



Policy and Regulations for the Accreditation of Prior Learning

**including the Accreditation of Prior Certificated Learning (APCL)
and the Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL)**

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<http://www.bolton.ac.uk/Quality/QAECContents/APPR/Documents/pdf/APLPolicyReqs.pdf>

Purpose of this APL Policy

The University recognises that many of its potential students already possess considerable amounts of learning which could be legitimately counted for academic credit. This learning may be certificated learning (obtained via previous study) or experiential learning (previous learning which has not received recognition in the form of a recognised certificate. Experiential learning should have resulted in the acquisition of knowledge and skills equivalent to learning arising from study).

The University wishes to encourage and facilitate the admission of suitably qualified students to programmes of study, including its professional development programmes, through the use of the Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL). It recognises that the application of APL procedures does vary across the University due to the differing needs of the Schools, Centres, programmes and students.

The purpose of this policy is to allow flexibility for the groups mentioned above to use APL procedures to their best effect while at the same time providing an overall framework within which regulatory and quality assurance issues are addressed across the University.

Schools and Centres (and, through them, their collaborative partners) will be responsible for documenting and operating their own APL procedures which are appropriate for the needs of their programmes and students but which adhere to the general principles of the University policy.

Definitions

Throughout this document the following terms will be used as defined below.

Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL)

An inclusive term which covers the formal recognition, assessment and award of credit at levels 3 to 8 within the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ) and the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF). It comprises the Accreditation of Prior Certificated Learning (APCL) and the Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL).

Accreditation of Prior Certificated Learning (APCL)

The formal recognition, assessment and award of credit for prior certificated learning. This may also be referred to as **credit transfer**.

Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL)

The formal recognition, assessment and award of credit for prior experiential learning, that is learning which has not been certificated but which has been achieved in specific contexts such as employment, voluntary work or life

experience. Experiential learning should have resulted in the acquisition of knowledge and skills equivalent to learning arising from study at levels 3 to 8 within the FHEQ and/or the QCF.

Advanced entry

Where the amount of credit an applicant is awarded via APL allows the applicant to gain exemption from one or more **modules**, but not a whole level or stage of study, within a programme.

Advanced standing

Where the amount of credit an applicant is awarded via APL allows the applicant to gain exemption from at least one whole level or stage of study within a programme

Assessment criteria

Assessment criteria describe what the learner has to do to show that the **learning outcome** has been achieved. They are based on the intended learning outcomes for the work being assessed and specify the standards that must be met and the evidence that will be gathered to demonstrate the achievement of the learning outcomes.

Credit

A quantitative measure of the amount of learning required to achieve specified learning outcomes of a module or level within a programme of study. In the University's credit framework, one credit equates to ten hours of required learning. The learning time includes class contact, directed learning, private study, preparation of assessments, revision and examinations.

General credit

Credit which may qualify a student for entry to HE but which may or may not be matched to the student's choice of programme of study.

The total amount of credit, at a specified level, a student may claim for appropriate prior learning. It is the award of credit which does not count towards specific module(s) but which may qualify the applicant for entry to the start of a specific programme of study.

Learning outcomes

Learning outcomes are specific for a programme or module. They describe what a student should know, understand, or be able to do at the end of that programme or module.

Level

Credit is expressed in terms of the academic level of study which relates to the relative demand, complexity, depth of learning and learner autonomy required in order to achieve the learning outcomes of a module or level within a programme. The levels of credit in use within the University are shown in Table 1 in Appendix 1.

Module

A component of a programme of study to which are allocated learning outcomes and ways of achieving those learning outcomes through learning opportunities and the completion of assessment items. Modules are defined in terms of their credit value at a particular level of study.

The standard module is the basic course unit in the Undergraduate Modular curriculum and is worth 20 credits. Credit values may vary eg there are some half modules worth 10 credits which devote half the normal amount of time to the module material and some modules carrying 30 or more credits which devote the proportionate amount of learning time to the module material.

In the Postgraduate Modular curriculum credit values are more variable. In the University Professional Development framework some modules may be taken by students as “stand-alone” modules rather than as a component of a programme of study.

Specific credit

Credit which may qualify a student for entry onto a specific course where the volume, content and level of prior learning can be matched to the learning outcomes within a module or level/stage of a chosen programme.

Credit, at a specified level, for prior learning which can be used to gain exemptions from specific modules within an award of the University.

Guidance and responsibilities

Guidance on the procedures to be followed and the responsibilities of academic staff and applicants is available in the following documents:

Assessing Prior Learning: Guidance for Academic Staff

Assessing Prior Learning: Guidance for Students

Below are the general principles within which the procedures should operate within Schools/Centres and through them, their collaborative partners.

Principles, Procedures and Regulations

- 1 The availability of APL to prospective/current students should be advertised via appropriate University, School/Centre, and programme-level publicity.
- 2 APL may be used for:
 - gaining entry, at the initial point of entry, to a programme of study validated by the University.
 - gaining entry, at a point subsequent to the initial entry point, to a programme of study validated by the University (Advanced Entry or Advanced Standing).
 - recognising previously accumulated credit which can then count towards an award of the University.
- 3 A claim for APL credit may be made at any time before or after a student has enrolled on a University programme of study.
- 4 “It is learning which is accredited not just the experience of doing”, i.e. acceptable evidence of achieved learning must be provided in a form which allows a judgement to be made about the equivalence of that learning to a given set of learning outcomes.
- 5 Decisions on an application for APL credit will be based on academic judgement of the equivalence of the learning outcomes of previous study or experience to the stated learning outcomes of a module or modules validated by the University. Even if there is judged to be equivalence in this respect it may be that the award of credit would disadvantage the applicant in terms of their level of achievement in the award for which they are registered, due to the fact that credit awarded through APL procedures is not normally graded (see 16 below).
- 6 An award of general credit through the APL procedures does not necessarily mean that all that credit may be used to exempt the applicant from specific modules. The amount of specific credit is likely to be less, since this is related to the degree of relevance of the prior learning to the modules for which the applicant is seeking exemption.
- 7 A credit value of 1 relates to 10 notional learning hours.
- 8 Credit gained through APL procedures can be awarded at all levels of study.
- 9 Credit gained through APL procedures can be awarded in respect of core, option, or elective modules but not for any module which comprises a major project or dissertation or for taught modules at doctoral level (level HE 8).

- 10 The minimum amount of credit which may be claimed is the amount allocated to the smallest credit-rated module within a programme. APL cannot be used to gain exemption from part of a module. However, programme teams may, in certain cases, suggest that an applicant undertakes specific self-directed study to complete the outstanding learning outcomes for a module for which they are seeking APL credit.
- 11 The maximum amount of credit which may be claimed is normally up to two thirds of the credits **required at the level of the intended award**. Table 2 in Appendix 1 shows the maximum credit allowable under the APL policy for each of the University's awards.
- 12 Credit for prior learning for which an award has previously been achieved may be counted towards a subsequent award requiring further credits at the same and/or higher level(s) where it can be established to the satisfaction of the University that this is educationally desirable and consistent with the approved aims, intended learning outcomes and curriculum of the University award.
 - credit will not normally be transferable in this way where the previous and subsequent award titles are effectively the same, as per the QAA Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ).
 - credit will not normally be transferable in this way if it is considered not to be educationally desirable to do so by the University because of the similarity of the aims, intended learning outcomes or curricula of the programmes leading to the two award titles.
 - outside these circumstances, the double counting of credit for APL purposes is not normally permitted.
- 13 Credit for previous certificated study awarded by a recognised body are equivalent to those awarded for study at the University.
- 14 APL cannot be considered for a module or modules taken and failed while being studied as part of a programme validated by the University.
- 15 APL cannot be considered towards an award and programme title where the requirements of a professional, statutory or regulatory body for that award or programme title are not met.
- 16 During the APL process, due regard must be given to professional, statutory and regulatory body specifications and requirements. Where the maximum credit permitted under the regulations of the professional or statutory body is less than that allowed under the University's APL regulations, the regulations of the professional, statutory or regulatory body will supersede those of the University if the award is to be recognised by that body.

- 17 Credits awarded via the University's APL procedures will not normally be graded. Calculation of the classification of an award (where appropriate) is done only on the basis of the marks achieved for modules studied at the University.
- 18 The evidence submitted in support of a claim for APL credit must have:
- detail (appropriate to the amount of credit applied for),
 - acceptability (in terms of the type of evidence being submitted),
 - sufficiency (in terms of the level of credit applied for and should include evidence of reflection on the learning that has been achieved),
 - authenticity (in terms of the evidence relating to the applicant's own work),
 - currency (should normally relate to learning which has taken place within the last five years. This time may be reduced in subject areas where the content is changing rapidly or may be increased where the applicant can provide evidence of substantial and continual up-dating since a recognised qualification was awarded).
- 19 The evaluation of this evidence should normally include an assessment of the learning needs of the applicant.
- 20 All claims for APL, together with the evidence supporting these claims, must be submitted in English. Where evidence in the form of certificates, testimonials, or references is in a language other than English it is the responsibility of the applicant to provide an accurate translation.
- 21 Various forms of assessment may be used in the assessment of claims for APL eg portfolio, interview or *viva*, applicant's performance, artefact(s), certificates, completion of written work (which may be an item or items of assessment normally used within the module or programme for which credit is being claimed). In addition, a reflective account or diary demonstrating the learning achieved may be required.
- the precise form(s) of assessment to be used will be identified and agreed by the applicant and members of staff responsible for APL in the School/Centre at the start of the process, with reference to the learning outcomes of the module/programme for which the applicant is seeking credit.
 - the production of a portfolio of evidence is one of the most used forms of assessment for APL purposes and guidance will be provided by the member(s) of staff responsible for APL in the School/Centre on its contents, preparation and production.
- 22 The outcome of a claim for APL will be one of:

The claim for credit is successful.

The evidence is incomplete.

(Insufficient information has been provided in order to allow the Assessor(s) to arrive at a decision. The Assessor(s) will decide if the applicant is allowed to re-work and resubmit their evidence).

The claim for credit is not successful.

(The claim for credit is not successful because the level and/or volume of learning are/is insufficient).

- 23 The outcome of the assessment process is subject to the approval of an appropriate authority within the School/Centre and to the appropriate Module Results or Progression/Final Award Board. Documents relating to any claims should be made available to the external examiner for the programme.
- 24 Re-working and resubmission of an unsuccessful claim may be allowed but is limited to one resubmission. The decision on whether resubmission is allowed is dependent on a number of factors including the quality of the evidence initially presented.
- 25 Any fees to be charged by the School / Centre for the administration of claims for APEL must be made known to the applicant at the time of their initial enquiry.
- 26 Any fees charged must be paid in full by the applicant after the decision is taken to allow the applicant to proceed with the claim for APEL but before the applicant's claim receives any specific guidance, assessment, moderation or consideration by the Assessment Board.
- 27 Details of any successful claims for APL will be identified on the applicant's transcript.
- 28 Schools/Centres should identify named members of staff as having responsibility for the APL process within that School/Centre.
- all members of staff responsible for APL within the Schools/Centres should have received appropriate staff development and be given time for carrying out their responsibilities and for up-dating.
 - it is the responsibility of these named members of staff to provide applicants with appropriate guidance during all stages of the APL process (eg initial guidance, on the form of the evidence to be presented, how the assessment of evidence will be carried out etc) and with effective, timely and accurate feedback.

- it is important that different, but appropriate, members of staff act as the APEL adviser(s), providing the applicant with support through the APEL procedures, and as the APEL assessor (s) of the evidence presented by the applicant.
- 29 Details of all cases involving APL applications and procedures will be fully documented by Schools/Centres. This documentation should normally include:
- Correspondence between the applicant and the member(s) of staff responsible for APL in the School/Centre;
 - Evidence submitted by the applicant in support of their claim for APL ;
 - A record of the decisions taken by the member(s) of staff responsible for APL in relation to the claim;
 - A record of the verification of the claim by the Module Results /Progression/Final Award Board and the external examiner for the programme;
 - A record of the agreed outcome to be passed to the responsible part of the University for entry onto the student's official record and transcript.
- Applicants who are awarded credit through the APEL procedures should be tracked through their studies by the appropriate/designated School/Centre authorities and their performance compared with students on the same programme who did not apply for credit through these procedures.
 - Applicants who have been through the APL procedures should be asked by the appropriate/designated authorities to provide written feedback on their experience of the process.
 - The School/Centre is responsible for reporting annually on APL applications for consideration at the School/Centre Board of Study and, through the Board, at University level by the Academic Quality and Standards Committee.
- 30 Applicants may request a review of the decisions of the APL assessment under the University's Appeal Regulations if it is believed the following grounds may apply:
- there was some material irregularity in the conduct of handling the claim for APL.
 - an applicant's performance in any assessment associated with their claim for APL was affected by circumstances which may be covered by the University's Mitigating Circumstances Procedures.

Note:

Decisions based on academic judgement cannot form the basis of an appeal.

Submission of an appeal is only possible once the decision on a claim for APL has been ratified by an Assessment Board.

- 31 The APL policy is not intended to replace or supplement programmes such as Erasmus and Socrates, or any exchange scheme which programmes may establish or have established with other institutions, or the principles of the GMSA Advance Scheme.

Appendix 1

Table 1. Levels of credit within the University.

Level	QAA FHEQ	Typical Taught Award	Benchmark
3*		FE Level 3 Foundation Certificate	Further Education HE Foundation Level
4		Certificate of HE/HNC	Year 1 degree
5		Diploma of HE/ HND/Foundation Degree	Year 2 degree
6		Honours Degree/ Ordinary Degree/ Graduate Certificate and Diploma	Year 3 degree
7		PgCertificate/PgDiploma Masters Degree	Masters
8		PhD, Professional Doctorate	Doctorate

*QCF Level 3

Table 2. The maximum amount of credit which may be claimed under the APL Regulations for each of the University's awards

Award (total credits)	Maximum APL credits permitted	Minimum credits to be studied at level of award
Professional Doctorate (540)	220	320 from 540 at HE7/8
Masters (180)	120	60 from 180 at HE7
PgDip (120)	80	40 from 120 at HE7
PgCert (60)	40	20 from 60 at HE7
Honours (360)	320	40 from 120 at HE6
Ordinary (300)	280	20* from 60 at HE6
Foundation degree/ DipHE/HND (240)	200	30 from 120 at HE5
HNC (150)	120*	30 from 150 at HE5
CertHE (120)	80	40 from 120 at HE4
CPD awards	67%	33%