

The University of Liverpool
Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL) Policy

CONTENTS

Definition of APL	2
The University's Approach to APL	2
Key Principles of the University's Scheme	3
General Guidelines	3
Roles and responsibilities	3
The Award of credit	4
Limitations to the award of credit	4
Instances where APL credit can and cannot be awarded	4
The APL Process	5
The Timing of a claim	5
Time limit for process	5
Responsibilities within the APL process:	6
• <i>The Responsibilities of the Student</i>	6
• <i>The Responsibilities of the Adviser</i>	6
• <i>The Responsibilities of the Assessor</i>	7
The APL claim and what constitutes evidence	7
The Use of interview	8
The Assessment decision	8
Feedback	8
Appeals	9
Payment of fees	9
Record keeping and monitoring	9
Glossary	10
APL Flowchart	12

Definition of APL

Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL) is the generic term used for the award of credits on the basis of demonstrated learning that has occurred at some time in the past. It encompasses:

- **Accreditation of Prior Formal Learning (APFL) / Accreditation of Prior Certificated Learning (APCL)**

Recognition and accreditation of prior learning gained from formal courses (interpreted broadly to include any designed learning experience) which has previously been assessed and/or accredited at HE level. This is also known as credit transfer.

- **Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL)**

The process of assessing and then credit-rating learning which has its source in some experience which occurred prior to the point of entering the course, where the experience was not previously assessed and credit rated at HE level.

The University's Approach to APL

The University of Liverpool operates an APL scheme which recognises relevant prior learning. The learning may take the form of:

- Recognised learning which has resulted in the award of credit from this, or another, institution i.e. credit transfer
- Informal or experiential learning arising from:
 - paid or unpaid work
 - courses attended, for example at work
 - self-directed study
 - leisure or voluntary activities

The University's APL scheme can be used to:

- Gain entry to a programme
- Gain exemption from study for a proportion of a postgraduate or undergraduate programme.

Where prior learning is used to gain entry to a programme, the University does not accredit but recognises the learning as being equivalent to required entry qualifications. This is known as the **Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)** and falls within the scope of the University's APL policy.

The *principles* contained in the University's APL policy shall also cover **Entry with Advanced Standing**¹ However, current *practice* for Entry with Advanced Standing (including that of making no charge for transfer in from broadly equivalent programmes of study) should continue. Where transfer is not straightforward and the prior certificated learning presented is not directly relevant, institutional APL procedures should be applied in an appropriate manner.

¹ whereby institutional procedures allow a student to enter a course later than the normal start point or otherwise shorten the normal period of study

Key Principles of the University's Scheme

- APL credits from another institution are of the same value as those gained from studying at the University of Liverpool
- 1 credit point is equivalent to 10 hours of Notional Student Workload (NSW)
- Credit is awarded only for demonstrated learning that can be made available for academic assessment. It cannot be awarded on the basis of experience alone.
- Credits are only awarded on the basis of evidence which is:
 - sufficient to determine that learning objectives have been met
 - authentic to the work of the applicant
 - recent enough to imply current knowledge or capability, normally no longer than 5 years old
 - appropriate to the level and volume of credit being claimed.
- As far as possible, the process of assessing a claim for credit should assist in identifying learning needs as well as identifying the learning that has taken place.
- Applicants are not charged for the award of APL credit. A charge may be made for assessment and other support processes involved in considering a claim for credit. Charges may, therefore, vary.
- When awarding credit for prior learning, due regard must be paid to the requirements of professional and statutory bodies.
- Where a University of Liverpool award is not modularised or credit rated, effort must be made to match a student's prior knowledge and understanding to appropriate components of the Liverpool programme.

General Guidelines

Roles and responsibilities

- Academic Standards Sub-Committee is responsible for the monitoring and development of the University's policy and procedures with regard to APL
- Faculties and Departments must adhere to the principles and procedures laid down by ASSC but may contextualise them e.g. by using case studies to assist applicants
- It is the student's responsibility to prepare an application and to submit adequate documentary evidence
- Departments must establish a system for the receipt of claims and administration of the APL process. Normally this will be the responsibility of the Adviser.

- Departments must nominate a specific member of staff who will act in the role of APL Adviser (normally the Admissions Tutor). The Adviser should have the competence to advise a student on the production and submission of an APEL claim.
- Departments must nominate a specific member of staff who will act in the role of Assessor. The Assessor should have the competence and responsibility to exercise academic judgment in assessing an APL claim. Where required, the Assessor will take advice from colleagues about the subject (s) covered in the claim.
- The role of the Adviser must be kept separate and distinct from the role of Assessor.
- Departments must ensure that members of staff, once nominated, undertake the required staff development before they can act as Adviser or Assessor.

The Award of credit

- APL Credit should be awarded in specified amounts at an identified level
- Specific credit may be awarded where prior learning matches, in terms of level, volume and content, the learning outcomes of a course or module.
- General credit may be awarded where prior learning is recognised to be of sufficient depth and quality as to be assigned a specific level and amount, but which cannot be matched to the subject content of a chosen award programme.
- There is no difference between certificated (APL) and uncertificated learning (APEL) in the amount of credit that can be claimed towards an award.
- APEL (experiential learning) credit is always ungraded.
- APCL (certificated learning) may be graded.
- Double counting of prior learning for credit must be avoided. Credit, whether gained at this or another institution, can only be accumulated towards one single award at any given level. For example, the credit transfer in (through APCL) of a CertHE or DipHE with a view to completing a first degree, would be accepted only where those credits had not already been counted towards another degree.
- Where a programme is not credit-rated or modularised, there must be clear identification of the specific elements of the programme against which the prior learning is to be matched.

Limitations to the award of credit

- The minimum claim allowable under the APL Scheme is equal to the smallest module within any given programme.
- The maximum credit for APL which can be offered is normally one third of any given programme

Instances where APL credit can and cannot be awarded

- Prior learning can be awarded credit against required, mandatory and optional modules

- Where claims are made for exemption, they should be against whole modules or components of a programme. Claims cannot be made against part modules. However, at a department's discretion, specific self-directed study may be suggested to enable a student to "top up" prior learning to the required level and volume in order to claim credit for the whole module.
- APL credit cannot be awarded for any module which comprises a major project or dissertation
- APL credit cannot be awarded where professional or statutory body requirements are not met.

The APL Process

APL may enable a student to:

- gain access to a programme
or
- gain exemption from study for a proportion of a postgraduate or undergraduate programme

In both cases the preceding principles and guidelines should be adhered to, but where prior learning is recognised for access purposes Departments should use their discretion in the approach they adopt when applying the process described below. It is expected that in most cases Departments will take note of established systems and that Admissions Tutors will continue to review both prior experiential and certificated learning. Where claims for exemption are made, particularly in the case of prior experiential learning, a common approach across the University is required.

The timing of a claim

Normally, APL claims for admission should be made 2 months prior to the start of the programme.

An APL application for exemption can be made:

- only once a conditional or unconditional offer of a place has been received by the prospective student. Claims cannot be made prior to an offer being made by the University
- if requesting APL for specific credit against the first modules in a programme of study, the application must be in time to allow the award of APL credit BEFORE that module has commenced.
- following registration as a student. Claims must be submitted within 3 months of the start of the programme.

Time limit for process

The use of APL does not alter the admissions process for the programme. Deadlines for acceptance of an offer of a place will not be extended to accommodate the timing of APL assessment decisions.

Once a full application documenting the claim has been received, the student will normally receive the decision within 4 weeks.

Responsibilities within the APL process

There are 3 key roles within the APL procedure. These are the Student (the claimant), the Adviser and the Assessor. Each has distinct responsibilities.

The role of the Adviser must be kept separate from the role of the Assessor. The roles, therefore, must be undertaken by different members of staff. The Departmental Adviser is the University nominated point of contact for all APL claims.

The Responsibilities of the Student

It is the responsibility of the student to prepare and submit their application. The student is required to:

- make contact with the APL Adviser and obtain the required paperwork (including details of admission requirements/learning outcomes for the module/ programme)
- identify their existing skills and knowledge
- match what they have learned against the requirements of the module/programme.
- collect and collate the evidence to support the claim
- formally submit the claim to the Adviser in line within required deadlines
- inform the Adviser of any change of contact details
- pay the appropriate fee within required timescales

The Responsibilities of the Adviser

The **Adviser** should be a member of staff who has the competence to advise the student on making a claim, including its production and submission.

It is the responsibility of the Adviser to ensure that the student has a copy of the relevant guidance notes and to provide advice upon:

- the nature of APL
- the credit requirements of the programme including specific learning outcomes for modules
- University procedure, including fee structure, limits on the amount of credit that can be claimed and the process of making the APL claim
- formulating a claim in terms of reflecting upon and demonstrating learning
- the assessment process
- the structure and content of a draft claim. The Adviser should, however, always make clear that his/her view on a draft claim does **not** guarantee the outcome of the assessment process.

On occasion, an Adviser may advise against making an APL claim.

Advice may be provided on an individual or group basis. Where advice is provided in a group setting, the Adviser will ensure that adequate time is also set aside for provision of individual advice, when appropriate.

It is the further responsibility of the Adviser to:

- receive and progress a claim

- receive, acknowledge and pass for processing, student fees
- notify Students and Exams of the assessment decision
- administer the student feedback process
- administer the on-going monitoring process
- maintain records during the APL process. These records include:
 - if required, the agreement reached with the student on any additional work to be undertaken to be able to claim credit for a full module
 - notes of briefing and subsequent meetings / telephone conversations
 - summary report
 - assessment report form
 - verifiers report form
 - student feedback form
 - if required, monitoring reports on APL activity to the Board of Studies

On completion of the process the Adviser will place all records relating to the APL claim on the departmental student record file.

The Responsibilities of the Assessor

The **Assessor** should be a member of staff who has the competence and responsibility to exercise academic judgement in assessing the APL claim.

Each claim must be assessed on an individual basis. The Assessor will:

- identify the assessment criteria – based on the learning outcomes
- assess the evidence against the defined criteria
- recommend, record and report the outcome of the assessment process within the required time-scale.

The APL claim and what constitutes evidence

Evidence presented should be of a character appropriate to the programme or module for which the claim is being made. It should be of sufficient:

- **Detail** – appropriate for the amount of credit being claimed
- **Depth** – i.e. sufficient breadth of evidence including evidence of reflection
- **Level** - appropriate for the specific credit claimed. This is cross referenced to an existing University module/programme which has been validated at a particular level
- **Authenticity** – it must be the claimant's own work
- **Currency** – the University would normally expect the experience or qualifications to have been gained within the previous 5 years. Academic awards achieved in the past may no longer have the same currency as when they were awarded.

For APCL claims:

The Student must, through the use of syllabi, programme descriptions, formal certificates, transcripts etc, demonstrate the match between their prior learning and the module or programme in question.

For APEL claims:

The Student must demonstrate the coherence, balance and progression of their learning through critical reflection. Appropriate sources of experiential learning may include:

- work experience
- voluntary work
- short courses
- other relevant experiences

Documentation to accompany the claim

A student will need to submit with their application:

- the originals of the evidence listed
- an SAE for return of the originals

Once the APL process is complete the accompanying documentation will be returned to the student.

It is the responsibility of the student to retain the original documentation and the APL claim portfolio, whilst they are completing their study as a student of the University.

The Use of interview

Departments may make use of an assessment interview routinely or to supplement documentary evidence presented by the student.

The Assessment decision

The assessment report will make one of the following judgements:

- 1) the level and volume of learning achieved is sufficient for specific credit to be awarded or for admission to a programme
- 2) the evidence is incomplete
- 3) the level and volume of learning achieved is NOT appropriate.

In the case of 2, a Student may re-submit a claim once only. The initial assessment decision will be notified to the student by the Adviser together with guidance as to the additional information required.

The assessment decision is verified by the relevant Board of Studies. This may be undertaken by a delegated individual from the Board and ratified at the next full Board of Studies, and then reported to the Faculty.

In cases of doubt, the claim shall be submitted to the Centre for Lifelong Learning for advice.

Feedback

- The Adviser will inform the student of the outcome of the APL claim.
- The Adviser will send a statement of any credit awarded to the student and to Students and Exams.

Appeals

There is no appeal regarding the academic decision.

Appeals regarding the conduct of the APL process should be referred to the Head of Department.

Payment of fees

Where APL is being claimed for access onto a programme:

No charge is made for the process of advising and assessing the claim.

Where APL is being claimed for exemption from study:

The University charges a fee for the process of advising on and assessing the claim. Initial advice is free of charge. The fee is paid once the student requests more detailed advice from the APL Adviser in submitting their claim for assessment.

The current fee shall be:

50% of the full module fee
or £30, whichever is the greater.

Record keeping and monitoring

It is the responsibility of the Adviser to maintain the records of:

- claims made by students
- the on-going monitoring process.

Record keeping

Upon completion of the APL process the Adviser will place all records on the Departmental student file.

Monitoring

In order to ensure the efficiency and effectiveness of institutional procedures and their application, the Adviser should monitor APL activities in his/her Department through:

- student evaluation questionnaires (relating to the APL claim process)
- tracking student progress
- compilation of exit statistics.

Student evaluation questionnaires should incorporate:

- a series of tick boxes for factual information (e.g. documentation received)
- qualitative questions e.g. re the value of any initial briefing session

It is recommended, as good practice, that the Adviser report periodically to the relevant Board of Studies on APL activities in his/her Department.

Glossary

Advanced standing – a whole level

This allows a student to be given substantial amounts of credit

Credit

A quantitative measure of learning effort. Credit is normally awarded for the achievement of a set of specified learning outcomes and is related to the amount of learning needed to achieve the learning outcomes.

The term **accreditation** means the process by which credits are assigned to a module or programme

Credit Accumulation & Transfer (CAT)

The University supports the nationally recognised Credit Accumulation and Transfer Scheme (CAT). This system allows a student to make a claim for exemption from a module, or access to a particular level of study, where they have previous certificated learning from another institution, which is appropriate. The system offers flexibility to the student, by allowing the transfer of this credit between institutions of Higher education.

General Credit

All credit rated programmes have general credit, which evidences the learning achieved. It is a recognition that certain activities are recognised as being of academic value at a given academic level.

The learning which has been achieved may or may not be within the subject area of the award programme for which the claimant is submitting their APL claim.

APL for general credit may be given for previous learning which is shown to be generally relevant to the programme being studied. However it must be appropriate to the programme in terms of level, content and quality.

This will often be used to allow entry to a course.

The claim for general credit will be judged on the same academic standards as those used for specific credit

Specific Credit

Specific credit exists where there is a match between the learning outcomes, content and level of the identified University module and the prior learning. It, therefore, allows exemption from taking that module.

All outcomes in the specified module must have been achieved to at least the level required in order to receive a pass by the standard method of assessment for that module.

If the previous learning claimed does not fully cover the content of the module it may be possible for the student to carry out some additional learning to make up to the full module.

Learning outcome

The knowledge, skills and attributes which a student can be expected to have gained on successful completion of a programme or element of a programme of study.

(Note: the terms 'aims' and 'objectives' are commonly used in defining the purposes of a programme of study, particularly in the context of subject reviews carried out by the Quality Assurance Agency. Although these terms are not used in this Code of Practice, the following are QAA definitions of them:

- *Aims: an expression of the provider's broad educational purposes in providing the programme(s) of study.*
- *Objectives: the intended learning outcomes that demonstrate successful completion of the programme(s) of study and the learning experiences provided to ensure that those outcomes can be achieved.)*

Level

An indicator of the relative demand, complexity and depth of the learning required of a learner in relation to particular modules or elements of study.

Module

A discrete component of a programme of study having stated learning outcomes, teaching and learning opportunities to achieve those outcomes and assessment tasks to enable students to demonstrate achievement of the outcomes. Modules are allocated credit values and normally are also allocated a credit level.

Programme

The term 'programme' is used rather than 'course'.

A programme of study is structured teaching and learning provision leading to one or more awards.