ACCREDITATION OF PRIOR LEARNING (APL)

AND

ACCREDITATION OF PRIOR EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING (APEL)

Student Guide
Welcome

This short introduction to Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL) and Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) will provide you with an awareness of the University’s systems and procedures pertaining to APL and APEL. It is not the intention that the handbook be used exclusively in the preparation of a claim, but in conjunction with the APL/APEL Advisor whom you may have already met, or will be introduced to should you wish to progress the claim.

Introduction

Abertay University recognises that learning occurs in many different ways, concurrent within the Quality Assurance Agency philosophy, "……Higher Education Institutions are increasingly recognising the significant knowledge, skills and understanding which can be developed as a result of learning opportunities, both paid and unpaid and through individual activities and interests”.

At the University we have embraced this concept by developing both non-standard entry routes to our programmes, and the AP(E)L facility to allow you to gain credit for module(s) beyond your entry point. In order to gain credits for modules, you will be expected to have prior learning. This can be in the form of certificates achieved at an educational institution(s) (APL) or experience of learning within a work environment (APEL).

If you think you may be eligible to claim credit for specified module(s), then please contact Lynne Bewley, the APL/APEL Co-ordinator who will be able to provide you with first line advice and assistance.

Please remember that claiming credit via APL or APEL is not an ‘easy’ option. Providing evidence to support a claim can be a demanding exercise. We would caution you to read carefully the information provided in this booklet and discuss any queries you may have with the APL/APEL Co-ordinator before you decide to embark on either of these routes.

The University’s APL/APEL Co-ordinator is:

Lynne Bewley
APL/APEL Co-ordinator
Abertay University
Bell Street
What is Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL)?

Accreditation of Prior Learning refers to the procedures, which the University employs to award credit for formal certified learning, which an individual has achieved prior to making an application to the University.

The learning experience in this instance has been gained within an academic environment, normally a Further or Higher Education Institution, for which an individual has gained a formal certificate for the learning undertaken.

If you have completed modules or a course of study at an educational establishment within the past 5 years, and have gained a formal certificate from that institution then you may be eligible to claim credit for your prior learning.

In order for the University to make a judgement on your prior learning you must provide a detailed outline of the content of the learning undertaken along with the formal certificate of award. It may also be necessary for a University representative to contact the Institution named on the certificate to authenticate details contained within your application.

An APL/APEL Advisor will help you to prepare your claim by assisting you in the identification of the type of evidence required. An Assessor will match the level of your previous certified learning with the programme statement on advanced entry for the specific modules for which you can gain credit.

It is important to remember that you are responsible for initiating a claim and for supplying the University with the relevant information in support of your claim within a defined timescale.

An administration charge is made for claiming APL, which must be paid before your claim is processed. Please discuss this with the APL/APEL Co-ordinator.

The University regulations and procedures covering APL are supplied in Appendix 1.
What is the Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL)?

The Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) is the process whereby the University evaluates the learning, which you have achieved through your experiences prior to making an application to the University. In this instance the learning experience has not previously been formally assessed or certified at Further or Higher education level.

We will assess the learning gained through your experiences and then provide credits for learning, where appropriate.

It is important to remember that we will assess your learning not your experience, although such experience will have been the source of your learning.

We can only award credits for assessed learning and as such you will be required to undertake assessment work to enable us to validate your learning experience. A number of assessment tools are available, but the most common are Assessment on Demand and the submission of Portfolio of Evidence.

Once again, an APL/APEL Advisor will be available to help you prepare your claim by assisting you in identifying the type of evidence required. An assessor will then match the level of your prior experiential learning with the programme statement on advanced entry or the specific modules for which you can gain credit.

Remember, you will be responsible for initiating a claim for credit via the prior experiential learning route and for supplying the University with the relevant information in support of your claim within a defined time scale.

An administration charge is made for claiming APEL, which must be paid before your claim is processed, please discuss this with the APL/APEL Co-ordinator.

The University regulations and procedures covering APEL are supplied in Appendix 1.
Procedure for making claim for Credit via the APL/APEL System

Should you wish to know more details about claiming credit for your prior learning or prior experiential learning, the first stage is to contact the University APL/APEL Co-ordinator, who will be able to provide you with further information on the procedure and put you in touch with a subject specialist; the APL/APEL Advisor. Should you wish to meet with the APEL Advisor please make an appointment with them at a mutually convenient time.

The Advisor will establish if you are eligible to proceed with a claim for APL or APEL. If it is decided that APL/APEL is the most appropriate route for you then the Advisor will assist you in establishing how best to proceed with the claim. At this stage you will be required to complete an APL/APEL application form and make payment to the University (Please note, that the University will not process your application until it is in receipt of the Administration Fee). The level of administration fee is dependent on whether you wish to proceed with an APL or an APEL claim, the number of modules you wish to claim for and the number of SCQF credits attached to them. The APL/APEL Co-ordinator will advise you of the APL/APEL administration charge at the application stage.

Claiming Credit for APL

Recap: APL refers to the procedures, which the University employs to award credit for formal certified learning, which an individual has achieved prior to making an application to the University.

The first step is to identify what certified learning you wish to claim credit for, your Advisor will assist you with this. You should be able to provide the original certificate, which will validate your claim and a transcript of the content of the learning. It is important that the certified learning should normally have been attained within the previous 5 years. You are responsible for providing the University with the documentation, which will support your claim.

An Assessor will authenticate your prior certificated learning and allocate specific credits according to the level of your prior learning. The APL/APEL co-ordinator will inform you of their decision as soon as possible.

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Claiming Credit for APEL

| Recap: | APEL is the process whereby the University evaluates the learning which you have achieved through your experiences, prior to making an application to the University. |

The first thing to do is reflect on your experiences in order to enable you to identify learning relevant to the APEL claim. The Advisor will assist you with this, but it does help if you have thought about this beforehand and have a good idea of what learning experiences will be relevant to your claim.

We must establish what learning is being put forward for the claim and decide means of measuring this learning. The way the University measures learning is to request that you match your learning experiences to the learning outcomes, which are included in the University’s Module Descriptors. The learning outcomes provide you with details of what will be the required learning to successfully complete the module.

Your advisor will assist you in deciding the most appropriate means of assessing your learning experiences. The various assessment tools include:

- Direct observation of practice
- Simulation or role play
- Presentation of artefacts
- A structured project
- Assessment on demand
- Written assignments
- Challenge examinations
- Oral examinations
- A portfolio of evidence

The most common approach, which the University uses to authenticate learning experience, is the compilation and submission of a portfolio of evidence. The portfolio contains information on the claim for learning along with a collection of documentation, which supports the claim. In essence it is a folder containing statements
and detailed descriptions about your learning experience and appendices of documentation, which validate the statements.

The content of each portfolio of evidence will differ between individuals, but normally the portfolio will contain:

- A statement of the claim for credit
- Your C.V.
- An identification of the module name, number and learning outcomes associated with your claim
- Commentary explaining learning gained from experience
- A list of evidence against each learning outcome cross referenced to the full evidence contained in the appendices
- A relevant bibliography which conforms to the Harvard system of referencing
- The names of two referees who can substantiate the learning experience for which credit is being claimed

The next stage is to submit your evidence along with the application form and administration fee to the APEL/APL advisor. All the evidence will be forwarded to the Assessor whose role is to determine the amount of specific credit which will count towards your award. The APL/APL co-ordinator will inform you of their decision by letter as soon as possible.

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Once you have decided to make your claim for either APL or APEL, the next stage is to submit your evidence along with the application form and administration fee to the APL/APL Advisor. All documentation will be forwarded to the Assessor whose role is to determine the amount of specific credit, which will count towards your award. The APL/APEL Co-ordinator will inform you of their decision as soon as possible.

**Further Information**

This is a lot of information to take in: don’t worry you will be provided with assistance at every stage of the process. Remember you should optimise on your previous learning experiences, whether
they are certified or otherwise, and University staff are here to assist you in the process.

For further information please contact the University APL/APEL Co-ordinator at the under noted address:

Lynne Bewley  
APL/APEL Co-ordinator  
Abertay University  
Bell Street  
Dundee  
DD1 1HG

Telephone:  (01382) 308991  
Fax:  (01382) 308095  
E-mail:  l.bewley@abertay.ac.uk
Appendix 1

Procedures for the Recognition of Prior Learning

1. POLICY
The University is committed to the principle of credit accumulation and transfer and that appropriate learning, wherever it occurs, provided that it can be assessed, may be recognised for academic credit towards an award. Credit for prior learning may be gained via APL or APEL. In either case this credit may be used to facilitate entry to a programme of study or to contribute, within appropriate limits, towards the achievement of part of a stage of a programme.

2. APL and APEL

The Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL) refers to the procedures which the University employs to award credit for learning which has taken place in an educational or training programme. Such learning may be certified by a recognised institution or it may not.

The Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) is the process whereby the University evaluates learning which has taken place through life or work experiences. The outcomes of the learning experience will not normally have been previously formally assessed or certificated.

In both APL and APEL, the learning must be current. Currency is concerned with both ensuring that the actual concepts that were learnt have not become dated and with ensuring that the student can still use what has been learnt to underpin further study. Normally learning should have taken place within the past five years, unless there is evidence of activities that have maintained the currency of the learning, eg using what has been learnt in the course of carrying out an occupation.

The most common application of APL or APEL is where a student wishes to claim that he/she has already achieved the learning outcomes of part of a stage of a programme and wishes to be exempted from studying one or more modules. APL or APEL may also be utilised where an applicant to a programme of study does not possess the formal entry qualifications and wishes to claim that he/she has achieved an equivalent level of learning.

The maximum amount of credit transfer is set out in section B4 of the Academic Regulations. In advising students on whether to proceed with an APL/APEL application consideration should be also given to the consequences of adopting a part-time study mode such as the potential impact on financial support from SAAS or missing out on some programme-wide learning experiences.

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1 The terms used in these procedures are defined in Appendix 1
2 this is sometimes referred to as APCL – Accreditation of Prior Certificated Learning
3 Academic Regulations B4.1
2.1 The Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL)

The learning that is considered for accreditation may be either formal learning or non-formal learning.

Formal learning takes place within the context of programmes delivered by learning and training providers, such as a higher education institution or a training organisation. This learning will have been assessed, credit rated and certificated.

Non-formal learning takes place within learning and training activities that do not lead to formal certification or credit rating. The learning may or may not have been assessed. Typical activities may be company training schemes, trade union programmes and CPD courses.

In order to make a judgement on a student’s prior learning a detailed outline of the content of the learning undertaken along with any formal certificate of the award must be submitted. To authenticate the learning it may be necessary for a University representative to contact the institution named on the certificate to authenticate the application.

2.2 Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL)

In APEL the learning will have taken place as part of the applicants work or life experience. The applicant will be required to undertake assessment to enable the validation of the learning outcomes as credit can be only awarded by the University for assessed learning. A large number of assessment tools are available but the most common are the submission of a portfolio of work or carrying out a formal written assessment.

3. Admission with Advanced Standing or Entry to the First Stage of a Programme

In most cases the judgement of whether a qualification is deemed to be equivalent to the specified entry qualifications, either into the first stage or a subsequent stage of a programme, will be a matter for the Admissions Tutor and will not invoke the APL process. APL is only to be used where there is a difficulty in finding information about the standing of the qualification from standard reference sources or where the applicant is seeking exemption from part of a stage of a programme.

The claim for considering prior experiential learning for entry to a programme will be made in the context of the expected outcomes achieved in order to gain the normal entry qualifications of a programme. The maximum amount of credit for APEL for entry with advanced standing to undergraduate programmes will normally be 120 credits and for entry to postgraduate programmes will be normally 240 credits at SCQF levels 9 and 10.

4. Making a Claim for APL or APEL

Claims for APL or APEL credit and the subsequent award of any credit will be in accordance with the section B4 of the University’s Academic Regulations. The maximum amount of credit that can be claimed is
defined by regulations B4.6 and B4.7. Regulation B4.5 precludes credit being claimed for part of a module or part of a CPD short course. Double counting of credit must be avoided. For example a qualification and experience equivalent to that qualification cannot both be assigned credit. If a programme structure contains a 15-credit module, it is not possible to assign 30 credits to the achievement of the outcomes of the module. If a qualification has been used as an entry qualification it cannot also be used for credit against a subsequent stage of a University programme.

The applicant is responsible for initiating a claim and for supplying the University with the relevant information within a defined timescale. The University APL/APEL Co-ordinator will provide applicants with first line advice and assistance. Once the applicant has contacted the APL/APEL co-ordinator and discussed the general basis for the claim, the co-ordinator will arrange an interview with the relevant advisor(s). The advisor will establish whether the applicant is eligible to proceed with a claim for APL/APEL and, if so, will assist with establishing how best to proceed with the claim.

This application should normally be made before the beginning of the academic year in which the credit is to be applied. Exceptionally APL/APEL claims in respect of modules delivered in semester 2 may be made up to 2 months before the start of the delivery of the modules. In structuring their programme of studies, students must not assume APL/APEL credits to have been granted until they have received an official statement to that effect.

An advisor, who will be a subject specialist, will help the applicant prepare a claim by assisting in the identification of the type of evidence required. An assessor will then match the level of prior learning with the modules for which credit is to be claimed based on a comparison of learning outcomes. In doing this the assessor will take note of the achievement of relevant stage or programme outcomes.

Once the assessor has completed the examination of the evidence, he/she will inform the APL/APEL co-ordinator who will arrange for the student’s record to include the credits awarded and that the student is informed of the outcome of the claim. In accordance with regulation B4.9 no grades will be associated with the credit awarded unless Senate has specifically approved this through a programme specific regulation.

All successful claims for credit will be recorded on the student records system and will be presented to the relevant programme assessment boards. All credits awarded will be recorded on the student’s transcript.

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4 Senate may wish to consider the development of a mechanism whereby CPD short courses may be combined to form the equivalent credit to a specified module
5 The current APL/APEL co-ordinator is identified in the appendix to these procedures
6 The current APL/APEL advisors and assessors are identified in Appendix 2
5. **Format of a Claim for non-formal APL or APEL**

Claims for non-formal APL or APEL may take the form of one or more of the following:

- a reflective account
- project reports
- interview/oral assessment
- assessment on demand eg sitting an examination paper or carrying out an assignment
- mapping of learning outcomes
- portfolio of work
- progress file or other record of achievement of learning eg the proposed European Curriculum Vitae which forms part of the Europass.

In some APEL claims based on work experience, the verification of the claim may require the use of references from an employer.

The learning must be current. The normal limit is that the learning should have taken place within the past five years. However this will depend on the subject area eg in some advanced technology areas the period of currency may be shorter than five years. There also may be situations in which learning took place more than five years ago but there is evidence of recent experience that has enhanced the currency of the knowledge or skills.

6. **Role of the APL/APEL Coordinator**

The Coordinator will be the University’s central point of contact for all enquiries regarding APL and APEL. Likewise the Coordinator will maintain communicative links with the advisors and assessors and ensure that the Registrar is kept informed of any credits awarded through APL or APEL. The Coordinator will establish and maintain administrative systems for APL and APEL and provide a support mechanism for staff and students throughout the period of the APL/APEL claim.

7. **Role of the Advisor**

The advisor’s role is to provide advice and guidance to the student throughout the process of compiling a claim for credit.

In the case of APL based on certified learning, the role of the advisor will be to assist the applicant in identifying the relevant information on his/her programme of study. If the learning has taken place within the SCQF this process will be made easier because of the ready access to information on credit volume and level and normally the advisor role can be readily carried out by the relevant module tutor or divisional leader without the need for additional training.

In general the support provided for APEL and non-formal APL will involve:

- encouraging reflection
- helping to identify the sources of learning
- helping with the selection of the evidence of learning
- providing feedback on the presentation of the submission.

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7 based on SCQF Consultation on Guidelines for APL section 5.3.2.1 which also contains an amplification of each type.
The advisor will also provide subject specific advice that focuses on the subject matter of the learning. This involves:

- advising if the subject matter is likely to be at the level claimed
- clarifying the meaning of the learning outcomes within modules and programmes as well as agreeing the student’s own learning outcomes
- agreeing on the structure of the submission and the criteria for assessment
- advising on which types of evidence are appropriate to the learning outcomes and the level of analysis required
- advising how to relate the learning from experience to the learning outcomes
- advising on the amount of credit to be claimed, including consideration of whether the success of subsequent study may be put in jeopardy by missing out on the opportunity to study specific modules against which credit might be claimed.

8. **Role of the Assessor**

The assessor will assess and authenticate the details contained in the application. The assessor will then be able to match the amount of specific credit that can count towards the award.

In general the assessor must ensure that the evidence contained within the submission is satisfactory and appropriate. To this end, the assessor will exercise academic judgement and consider:

- **Acceptability**: the match between the evidence and the learning outcomes. Is the evidence relevant and reliable?
- **Sufficiency**: is the evidence sufficient to demonstrate achievement of the outcomes? Is the volume of credit appropriate?
- **Authenticity**: whether the evidence is clearly related to the student’s own learning
- **Currency**: the topicality of the learning

9. **Staff Development**

Staff development for the co-ordinator, advisors and assessors will be arranged by CELT. In determining the appropriate staff development CELT will take into account current specifications for training in assessment processes eg SQA units\(^8\) for assessors and verifiers.

10. **Charges for APL and APEL**

The University will normally make a charge for processing applications for APL/APEL credits. This charge is payable prior to consideration of the application and is not refundable, irrespective of the outcome of the application.

\(^8\) Currently these are the units A1,A2,V1,V2 which replaced the earlier units D33,D34,D36.
application. The charges for APEL/APEL will be determined by Planning & Resources Committee in the same way as other fees.9

11. Information on APL and APEL
It is recommended that the Student Guide to APL and APEL be revised in the light of these procedures.

It is recommended that the Student Guide to APEL, these procedures and a summary of the University’s approach to the Accreditation of Prior Learning be publicised on the University’s intranet site and promoted as a service aimed at enhancing access to programmes and in the context of lifelong learning recognising credit for previous learning.

12. Complaints and Appeals
It is recommended that both the Student Complaints Policy and the Academic Appeals Policy be modified to provide explicit references to their application to complaints and appeals arising from claims for APL/APEL.

13. Quality Assurance of APL and APEL
Both APL and APEL are subject to external examiner oversight and any APL or APEL at SCQF level 9 and above should be brought to the attention of the relevant external examiner. The external examiner role is concerned with providing a view on the academic standards, policy and procedures associated with APL or APEL. External Examiners do not have authority to change APL or APEL decisions10 (regulation F2.12).

In order to help ensure a consistent approach across the University it is recommended that an annual meeting of advisors be convened by the APL/APEL Coordinator to consider the operation of the accreditation process. The notes of this meeting will be submitted to the Quality Assurance Committee. It is also recommended that the operation of APL/APEL should be considered within the subject review process.

14. Arrangements for the Administration of APL and APEL
The responsibility for maintaining the administrative arrangements for APL and APEL including the publication of appropriate information and the maintenance of any associated forms shall lie with the Registrar who will liaise with Heads of School and Services as appropriate.

15. Future Developments - APL
The background to these procedures including the principles underlying their revision in 2005 is contained in the QEC discussion paper on the Recognition of Prior Learning11. These procedures take fully into account the development of the Scottish Credit & Qualifications Framework (SCQF) and the definitions of formal and informal learning as defined within the Bologna process. In 2005 SCQF produced a consultation paper on the Accreditation of Prior Learning(APL). The University’s procedures

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9 Factors to be considered in determining this fee level are discussed in the paper Accreditation of Prior Learning – The Background Context.
10 to allow APL/APEL decisions to be reversed in this way would be problematic given that the student would have embarked on a study programme in good faith thinking that the credit had been awarded.
currently only address the APEL aspects of APL ie the allocation of credit to prior experiential learning. APL also includes the Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning as part of an informal learning process that may eventually lead to the allocation of credit.

16. Further Guidance
Further guidance on APL/APEL may be found in the following sources


UCAS, Curriculum & Qualifications – Accreditation of Prior Learning, http://www.ucas.ac.uk/cand/APL/ accessed on 21/1/05

Approved by Senate 15 June 2005

GLOSSARY OF TERMS for APL

APEL
Recognition of Prior Experiential Learning
The process of allocating credit to learning which has taken place in the past through informal learning

APL
Recognition of Prior Learning
The process of allocating credit to learning which has taken place in the past through either formal or non-formal learning

Formal Learning
Learning which takes place within education or training programmes and which is both assessed and credit rated.

General Credit
This refers to credit which is awarded for learning which does not relate to a particular programme of study. Like all credits it must be assigned an SCQF level.

Non-Formal learning
Learning which takes place through specific learning or training activities, for example in the workplace, in the voluntary sector or trades union, which may be but not always assessed and which is not credit rated.

Informal Learning
Learning which takes place through life and work experiences. Informal learning is rarely assessed or credit rated.

APL
Recognition of Prior Learning
The general term for the recognition of past
informal learning either as a formative process or as a summative process in which credit is awarded. The latter case is referred to as APEL within the University.

Specific Credit

This refers to credit that can be related to the learning outcomes of an Abertay module or stage of a programme.

### STAFF WITH RESPONSIBILITIES FOR APL/APEL

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<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Name</th>
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<tr>
<td>Registry APL/APEL Co-ordinator</td>
<td>Ms Lynne Bewley</td>
<td>8991</td>
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<tr>
<td>Computing &amp; Creative Technologies Assessor</td>
<td>Dr Colin Miller</td>
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<td>Contemporary Sciences Assessor</td>
<td>Dr Graham Wightman</td>
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<td>Dundee Business School Assessor</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social &amp; Health Sciences Assessor</td>
<td>Dr Eva Forbes</td>
<td>8581</td>
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