It is the policy of the University, wherever appropriate, to give students recognition for previous studies undertaken in Higher or Advanced Further Education. In appropriate cases students may also be exempted from part of their degree programme on the basis of qualifications obtained before entry. Additionally, there are formal articulation arrangements with Further Education colleges, which permit entry with advanced standing to specified degree programmes following successful completion of a Higher National programme. Admissions Selectors have delegated authority to accredit prior learning (APL) or prior experiential learning (APEL) for individual applicants.

Exemptions and Recognitions are defined in General Regulation 1 for First Degrees as follows:-

**Exemption:** For the purposes of General Regulation 14\(^1\), a concession made on the basis of successful completion of previous study which exempts candidates from attendance on and/or assessment in a specific course or courses, or from the requirement to obtain a specified number of credits, but which of itself has no credit value.

**Recognition:** For the purposes of General Regulation 14\(^1\), the acceptance of successful completion of previous study as equivalent to the award of credit for a named course or courses, or to the award of unnamed credit of a specified value.

Exemptions and Recognitions can be either in terms of named courses or a specified number of credits. In either case, the extent of any recognition or exemption will depend on individual circumstances and on the qualification to which a student wishes to proceed. Thus, while all of a student’s previous HE study may be recognised as having a ‘general credit’ value, only part may be recognised as having a ‘specific credit’ value in terms of the student’s study aim. There are restrictions also on the extent to which a student may count passes towards more than one award at degree level. These effectively require that to obtain a second First Degree will require a minimum of two years of full-time study or the equivalent.

The University Policy on the Accreditation of Prior Learning can be viewed in full overleaf.

The University supports the UK Credit Accumulation and Transfer Scheme (CATS), and was a signatory to the agreement that established its Scottish variant, SCOTCAT. All awards offered by the University comply with ‘The framework for qualifications of higher education institutions in Scotland’, which has been developed as part of the wider Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF). The University has also credit-rated its courses in terms of the European Credit Transfer Scheme (ECTS), and has a reciprocal agreement with the UK Open University.

Transfer at postgraduate level is less common than at undergraduate level, but appropriate recognition can, where appropriate, be given to studies previously undertaken elsewhere on the same topic.

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\(^1\) General Regulation 14 states that “The Senatus Academicus, on the recommendation of the Academic Standards Committee (Undergraduate), may recognise, as qualifying for a degree of the University of Aberdeen, or as exempting from the requirements of a degree, attendance on and/or examination passes in courses obtained through study for a previous degree or other qualification provided that candidates shall not be admitted to a degree of the University of Aberdeen unless they have attended qualifying courses therein during at least one session.”
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\(^2\) 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\(^3\).

- **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.

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 or Complaints Handling Procedures respectively.

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

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.

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\(^2\) I.e. the Admissions Officer for each area of study

\(^3\) See [www.scwf.org.uk/RPL](http://www.scwf.org.uk/RPL)
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 information⁴. 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.