



BUCKINGHAMSHIRE  
NEW UNIVERSITY

EST. 1891



# ACCREDITATION OF PRIOR LEARNING (APL) POLICY AND PROCEDURE

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## Background

- 1 Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL) is the term given to the assessment of previously- acquired learning and the award of academic credit within the context of the programme which the individual intends to study. Such learning may be certificated (APCL) or experiential (APEL).
- 2 These regulations adhere to the indicators and expectations detailed for the recognition of prior learning in the QAA Revised UK Quality Code for Higher Education (March 2018).

## Applicability and Scope

- 3 The APL process as defined in this document enables an individual to apply for exemption from study of module(s), and to be awarded credit for those module(s), based on recognition of their previous study and/or experiential learning. It does not apply to the assessment of an individual's prior learning and/or experience for the purpose of entry to a programme of study, other than entry with advanced standing: for such details see the *Admissions Policy and Procedures*.
- 4 The APL process is not required to be followed by an individual where an Articulation Agreement is in place and where details are written in Programme Specifications. Articulation Agreements are used where the programme team considers that the learning outcomes, content and levelness of a designated external award from another Higher Education provider are considered sufficient to permit the holder of that award to have automatic entry with advanced standing to a Buckinghamshire New University programme of study.

## Definitions

- 5 **Credit:** a means of quantifying and recognising learning awarded for the verified achievement of designated learning outcomes at a specified level. One credit represents 10 hours of notional learning time at a specified level.
- 6 **Module:** a discrete unit of learning at a specified level normally leading to the award of credit and/or which contributes to a qualification.
- 7 **Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL):** the method of assessment (leading to the award of credit) that considers whether a learner possesses the knowledge, understanding and/or skills which demonstrate that the learning outcomes for one or more modules have been met.
- 8 **Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL):** the process by which academic credit and exemption from study may be given for modules(s) by the official recognition of prior learning. Such exemption is a matter of academic judgement based on an assessment of the equivalence of learning. It encompasses APCL and APEL. Applications for APL may include both APCL and APEL.

- 9 **Accreditation of Prior Certificated Learning (APCL):** the recognition of prior learning which has taken place within a Higher Education provider, including Buckinghamshire New University, and has resulted in a certificated award of credit.
- 10 **Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL):** the evaluation and recognition of non-certificated learning which demonstrates the acquisition of knowledge and skills through life and work experience.
- 11 **General Credit:** a term given to the total credit that an individual may have as the result of prior learning, usually at another institution. In terms of credit transfer, all the general credits possessed by a student are eligible for consideration.
- 12 **Specific Credit:** a term given to the proportion of the total credit for which prior recognition is given when mapped against the learning outcomes for the intended programme of study. Where comparison of the module learning outcomes show little commonality, an individual may be given less specific credits than the total general credits they actually hold.
- 13 **Exemption:** a term given where a learner is awarded credits for a module without them having to undertake the module content or assessment.
- 14 **Advanced Standing:** where students are admitted onto a programme at a stage later than the normal admission stage either as a result of successful APCL and/or APEL applications, or through an Articulation Agreement.
- 15 **Articulation Agreement:** a formal arrangement that allows specific credit that has been gained from one Higher Education provider or recognised awarding body to be transferred to another institution as a means of allowing consideration for entry to a programme with advanced standing, without the requirement for individual applications for APL.
- 16 **APL Assessor:** refers to those academics at Buckinghamshire New University who have been nominated by School Management Teams and given responsibility for advising applicants about APL, for assessing applications and making recommendations to the APL Panel. They also have responsibility for confirming applicants with advanced standing against specified entry requirements where identified in Programme Specifications, in liaison with the Marketing and Student Recruitment Directorate.
- 17 **UK NARIC:** UK NARIC is the designated United Kingdom national agency for the recognition and comparison of international qualifications and skills.
- 18 **Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies (FHEQ):** describe the achievement represented by higher education qualifications. They apply to degrees, diplomas, certificates and other academic awards granted by a higher education provider with degree awarding powers.

## Principles

- 19 These regulations are based on the key principle that decisions to grant APL are based on the achievement of learning and the evidence used to demonstrate the equivalence of learning.

- 20 In some programmes, especially those which are professionally accredited, APL may not be applicable and such details must be written into Programme Specifications.
- 21 In order for accreditation to be considered, the prior learning has to be:
- Relevant – there must be an appropriate match between the evidence presented and the learning claimed
  - Sufficient – there must be enough evidence to demonstrate achievement of the learning claimed
  - Authentic – the evidence must be the result of the applicant's own work and experience
  - Current –the currency of the prior learning will be determined by the APL Assessor as appropriate for the programme. Where programmes have specific PSRB requirements and/or have agreed time limits for the currency of evidence, certification, or demonstration of learning, these details should be made clear in Programme Specifications.
- 22 Where applicants can demonstrate that equivalent learning has been achieved to the satisfaction of the APL Assessor and approved by the APL Panel, the University will allow exemption from agreed modules. The limits for the amount of entry with advanced standing /exemption, through APL that can be permitted at undergraduate and postgraduate level are detailed below:

| Approved course  | APL Limit  |
|--|--|
| Certificate of Higher Education (120 credits)                            | Up to 60 credits out of 120 credits  |
| HNC (150 credits)  | Up to 75 credits out of 150 credits  |
| HND/DipHE Foundation Degree (240 credits)                                | Up to 120 credits out of 240 credits   |
| Ordinary Degree (300 credits)  | Up to 240 credits out of 300 credits (to undertake 60 Level 6 credits)   |
| Honours Degree (360 credits and including 120 credit Level 6 programmes) | Up to 240 out of 360 credits   |
| Integrated Masters (480 credits)   | Up to 240 credits at Level 4 and Level 5.  |
| PG Certificate (60 credits)  | Up to 30 credits out of 60 credits   |
| PG Diploma (120 credits)   | Up to 60- credits out of 120 credits   |
| Masters (180 credits and including 60 credit "top-up" programmes)        | Up to 120 taught credits. (Transferring more than 60 credits from another Higher Education provider excludes consideration for a distinction or merit for a Masters award) |
| Professional Doctorate   | Claims for APL from applicants with prior learning will be considered on a case by case basis.   |

- 23 Programmes may be validated which permit exemption limits which differ to those detailed above. Where this is the case exact details of exemption limits and how these

would be applied to a specific award must be approved at validation and detailed in the Programme Specification. Any changes to these exemption limits in the Programme Specification should be approved through the Course Amendment procedure.

- 24 Applications for APL should normally be made prior to enrolment on the level/module(s) from which exemption is sought. Submission of an application for APL does not guarantee that exemption will be granted.
- 25 Exemption will be for a whole module or modules to the maximum permitted limits. Exemption is not allowed for part of a module.
- 26 Where credit is allocated to exempted modules or levels, this will be recorded on the student's record and indicated on the Assessment Board Sheet.
- 27 Where APL has been approved, the classification of an award will be determined on the basis of the marks awarded for modules undertaken at Buckinghamshire New University for the specific programme of study only, and excluding modules with exemption.
- 28 In permitting exemption, credits must not be "double-counted" in the award of any further qualification. Whether gained at Buckinghamshire New University or another institution, credit can only be accumulated towards one single award.
- 29 Students exiting the University will be provided with a transcript showing the modules undertaken, level, percentage mark awarded and total credits achieved whilst studying for a registered award at the University. Where the student has been awarded credits through APL this will be indicated on the transcript from the University.

## APL applications

- 30 Individuals wishing to apply for APL should have an initial discussion with the Admissions Tutor / Course Leader before progressing their application. They will direct the applicant to an APL Assessor who will provide guidance for APCL applications, and will confirm the requirements for the portfolio for APEL applications. Details of application requirements and the associated forms are found on the University website.
- 31 It is the responsibility of the individual to make the application using the appropriate form(s) and to supply the supporting evidence and/or the portfolio requirements.
- 32 The evidence supplied by the applicant is used in a mapping exercise to establish the equivalence of learning for APCL and/or APEL. Based on the outcome of the mapping, the APL Assessor will make a recommendation to the APL Panel: the decision to approve or reject the recommendation rests with the APL Panel.
- 33 APL Assessors may confirm applications for advanced standing and specific APCL exemption against specified criteria **where identified in Programme Specifications**, Articulation Agreements and Group Directives in liaison with the Marketing and Student Recruitment Directorate and Academic Registry. The APL Assessor must see evidence of the claimed qualifications. These confirmations need only be reported to the APL Panel rather than recommended for approval. The APL Secretary will log and report all such confirmations to the Panel.

- 34 Applications for APL should be submitted to and considered by the APL Panel prior to the commencement of the course/module(s) from which the individual is seeking exemption. This may be at a pre-entry point to the programme, or during the programme prior to the start of the module from which exemption is sought. Students entering programmes with Advanced Standing should not be made Unconditional Offers or enrolled onto programmes until APL has been **approved** by APL Assessor or APL Panel as appropriate.
- 35 All applications should be submitted to the Secretary of the APL Panel to allow sufficient time for the checking and distribution of papers.
- 36 It is the responsibility of the APL Panel Secretary to notify individuals in writing of the outcome of their application. Where the decision is to reject the application clear reasons for the rejection will be given.
- 37 APL decisions are recorded on the Student Record System for reporting to Assessment Boards.
- 38 Appeals from applicants against the decision made by the APL Panel should follow the procedure for Appeals against Admissions decisions in the Buckinghamshire New University Admissions Policy.

## **APCL applications (Form 1)**

- 39 In cases of **APCL** academic judgement must be used to ascertain whether the academic content and learning outcomes of the certificated award used as evidence are equivalent to the standard of learning that would otherwise have been achieved from study of the modules from which the applicant seeks exemption.
- 40 The applicant is required to complete the APCL mapping form (Form 1) and provide original supporting evidence.
- 41 Applications for exemption from a module/level of a Buckinghamshire New University programme based on APCL credits awarded by another institution will first be considered by the APL Assessor.
- 42 A learner's prior studies submitted for APCL will only be considered if they closely match the content of the module(s) from which exemption is being sought. Where equivalency between the previous study and the Buckinghamshire New University module(s) cannot be established, no credit will be awarded under APL.
- 43 Percentage marks from modules for which APL is claimed will not be brought into the calculation of the programme studied at Buckinghamshire New University. Only where the credits for APCL are derived from Buckinghamshire New University approved module(s) which form part of the receiving award from which exemption is granted – for example as in affiliate programmes - will percentage marks be brought forward for the purpose of progression and/or classification.
- 44 For minor credit that is likely to be made regularly to entrants to a particular course, the course team may complete a Group Directive (Form 6) and submit for approval to the APL Panel. APL Assessors can then approve the credit on confirmation from the course team which applicants have evidenced the required qualification. The Group

Directive, once approved, should be used to make an editorial change to the Programme Specification to detail the qualification and allowed credit.

## **APEL applications (Form 2)**

- 45 In cases of **APEL**, academic judgement must be applied to the evidence supplied by the applicant to ensure equivalent learning outcomes are demonstrated.
- 46 Applicants must demonstrate that they have mapped the relevance and equivalency of their prior experiential learning against the learning outcomes of the module(s) for which exemption is sought.
- 47 Applicants must also demonstrate that they have reflected on the experiential learning and not just described examples of their previous experience.
- 48 APL Assessors should make an initial assessment of any individuals who are planning to make an APEL application through an interview, to discuss their prior experience and establish whether they have the potential to make a full application through a portfolio.
- 49 The evidence for APEL applications is required in the form of a portfolio, the structure of which is determined by the School responsible for the programme in question. The portfolio may be supplemented by one or a combination of other forms of assessment if required, such as a presentation, an interview, an extended CV giving details of prior experience, or the requirement to produce a piece of academic work or sit an examination at the appropriate academic level.
- 50 Full applications for APEL are considered by APL Assessors and their recommendations are presented to the APL Panel for ratification.

## **Advanced standing (Form 3)**

- 51 Individuals who successfully apply for exemption from a level or levels of a programme, usually through APCL, are considered as being on the programme with advanced standing.
- 52 Certificated awards which have been recognised as providing entry to a programme through an Articulation Agreement will allow exemption through advanced standing. In these cases, applications are not required to be considered by the APL Panel, but are confirmed by APL Assessors.
- 53 Students who hold a Buckinghamshire New University award which is recognised in Programme Specifications as being the equivalent learning to sections of a higher award, may apply for internal progression. Completion of the Internal Progressing application form and an accompanying reference from the student's course leader will be sufficient for entry with advanced standing, providing the award is successfully completed at the profile required by the receiving programme. For example, internal progression from a Buckinghamshire New University Foundation Degree to an Honours degree at the University may require a Merit or Distinction profile.



## Learning agreements for outgoing exchange students

- 54 For students planning to undertake a Study Mobility to an exchange Host Institution in Europe (under Erasmus+) or overseas, an individual Learning Agreement must be completed by the relevant programme team and the student, and approved by the APL Panel.
- 55 Learning Agreements are in the Buckinghamshire New University format but comply with guidance produced by the National Agency for Erasmus+ (the British Council). The University complies with the guidance, advice and spirit of Erasmus even where the intended exchange is with a Host Institution outside Europe.
- 56 Under the University's Erasmus+ Charter it is required to recognise the credits awarded by an Erasmus+ partner institution as equivalent to those awarded by Bucks. As the University awards credits for the Student Mobility *en bloc* (i.e. 60 credits or zero credits) in recognition of a student having passed or failed the Mobility, the specific number of credits undertaken and achieved at the Host Institution need not be an exact match for those needed at Bucks. The credit framework adopted across Europe in accordance with the Bologna Agreement is the ECTS (European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System) with 1 ECTS being worth 2 CATS (Credit Accumulation and Transfer Scheme).
- 57 The Bologna Agreement is a European-wide educational framework with which the UK FHEQ complies. This allows studies designated at a particular level to be recognised as such across Europe. There is therefore no need to consult UK NARIC for equivalences.
- 58 For an overseas exchange (i.e. to a Host Institution outside Europe) the Learning Agreement will contain information from UK NARIC or other trusted source or the comparability of academic credits from the appropriate country, state or region.
- 59 It is an accepted principle of the Erasmus+ scheme that the value to a student of undertaking a Student Mobility is more than simply the sum of the academic modules taken at the Host Institution. The whole experience of travelling and living in an unfamiliar environment and coping with the inevitable cultural and social deracination serves to strengthen the student and prepares them well for the reality of the workplace. The University does not, therefore, require that the diet of modules undertaken at the Host Institution be an exact match of module learning outcomes as this would never be possible. Instead, course teams at Bucks (i.e. subject specialists) consider the availability of modules at the Host Institution (and these vary from year to year) and in liaison with the student select those which are broadly comparable with the nature of the studies the student would have undertaken had they studied modules at Bucks.
- 60 The exception to this is for students on a programme with a compulsory Study Mobility where no modules are identified at Bucks against which a mapping exercise can be undertaken. In this case the course team at Bucks works with the student to identify a diet of subjects in a broadly comparable subject area e.g. business & management.
- 61 Where course teams identify significant gaps in the learning experience to be received at the Host Institution (e.g. in subject area knowledge or key skills) which might disadvantage a student when s/he progresses to Level 6, additional studies can be

prescribed. These are identified in the Learning Agreement as Recommended or Required as the Course Team deems appropriate.

- 62 In preparing Learning Agreements the Erasmus+/Exchange Co-ordinator consults with the Host University to identify whether the Host has a regulatory framework which permits reassessment in a manner broadly consistent with that at Bucks. Where for whatever reasons (e.g. different policy or non-availability of facilities) the reassessment opportunity or lack of it at the Host University would disadvantage the student, it is noted on the Learning Agreement that the Bucks Assessment Board may, at its discretion depending on the student's full profile for the year, allow a referral opportunity to enable the student the opportunity to demonstrate that s/he has achieved the Learning Outcomes. The specific nature of the reassessment task(s) would be determined by the Head of School or nominee after consideration of the specific results obtained from the Host institution.

### **Individual programmes of study (Forms 4 and 5)**

- 63 Applications for individual programmes of study are required to be approved by the APL Panel. Such individual programmes of study may be required where students are, for example, returning from Interruption to a changed curriculum where there is not a clear match between modules on old and new curriculum for APL purposes (Form 4), or where students are applying to convert a Buckinghamshire New University Ordinary degree to an Honours degree (Form 5).
- 64 Individual programmes of study should not be used to facilitate amended programme delivery modes for an individual student other than in the most exceptional circumstances. Consideration should be given first to potential resolution of difficult via Interruption of studies, extensions and mitigating circumstances. If there is a demand for a different delivery mode for a course then this should be taken through the normal validation and approval processes.

## Appendix 1: Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL) Panel

|                            |                     |
|----------------------------|---------------------|
| Reports to                 | Education Committee |
| Standing Committees        | None                |
| Non-Standing Committees    | None                |
| Minutes                    | Not published       |
| Executive summary required | Yes                 |
| Frequency of meetings      | As required         |
| Updated/reviewed           | May 2019            |

### Membership:

|                    |  |
|--------------------|--|
| Chair              | Senior Academic appointed by Chair of Education Committee                        |
| Secretary          | Appointed by Academic Registrar & Secretary                                      |
| Minute Secretary   | Appointed by Academic Registrar & Secretary                                      |
| Ex-officio Members | Four academic members of staff from each School, nominated by the Head of School |
| Other Members      | One member nominated by the Director of Marketing & Student Recruitment          |
| Co-opted Members   | University Erasmus Co-Ordinator  |

### Terms of Reference:

- a. Based on the recommendation of APL Assessors, and the mapping and other documentation presented, to consider for approval exemption from specific modules, and entry points with advanced standing beyond those approved at validation or subsequently defined in Programme Specifications or in Articulation Agreements.
- b. To approve or reject applications for APL for an individual or cohort of students, and in the case of approval, to award credits to those students.
- c. To consider for approval Learning Agreements for individual students who wish to undertake an international exchange, such as Erasmus+ mobility.
- d. To agree individual programmes of study.
- e. To recommend approval of proposals for Articulation Agreements to the Education Committee.

- f. Where applications are rejected, to ensure that feedback is provided to the applicant giving the reasons why their application was not successful.
- g. To endorse nominations of those academics authorised as APL Assessors to:
  - Advise applicants and make recommendations based on the evidence supplied
  - Confirm the requirements set out in the Programme Specification
  - Confirm the requirements of the portfolio in the case of APEL applications
- h. To arrange training and offer advice to staff responsible for advising students in relation to APL applications
- i. To review and assess the effectiveness of the operation of the APL Panel, to share good practice, and to address issues requiring improvement.

**Notes:**

- 1 The Chair may invite academic representatives to the Panel who should attend to present cases and to contribute to the discussion surrounding specific subject areas or programmes of study as appropriate.
- 2 The Secretary will ensure all APL Assessors are informed of the dates of the APL Panel meetings and the deadlines for applications to be considered.
- 3 Approval of APL credit via Chair's Action should only occur in exceptional circumstances such as an urgent requirement to allow a student to start a course at the beginning of a level which they are entering with advanced standing.