot claim more than 20 APL credits if you are undertaking a postgraduate certificate, 40 APL credits if you are undertaking a diploma, or 60 APL credits if you are undertaking a masters degree.

3.4 Processing an APL claim.

- (i) The Institutes should ensure that the evidence they require for consideration of an APL claim is clearly communicated to the Registry. Examples of possible evidence are, original transcripts of marks achieved from awarding educational bodies, original certificates awarded from Accrediting bodies, signed letters of certification from Employers or certified reports or observations of placement learning.
- (ii) The Registry should ensure the evidence required for consideration of an APL claim is clearly communicated to the claimant.
- (iii) Institutes should assess the evidence of APL against the requirements and learning outcomes of the relevant credit and consider the following:
 - subject content and knowledge;
 - volume of learning;
 - level of learning;
 - evidence of achievement;
 - currency of the student's knowledge in light of the time that has elapsed since the claimant acquired the learning and in relation to the learning outcomes and credit aims;
 - restrictions imposed by Professional or Statutory Bodies, if applicable.
- (iv) Upon receipt of the APL claim and evidence, a decision should be made and the claimant informed **prior to registration** to ensure the claimant can register for sufficient credit if the claim is unsuccessful.
- (v) The nominated APL Assessor(s) should complete section 3 of the APL form (Appendix 1). A copy of the form should be kept for the Institute's records and the original sent to Registry.
- (vi) If it is appropriate that the claimant's application of prior knowledge is tested, then an Institute may make a small administration fee to cover the cost incurred, but the use of a fee must be consistent and fair.

3.5 Additional considerations for an Institute:

- AP(E)L can assist Schools' Widening Participation strategies, but its use should be subject to rigorous standards. It is especially of relevance to potential mature students who may be seeking to combine a degree with other commitments; especially if the assessment involves group work outside of formal contact hours.
- When assessing an APL claim, Institutes should consider the contribution that specific credits have towards the programme (in terms of contributing to the attainment of specific learning outcomes and as a significant element of an award from the School of Advanced Study), and the importance of attending the module for which exemption is claimed in the experience of studying the programme as a whole.
- That it be recommended that staff nominated as APL Assessors should be considered to have administrative duties similar to the role of Tutor and that it may be useful to consider individual workloads before allocating this responsibility.
- If a student gains full exemption from a credit, the student may be entitled to a pro-rata reduction in their tuition fees and this information should be made clear to Registry.
- Where the credit being considered for exemption arises from a prior programme of study at the School of Advanced Study, these APL requirements do not apply.