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, for its academic purposes, of prior learning that has taken place elsewhere and prior to a student commencing their studies at the University. It can take one of two forms:

- Accredited Prior Certified Learning (APCL): accreditation of learning for which an award has been achieved;
- 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.

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 specific 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 course is the smallest unit for which exemption can be claimed.

3.3 APL will only be given for taught courses. APL will not normally be given for a major project or dissertation as in these courses many of the learning outcomes 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, normally at least 50% of the total credit value of any honours award must be derived from courses provided by the University of Aberdeen. Similarly, normally at least 120 credit points of any designated award must be derived from courses provided by the University of Aberdeen. Exceptions to this would be where a specific collaborative agreement is in place, or allowed only with the agreement of the relevant Head of School.
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.

4.2 Each School will designate at least one member of staff with whom Admissions APL officers \(^1\) 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.

5. **Assessment of APL**

5.1 Matching prior learning to programmes of study is an *academic* judgement and as such Schools are responsible for detailed APL decisions.

5.2 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. 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 a University APL Officer who will follow QAA guidance.

- **Relevance and Sufficiency:** The evidence provided must be such that it indicates the student has already achieved the learning outcomes for the courses for which exemption is being sought \(^2\).

- **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.

5.3 Where professional and regulatory bodies impose any particular restrictions on the use of APL, these will be reflected in the handling of APL applications.

5.4 All applications will be considered in accordance with the University's Equality and Diversity policies \(^3\).

5.5 APL Officers will communicate their decisions clearly and promptly to applicants. 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 \(^4\) or Complaints Handling Procedures \(^5\) respectively.

5.6 A charge may be incurred for the work involved in assessment of prior learning.

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\(^1\) I.e. the Admissions Officer for each area of study

\(^2\) See [www.scwf.org.uk/RPI](http://www.scwf.org.uk/RPI)

\(^3\) [www.abdn.ac.uk/staffnet/governance/2column-page-2269-2269.php](http://www.abdn.ac.uk/staffnet/governance/2column-page-2269-2269.php)

\(^4\) [www.abdn.ac.uk/staffnet/teaching/aqh/appendix5x18a.pdf](http://www.abdn.ac.uk/staffnet/teaching/aqh/appendix5x18a.pdf)

\(^5\) [www.abdn.ac.uk/staffnet/teaching/aqh/appendix5x19.pdf](http://www.abdn.ac.uk/staffnet/teaching/aqh/appendix5x19.pdf)
6. **Award of APL**

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

6.2 APL credit is ungraded; this may have implications for a student’s chances of progression to the later stages of some degree programmes and of gaining particular classes of award. Only credit achieved from courses taken at the University of Aberdeen can count towards undergraduate honours classification or distinction and commendation awards at taught postgraduate level.

6.3 Awarded APL credit will be represented as Prior Learning on the student’s academic transcript.

7. **Quality Assurance**

7.1 The University Committee on Teaching and Learning, UCTL, 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.

8. **Public Information**

8.1 Section C of the revised Quality Code includes a section on the provision of public information[^6]. To ensure that the University meets the QA requirements, prospectuses and similar sources of information for prospective students, both paper-based and electronic, should indicate our practices for the accreditation of prior learning.

[^6]: http://www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code