

ACCREDITATION OF PRIOR LEARNING

POLICY

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The University of Aberdeen is committed to recruiting the most talented students from the widest possible range of backgrounds. To that end, it invites applications to its degree programmes from all those who possess the ability, knowledge and experience required to benefit from them.

2. Definition

- 2.1 Accreditation of prior learning (APL) is the recognition by the University of prior learning that has taken place elsewhere. Usually an application for recognition of prior learning is made prior to a student commencing their studies at the University but occasionally an application may be made after studies have commenced. Recognition is through the award of credit and/or exemption from a course or courses on a taught programme at the University. APL can take one of two forms:

- **Accredited Prior Certified Learning (APCL):** accreditation of learning at Higher Education level that has already been assessed at another Higher Education Institution and for which an award has been achieved. Award of specific credit and corresponding exemption from a course(s) requires a mapping of learning outcomes for the course(s) for which exemption is sought against the prior certified learning;
- **Accredited Prior Experiential Learning (APEL):** accreditation of learning that has been acquired through life experiences, including work and uncertified training, for which no formal qualification has been gained. APEL does not recognise experience by itself for academic purposes, instead learning must be demonstrated to have taken place. Applications for APEL will be assessed by academic staff possibly through provision by the applicant of a portfolio of evidence showing where their experience meets the learning outcomes of specific course(s) and may require submission of a formal piece of assessment.

3. The use of APL at the University of Aberdeen

- 3.1 APL has three main purposes:
- Facilitating admission to a degree programme;
 - Providing advanced standing on a named degree programme;
 - Awarding credit for a specific course, or courses, prescribed for a named degree programme.
- 3.2 Applicants may request exemption from courses for any taught programme – both undergraduate and taught postgraduate - based on evidence of prior learning. A 15-credit course is the smallest unit for which exemption can be claimed.
- 3.3 APL will only be given for taught courses. APL will not be given for a major project or dissertation as many of the learning outcomes in these courses are specific to the individual student or project.

3.4 In order to maintain the integrity of the University's awards and to ensure that students have had the opportunity to obtain Aberdeen Graduate Attributes, the maximum number of credits that may be awarded through APL is as follows:

- No credits for an Undergraduate Certificate in Higher Education
- 120 credits for an Undergraduate Diploma in Higher Education
- 240 credits for an undergraduate degree programme (Designated, Honours or Integrated Masters)
- 30 credits for a Postgraduate Certificate
- 60 credits for a Postgraduate Diploma
- 90 credits for a Postgraduate Taught (PGT) Masters degree.

Any exceptions to this would be only permitted with the agreement of the Vice Principal (Education).

3.5 There is no obligation on the part of the University or individual Schools or Disciplines to consider applications or give credit for APL if it is inappropriate for the field of study that is requested. It should be noted that APL may not be possible for some accredited programmes, particularly Medicine, Dentistry, Primary Education, PGDE, LLB (see Section 6.2). In addition, exemption from core courses may not always be possible.

4. Application for APL Credit

4.1 All applications for APL must normally be made, and approved, **prior to** entry to a programme and in all cases prior to entry to a higher level course or advanced entry to a higher programme year. A downloadable application form is available at <https://www.abdn.ac.uk/staffnet/governance/senate/internal/#panel8733>. Current students who wish to seek recognition for prior learning should complete the form available at: <https://www.abdn.ac.uk/students/academic-life/changes-to-studies.php#panel4515>.

4.2 Each School will designate at least one member of staff with whom Admissions Selectors will liaise to ensure that requests for APL meet the academic quality assurance standards of the institution and are consistent and equitable.

4.3 It is the responsibility of the applicant to make sure that all evidence and supporting application material is presented and is submitted timeously and in English. Where entry to, or advanced entry into, a programme of study is dependent on a successful application for **APEL**, applications should normally be received by the University by end March for entry in September of that year or end June for entry in January of the following year (PGT entry). Later applications may be permitted if the application is dependent on **APCL**. A conditional offer may be given where it is determined that the qualifications would be sufficient for entry or advanced entry but where they are yet to be achieved by the applicant.

5. Procedure for consideration of requests for APL

5.1 *Advanced entry based on APCL (see Appendix 1):*

5.1.1 Admissions Selectors can determine the specific or general credit to be awarded for applications based on standard qualifications (such as excellent A-level or International Baccalaureate (IB) grades), using their knowledge of the requirements for individual programmes. In some instances, the Admissions Selector will refer to individual Schools or Disciplines to determine whether APCL can be awarded specific credit.

5.1.2 Matching prior learning to programmes of study is an academic judgement and as such Schools are responsible for detailed APL decisions, particularly for entry to year three. Admissions Selectors can make decisions on advanced entry, and award of required APCL, where there are established articulation routes, but the mapping of these routes must have been considered and agreed by the School when they were first established. Any other applications for advanced entry that are not based on an established articulation route must be discussed with the School.

5.2 *Advanced entry based on APEL (see Appendix 2):*

5.2.1 Requests for advanced entry to a degree programme based on APEL must be considered at discipline/programme level. The applicant must provide evidence that their experiential learning meets the learning outcomes for the course(s) that they wish to get recognition for and that they are academically able to cope with the depth of learning required at the level of study they will be joining. The Programme Leader or School/Discipline will use the evidence provided to map against a programme's learning outcomes to determine whether specific credit can be awarded.

5.3 *Exemption from a course(s) based on APL*

5.3.1 An APL application can also be made to gain exemption from, and recognition for, one or more courses on a degree programme without this being connected to advanced entry, e.g. where an applicant intends on applying for entry to year 1 of an undergraduate degree programme but wishes recognition and exemption to be given for a particular course for which they have already met the learning outcomes either because of previous study or through work-based learning. These applications will follow the flowchart shown in Appendix 1 or 2 as appropriate to the form of APL being considered.

6. **Assessment of APL**

6.1 Applications for APL will be assessed to determine whether there is evidence of:

- **Authenticity:** Applicants must demonstrate evidence of prior learning. For APCL this will normally be formal certification /transcripts and will be requested by the Admissions Selector. For APEL evidence might include: a portfolio of work; a discipline specific interview; completion of a set task; completion of the usual assessment for the course to which the prior learning is claimed to be equivalent; a reflective account or a diary of the learning achieved. The exact nature of the assessment should be decided in consultation with the Programme Leader of the programme being applied for. Flowcharts indicating the process for APCL and APEL can be seen in Appendix 1 and 2 respectively.
- **Relevance and Sufficiency:** The evidence provided must be such that it indicates the student has already achieved the learning outcomes for the course(s) for which exemption is being sought.
- **Currency:** The prior certified or experiential learning for which accreditation is sought should normally have taken place within five years of the date of request for APL. In areas in which curricula change rapidly, this period may be less.

6.2 Where Professional, statutory and Regulatory Bodies impose restrictions on the use of APL, these will be reflected in the handling of APL applications.

6.3 All applications will be considered in accordance with the University's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion policies.

6.4 Admissions will communicate a decision on an APL application clearly and promptly to applicants. For prospective students, decisions on APL applications will be communicated

early enough to inform decisions of the applicant, i.e. prior to the deadline for the applicant to accept their offer of admission. If an APL application is refused, the applicant will be provided with a clear statement of the reasons as to why. Applicants will have a right of appeal or complaint in accordance with the University's Policy and Procedures on Student Appeals or Complaints Handling Procedures respectively.

- 6.5 Because of the extent of the work involved in considering applications, a charge will be incurred on a credit basis for assessment of prior experiential learning.

7. Award of APL

- 7.1 Prior learning may be awarded specific credit if it demonstrably fulfils all the intended learning outcomes of a specific course. Otherwise relevant prior learning is awarded general credit.

- 7.2 APL credit is ungraded; this may have implications for a student's degree classification. Only grades achieved from courses taken at the University of Aberdeen will be used to determine undergraduate honours classification or distinction and commendation awards at taught postgraduate level.

- 7.3 Awarded APL credit will be represented as Prior Learning on the student's academic transcript.

8. Monitoring and review

- 8.1 The University Education Committee, or a relevant sub-committee, must satisfy itself that its criteria for APL remain objective, are being fairly and consistently applied, and are not unintentionally growing more or less stringent as time goes by.