

GUIDELINES FOR THE ACCREDITATION OF PRIOR LEARNING (APL)

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1. Introduction

This University of Wolverhampton (UoW) *Guidelines for the Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL)* is designed to serve as a basic framework document for Schools, outlining the principles of APL and the structures and processes that Schools are to implement in order to provide consistency and transparency for APL. The Guidelines have been informed by the UoW APL Working Party's investigation of APL practices within the University (2004/05). They draw extensively on a range of sources, including the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education's *Guidelines on the accreditation of prior learning*, September 2004, which acknowledges that higher education institutions (HEIs) increasingly recognise the significant knowledge, skills and understanding that can be developed as a result of learning opportunities at work, both paid and unpaid, and through individual activities and interests.

The UoW model is a devolved one, giving Schools a degree of flexibility and ownership of their APL processes and approaches in order to meet the specific requirement of their academic portfolios. Where a school has a relatively low frequency of APL, it may wish to consider combining its APL with another school in order to facilitate the process and share best practice.

Schools should be guided by the key principles, structures and processes for APL as outlined in the following Sections of this document and to consider and implement, as appropriate to their requirements for effective APL.

2. What is Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL)?

2.1 The QAA Guidelines (2004) state that **APL** is a process for recognising and assessing students' prior learning. *Importantly, it is the achievement of learning, or the outcomes of that learning, and not just the experience of the activities alone, that is being credited.* This recognition may give the learning a credit-value in a credit-based structure and enable it to be counted towards the completion of a programme of study and the award(s) or qualifications associated with it. Given this focus, 'APL' is now the preferred term and is displacing 'APA', the 'accreditation of prior achievement'.

APL includes experiential learning or prior certificated learning for academic purposes. These are discussed below.

2.2 Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (**APEL**) is a process by which a student's learning through experience is assessed and, as appropriate, recognised for academic purposes.

2.3 Accreditation of Prior Certificated Learning (**APCL**) is a process through which previously assessed and certificated learning is considered and, as appropriate, recognised for academic purposes (for the dimensions of international applications for APCL see Section 4.3.5).

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3. Key principles of the University's APL system

The following are the identified key principles of the University's APL system which must be put in place in each School.

3.1 A **formal APL Board** that is part of the formal Assessment Board structure of the School, with appropriate representation from School Registry, academics (including subject and award representatives), representatives from collaborative partners as and when appropriate, and administrative staff. A schedule of dates should be set for the meetings of the Board within the academic year.

The role of the Board is to consider and confirm the decisions made within the School at subject or other levels and to report these decisions to Award Boards. Specimen terms of reference for APL Board are given in Appendix 1.

Depending on the School's recruitment patterns it is recommended that APL Boards are held at least twice a year, November and February, i.e. after student enrolment or as appropriate to the School's assessment board schedule. The APL application form, decisions on APL, plus the student's programme application form, should be with Registry at least a week before the APL Board.

Minutes of the Board should be forwarded to the next scheduled meeting of the assessment boards.

Following the Board, Registry will update student records.

3.2 A School procedure for review and monitoring School procedures and policies for APL. Depending on the significance and volume of APL undertaken in the School, this procedure may take the form of a School APL Committee reporting to School Quality Committee (SQC) or SQC itself taking on this role using standing agenda items to ensure that all recommended areas are covered.

Appendix 2 indicates an outline of Terms of Reference for an APL Committee or the framework for SQC engagement.

The School's processes for review and monitoring of APL procedures, either within the APL Committee or through SQC, must include the following:

- representation from School, Registry and collaborative partners where considered appropriate;
- to undertake periodic monitoring and review of APL within the School;
- analysing data and monitoring trends;
- changes to School policy and procedure should be communicated to the SQC and staff;
- consider processes for dealing with any appeals regarding APL and in these instances may wish to consider representation from other schools.

The School APL Committee should present an annual report to the SQC to be approved and forwarded to UQC.

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- 3.3** A **School APL Guide (Handbook)** that serves to inform students of the principles and procedures for APL, any costs involved in processing APL and also fee reductions (if any) consequent on APL being accredited for a programme of study. This Guide may also serve as the document for all staff within the School involved in APL or, alternatively, Schools may draw up a separate document for staff. It is recommended that the APL Guide for students be presented to SQC for final approval prior to its publication. The Guide should be openly available (public folders, WOLF, intranet, etc) and should be used to support the promotion of APL to the School's clients.

School APL Guide should be made available to:

- All students
- School APL staff at all levels
- Registry
- Collaborative Partners
- UoW International Office

- 3.4** A **designated subject external examiner(s)** who has (have) responsibility for APL within each subject or combination of subjects, as deemed appropriate by the School, to ensure the quality and standards of APL. The subject (or combination of subjects) will submit samples of *processed* applications for APL (APEL and APCL) to the external examiner(s); the comments from the external(s) will be submitted to the School APL Board and/or subject boards, as part of the normal assessment processes, and then to award boards. Externals will be requested to also include comments on APL processes and outcomes in their annual subject reports. Such comment should form part of the post-assessment review and discussions in subjects and also at the School's APL Committee.

Processing of applications for APEL is normally a subject-based activity. Applications for APCL can be subject or programme/pathway-based and can be allocated, in terms of submitting samples of APL applications, to an appropriate subject external. Where schools feel that the subject-based process does not adequately meet their requirements they may complement it accordingly.

External examiners allocated to consider APL applications should provide comment on the School's APL processes (quality and standards) in their reports. (External Examiners Handbook)

- 3.5** **Student feedback on APL processes.** Schools should establish effective systems and processes for obtaining appropriate and regular feedback from students on APL applications and decision-making. As is normally the case, schools should provide responses to student comments and publish them in the usual ways.
- 3.6** **University overview of APL.** Provision is to be made allowing the University to maintain an overview of APL being awarded through School APL Boards, to highlight trends, identify issues and share good practice. (Refer to section 6 for full details.)

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4. Principles of APL

In writing the School's APL Guide, the following principles must be included.

4.1 *The policies and procedures for APL should be explicit, transparent, fair and applied consistently.*

- 4.1.1** As accreditation is a matter of academic judgement, it is essential that a school's assessment of applications for APL are consistent across and between whatever points the assessment is made.
- 4.1.2** An explicit statement of the proportion of learning that can be recognised through the accreditation process. UoW regulations state that no more than 50% of an award can be achieved through accreditation. For the undergraduate Academic Regulations, section 29, and postgraduate Academic Regulations, section 6.0.
- 4.1.3** An explicit statement of the use and re-use of credit achieved through APL; for example, where accreditation that has been previously awarded is subsequently presented for recognition in a second qualification or part thereof (Refer to University Academic Regulations).
- 4.1.4** Clear communication of the decision on APL to the applicant, with clear exposition of the reasons for that decision and any implications for the progression normally available in the programme of study. This communication should include information on the student's right of appeal. The School's APL Guide (or other communications) should state who is responsible for feedback to the applicant (see section 4.2).
- 4.1.5** APEL or APCL that has been accredited should be identified on students' transcripts.

4.2 *Information available to applicants and staff undertaking accreditation should be clear, explicit and accessible.*

- 4.2.1** Schools will provide an APL Guide (Handbook) for students that is annually updated, outlining (also see sections 4.3 and 4.4 below):
- the role and purpose of APL;
 - what will and will not be accredited;
 - how and when a claim should be made;
 - to whom the application is made;
 - the processing of APL applications, including feedback;
 - the nature of support and advice available;

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- any costs to students associated with applying for APL;
- the nature of evidence required to support the application for APL;
- any methods of appeal and a statement of the normal limit within which an appeal decision will be made.

4.2.2 There is to be an application form for APL (perhaps contained within the Guide) which, inter alia, facilitates the student's statement of:

- the total number and level of credits for which accreditation is being sought;
- the credits or module(s) against which the evidence is being supplied for APEL or APCL;
- the evidence that is being submitted for purposes of supporting an application for APL, for example work-based portfolio, interviews, artefacts, projects, certification (see section 4.2.3);
- An example of an APL Application form is given in Appendix 3 and of a Decision Form in Appendix 4.

4.2.3 Applicants for APL are to be fully informed of the nature and range of evidence considered appropriate to support a claim for APL.

For APCL the evidence will normally involve the submission of certification indicating the attainment of prior learning. For APEL the evidence may consist of portfolios, interviews, artefacts, projects and so forth.

Four key criteria apply:

- **Currency:** does the evidence of prior learning relate to current learning?
- **Authenticity:** is the evidence clearly related to the applicant's own efforts and achievements?
- **Sufficiency:** is there sufficient evidence to demonstrate fully the achievement of the learning claimed?
- **Acceptability:** is there an appropriate match between the evidence presented and the learning being demonstrated? Is the evidence valid and reliable?

4.2.4 In the case of the submission of evidence supporting an application for APEL, the APL Guide for students should outline in detail how the evidence be collated and presented. Students are to be advised that they should have permission to use materials and documents that are the property of an organisation rather than that of the individual her/himself. Schools should direct students to the consideration of data protection issues and professional and legal confidentiality issues.

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4.2.5 Equivalence of prior learning to a programme or a part of it should be through explicit criteria such as those contained within the programme (learning outcomes, skills, subject knowledge and understanding, etc.). Statements/testimonials of professional competency may also be relevant.

4.2.6 There is to be explicit information on whether fees are being charged for APEL and APCL and, if so, what the tariff is, for example per credit, per application, etc. In addition there should be information on when the fees are paid and whether they are non-refundable.

Clear information to be provided on whether APL attracts a reduction in programme/award fees and, if so, the basis on which such a reduction occurs.

4.2.7 Clear guidance to be given to APL applicants about when a claim should be submitted, the timescale and process for feedback and the decision. For example, claims for APL should normally be before the start of a programme but, where this is not possible, there should be a clear indication of the process and the implications for progress on a programme.

Where external organisations or collaborative partners are involved, there should be clear direction from the School on the timescale and for decision and feedback, particularly on any applications made after the start of a programme. Cognisance should be taken of how the approach adopted will promote or compromise the equality of opportunity.

4.3 ***Roles and responsibilities of APL staff and of applicants should be defined clearly. Staff should be competent to undertake APL.***

4.3.1 In addition to the APL Guide, schools should have a clearly documented process for APL, with clear lines of responsibility for advising on and processing applications for APL, including the roles of Registry and the UoW International Office. For example, advice may be offered primarily by award leaders/programme managers or by designated APL advisors. In addition schools may wish to have subject APL advisors to support students' submission of portfolios relating to APEL applications. In relation to the APL Application Form, schools may require it to be counter-signed by a designated member of staff (see Appendix 3).

4.3.2 Collaborative partner institutions should be consulted and informed on UoW APL issues, kept up to date with any changes or amendments and provided with the most recent edition of the APL Guide.

4.3.3 Appropriate arrangements should be provided for the training and support of **all** staff, including collaborative partners' staff who engage with the support, guidance and assessment of APL claims.

4.3.4 External examiners undertaking APL responsibilities should be fully cognisant of the School's APL policy and procedures. The University's

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perspective on APL will be provided at external examiner inductions conducted by the University.

- 4.3.5** Schools should liaise closely with the International Office, University Admissions Unit staff and School Admissions Tutors regarding processes for the admission of applicants with APCL and direct entry onto pathways using the Registry Accreditation of Prior Learning Direct Entry form, ensuring that decisions made are clearly recorded and authorised. (see Appendix 6)

The principal information source for establishing the **level** of an overseas qualification is NARIC (the National Academic Recognition Centre for the UK). This is an internationally recognised body, originally part of the DfES and used by all UK universities and other government-based organisations, eg, The British Council. Qualifications that are not endorsed by NARIC are not accepted. (All queries relating to International qualifications should be directed to the University's International Office.)

- 4.3.6** Schools must liaise with Campus Registries to agree processes and ensure:
- all APL and Advance Standing claims are recorded onto the SITs student records;
 - they are aware of the School's APL procedures and signpost student enquiries accordingly;
 - APL decisions are recorded and students notified of the decision made once applications have been ratified at the APL Board;
 - APL and Advanced Standing information and data are made available and presented at Assessment Boards.

4.4 *Appropriate support should be offered to applicants for APL and provision for feedback on the decision.*

- 4.4.1** Support should be offered at several points within and outside of the School; for example, at subject and award level and by APL advisors, registries, collaborative partner institutions, international office, etc. It should be made clear to the student:
- what the role of APL is and where and from whom students can obtain advice on its relevance to their particular circumstances;
 - what is available for supporting APL applications, including the hierarchy and levels of support and advice and where advice may be obtained;
 - what the specific support is for APEL and APCL; for example, portfolio development may require subject-based support, whereas APCL may be processed and supported by APL advisors.

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4.4.2 Applicants should be advised either individually or through formalised group instruction about APL procedures and an explanation of the learning that would need to be evidenced and the nature of that evidence. Such processes should be made explicit within the APL Guide (see 4.2.1).

4.5 *It is recommended that regular monitoring and review of policies and procedures for APL should be clearly established within the School.*

4.5.1 The monitoring of a School's APL structures, policy and procedures should be within the remit of its quality and standards framework so that appropriate reporting and feedback lines relating to APL are embedded with the School.

4.5.2 The establishment of a school procedure for monitoring and reviewing APL processes is to include relevant stakeholder involvement (registry, collaborative partners, APL advisors and academics), to assist in the periodic monitoring and review (see Section 3.2 and Appendix 2).

4.5.3 Direct feedback received from External Examiner involved in overseeing APL claims and processes should be considered within the context of the schools annual review and monitoring of APL processes.

4.5.4 Feedback from students with experience of the School's APL processes should be considered within the framework of the School's student consultation processes, with the feedback made available for internal scrutiny and that from external examiner(s) where appropriate. Other external scrutiny may be incorporated, e.g. professional bodies.

4.5.5 Data available from SITS to be include in the monitoring of APL processes.

4.5.6 Annual report to be produced for UQC.

5. Curriculum mapping for advanced standing

5.1 Advanced standing is the entry of a student to a UoW award at a point beyond that which is normal for a student undertaking the full credit diet of the programme pertaining to that award; for example an advanced standing entry point for a Bachelor's or Master's programme may be Certificate/Diploma level.

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Successful application for advanced standing is consequent on the formal recognition of a student's completion of a body of credits that constitute a programme or part of a programme achieved at another institution (or at UoW) as being equivalent to that part of the UoW programme for which advanced standing is being sought. Such equivalence is determined by a process of curriculum mapping conducted by the relevant school(s) within UoW. This involves an academic judgement, by appropriate staff, of the comparability of the curriculum and learning outcomes associated with the body of credits achieved by the student against the curriculum and learning outcomes of the UoW programme being applied for. Such mapping may result in full or partial recognition of the body of credits achieved.

- 5.2** Curriculum mapping for advanced standing can pertain to an individual student's application for a UoW programme or to an institution's submission of a programme for consideration for advanced standing to a UoW programme, and students from that institution, at admission stage, are to be assessed for advanced standing on the basis of that mapping. (See Appendix 5 for the University Form for recording mapping agreements.)

Schools must also ensure that they establish a formal process for curriculum mapping that is both consistent and transparent. The School's structures and processes for advanced standing considerations and for curriculum mapping should be communicated to its SQC for consideration and reported on in the School's annual report to UQC.

UoW Schools must ensure that any subsequent changes to previously mapped programmes are taken account of and, where appropriate, re-mapping undertaken.

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- 5.3** Outcomes of curriculum mapping conducted by schools must be recorded and the information communicated to the School Registry (including other registries where appropriate), for overseas applications, to the UoW International Office (IO) and the Registry's Admissions Unit.

Similarly, any decisions taken independently by the IO, using the mapping frameworks submitted by the School to the IO, must be communicated to the School. Importantly, summaries of decisions on advanced standing applications by schools or the IO must be submitted to the relevant school's APL Board for information.

Where schools are engaging with an international institution to establish an agreement for a cohort of students to enter onto a UoW programme with advanced standing then the school must liaise with Education Partnerships to discuss any contractual requirements.

These decisions are reported annually within the School's report to UQC.

6. University overview

The University will monitor and review APL processes through a sub-committee of UQC tasked with the annual monitoring and review of APL:

- keep the University APL Guidelines under review;
- review APL processes to ensure academic standards are upheld;
- receive School annual APL reports;
- maintain an overview of School APL Guides;
- share good practice;
- monitor level of activity;
- highlight trends;
- consider trends and comparability at a national level;
- maintain an overview of mapping decisions approved by Schools.

This sub-committee will report by exception to UQC.

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Appendix 1

Accreditation of Prior Learning Board & Terms of Reference (Specimen)

Membership

Chair
 Deputy/Co-Chair
 Subject/Pathway Representatives
 Registry Representative
 Representative from the International Office (as appropriate)
 Representative from Collaborative Partners (as appropriate)

Terms of Reference

The underlying rationale for the APL Board is to:

1. Ensure the quality and standards of APL throughout the School.
2. Ensure the consistent and rigorous implementation of University and School APL procedures for Accreditation of Prior Certificated Learning (APCL) and Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL).
3. Discuss, confirm and monitor decisions on APL relating to students at subject and award level prior to assessment boards and to formally report those decisions at the appropriate boards.
4. Ensure all APL Appeals have been dealt with in the appropriate manner.

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Appendix 2

Accreditation of Prior Learning Committee & Terms of Reference (Specimen)

Membership

Chair
 Deputy/Co-Chair
 Subject/Pathway Representatives
 Registry Representative
 Representative from the International Office (as appropriate)
 Representative from Collaborative Partners (as appropriate)

The following Terms of Reference for an APL committee is for Schools that undertake a larger volume of APL. Where a School is involved in a relatively small volume of APL and chooses to retain the overview of APL procedures within the work of SQC then the following should be used as the framework with which to set standard agenda items for the management of APL through SQC.

The underlying rationale for the APL Committee is to:

1. Discuss and determine the School's APL procedures in the light of the guidance provided by the University's APL guidelines.
2. Discuss and update the School's APL procedures in line with University and external guidelines (e.g. QAA and professional bodies).
3. Annually review the School's APL Guide.
4. Consult with Registry and other units within the School and University to obtain feedback on process.
5. Provide guidance to the School's APL Board and subject and award boards on matters relating to APL, either on request or when changes to University and School policies arise.
6. Receive and process APL appeals and report decisions to the APL Board.
7. Ensure the quality and standards of APL procedures at subject, award and/or portfolio level.

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Appendix 3

Part A: APL Application Form

(Example only – can be adapted to school requirements.)

Original Copy forwarded to Registry.

Photocopy attached to Programme Application Form and retained in School Office.

Title		Surname		Forename	
Student No		Award			
Telephone		Mobile		Email	
Address					

1. APCL Applications: *Details of qualifications. For certificated applications please enclose copies of relevant qualifications, further information may be required.*

Qualifications held	Institution	Date Awarded

2. APL Claims: *I wish to apply for accreditation against the following module(s):*

Module Code	Module Title

Fee Payer/Employer *(in the case of APL applications)*

Name	
Address	

Name and Signature *(All concerned parties must sign for processing before submission to Registry)*

Student		Date	
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Print name:			
Award Administrator		Date	
Print name:			
Portfolio Leader		Date	
Print name:			

Appendix 4

Part B: APL Decision Form

(Example only – can be adapted to school requirements.)

This Section for Office Use Only

Title		Surname		Forename	
Student No		Award			
Telephone		Mobil e		Emai l	

To be completed by student.

1. APCL Claim

Qualification Held:		Date Awarded	
Module Code(s)	Module Title	No of Credits	Level
		Total Credits	
Decision/Comment			

2. APEL Claim

Module Code(s)	Module Title	Subject Area	Date sent to DA for Assessment
Please delete as applicable			Accepted
			Declined

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Decision/Comment

NB. Please return completed form to appropriate DA by _____ (Normally within two working weeks)

Name and Signature (All concerned parties must sign before processing)

Student		Date	
Print name:			
Award Administrator		Date	
Print name:			
Portfolio Leader		Date	
Print name:			

Appendix 5

APL Form No. _____

(Number unique to the School)

ACCREDITATION OF PRIOR CERTIFICATED LEARNING (APCL)

Direct Entry Agreement

This form is used to formally record the mapping exercise undertaken by a school when entering into agreements with Partner Institutions to provide direct entry with Advanced Standing for students onto University of Wolverhampton pathways. This agreement relates to existing programmes for which it has been agreed that students will enter at a point other than the beginning of the course.

1. University of Wolverhampton information

School:

School Contact: (name and contact details)

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2. Other Institution information

Name of Institution:

Country of Institution:

Institution Contact: (name and contact details)

3. Pathway information for the UoW pathway for which students will be given Advanced Standing

Admissions Course Code:

Admission Course Title:

Pathway Code:

Pathway Title:

4. Qualification gained, or to be gained, for which students will be given Advanced Standing

Qualification, from other institution, to be mapped for students seeking APL:

What is the NARIC equivalent?

What is the qualifications equivalent to UoW level of study and credits?

Level:

Number of credits:

Any other information:

Has documentation relating to this qualification been presented and evidenced?

5. Agreed entry point onto UoW pathway

Total number of UoW credits to be awarded to students:

Year of entry:

General credits to be awarded:	Level	Number of credits awarded
	Total	

If credits do not add up to a full year of credit (120 u/g), please explain:

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Appendix 6



Reference Number.....

Student APL Direct Entry Form

This form is to be completed by the Admissions Officer or Tutor at offer stage to record Accreditation of Prior Certificated Learning.

UOW Student No......
Course(s):.....

Student Name.....
Route(s):.....

Date of Birth:..... **Block/Occ.**...../.....

Applicant No. (Admissions) **MAS Code (Admissions Code)**.....

APL Agreement Form Number if applicable.....

These sections are to be completed if APL is not covered by an approved agreement.

Qualifications gained:

OR Relevant Experience

NARIC Equivalent:

UoW Equivalent:

Awarding Body:

Previous Institution:

General Credit {University Level		Module Specific Credit	
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Appendix 7

References

QAA APL Guidelines 2004

www.qaa.ac.uk

Edexcel (2005) Accreditation of prior learning

www.edexcel.org.uk

UCAS (2003) Curriculum and qualifications: accreditation of prior learning www.ucas.com

The Higher Education Academy, UK Centre for Materials Education (2006) Accreditation of prior and experiential learning

www.materials.ac.uk

Institute of Quality Assurance (2001) Accreditation of prior achievement policy.

www.iqa.org/education

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