

LEARNING AND TEACHING SUPPORT HANDBOOK

Chapter 16 - Accreditation of Prior Learning

Procedure for the Accreditation of Prior Learning for Taught Programmes

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL) is the process whereby students can be exempt from some parts of their chosen programme of academic study by recognition of their learning from previous experiences and achievements.
- 1.2 Accredited Prior 'Certified' Learning (APCL) is the achievement of learning that has been formally assessed and certificated from previous study with a higher education institution, which can include the University of Exeter. Where groups, or cohorts of students, wish to apply, this should usually be covered by the creation of a 'progression agreement'.
- 1.3 Accredited Prior 'Experiential' Learning (APEL) is the non-certified acquisition of relevant skills and knowledge, gained through relevant experience, which is capable of being evaluated.
- 1.4 It is the achievement of learning, or outcomes of the learning, and not just the experience of the activities that are being accredited. In all cases, evidence must be presented to the University that such learning has taken place.
- 1.5 Some programmes have approved modules/periods of study undertaken at another institution or in the workplace. Where this is a recognised part of an approved programme these guidelines do not apply.
- 1.6 The term 'prior learning' does not include the learning implicit in formal teaching, a work placement, group work or independent study designed as part of a programme of study provided by a higher education institution. Recognition of such learning would be expected to occur in the formal assessment practice of the programme.
- 1.7 APL operates at the whole module level and cannot be applied to components of modules. For Degree Apprenticeship programmes, please see the [Special Provisions for Degree Apprenticeships](#) information for further guidance.

Consideration of whether the student has demonstrated every single Intended Learning Outcome is not required, only that the student can demonstrate achievement of the significant Intended Learning Outcomes for the module to be exempted. Other Intended

Learning Outcomes are likely to have been demonstrated through the completion of the remaining parts of the programme of study.

- 1.8 Acceptance of prior learning for credit purposes is at the discretion of the Faculty (or delegated School). Approval is required from the Dean for Taught Students or Dean for Postgraduate Research (whichever is relevant) where exceptional circumstances apply e.g. a request for APL in excess of the maximum number of credits permitted for the programme, or where more than five years have elapsed since the prior learning occurred. The Faculty (or delegated School) should ensure that the criteria by which they judge applications for APL are transparent and accessible.
- 1.9 Prior learning should not normally be accepted if five or more years have elapsed since it occurred unless the applicant can provide evidence that his/her learning has continued in a professional or similar context. In such cases the Faculty (or delegated School) may choose to set an assessment to test an applicant's current knowledge. The approval of the Dean for Taught Students or Dean for Postgraduate Research (whichever is relevant) is also required as set out in paragraph 1.8.
- 1.10 All students must be treated equitably regardless of the type or source of learning that is being assessed.
- 1.11 Where a student is exempt from part of their programme of study at the University of Exeter the programme fee for the relevant year may be reduced pro-rata to the amount of credit being studied.
- 1.12 In all cases, the award of a qualification of the University is subject to students meeting the requirements of Chapter 7 of the [Credit and Qualifications Framework](#).
 - a. For undergraduate programmes the final 120 credits of the programme must be taken as University of Exeter modules and the maximum amount of APCL permitted is 180 credits in a 360-credit programme or 240 credits in a 480-credit programme. Exceptionally this amount may be exceeded with the approval of the Dean for Taught Students or Dean for Postgraduate Research (whichever is relevant).
 - b. Masters programmes should normally include at least 90 credits taken as University of Exeter modules. Exceptionally this amount may be reduced with the approval of the Dean of Taught Students or Dean of Postgraduate Research (whichever is relevant), on a programme by programme basis.

- c. For all awards (except where students are transferring University of Exeter credit attained by the study of standalone modules see 1.13 below) the maximum amount of permitted APCL credits are as follows. With exceptional approval from the Dean of Taught Students or Dean of Postgraduate Research (whichever is relevant) these amounts may be varied.

Award Type	Total credit required for award	Maximum amount of APL allowed	Minimum amount of Exeter credit
Credit-rated graduate research			
Credit-bearing Doctoral awards (e.g. Professional Doctorates)	540	180	360
Postgraduate Level Award			
Master's Degrees (MSc, MA etc.)	180	90*	90
Postgraduate Diploma (PGDip)	120	60	60
Postgraduate Certificate (PGCert)	60	30	30
Undergraduate Level Award			
Graduate Diploma (GradDip)	240	120	120
Graduate Certificate (GradCert)	120	60	60
Integrated Master's Degree with Honours (MSci, MEng etc.)	480	240	240
Bachelor's Degree with Honours (3 years)	360	180	180
Bachelor's Degree with Honours (4 years)	480	240	240
Ordinary Degree	300	180	120

Foundation Degree (FdSc)	240	120	120
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*This can be increased to 120 credits where credits are from another University of Exeter programme, or where a programme has been given permission from the Dean for Taught Students to allow a greater number of credits to be accredited (as set out in 1.12b).

- 1.13 Students wishing to transfer credit from University of Exeter standalone modules will be permitted to transfer 100% of the modules required for award. As per 1.8 and 1.9 above, prior learning should not normally be accepted if five or more years have elapsed since it occurred although exceptions can be made at the discretion of the Programme Director or equivalent. Credit transfer is intended to recognise learning that has not been previously awarded, unless contributing to an upgrade in award within the same programme e.g. from a PGDip to a Masters.
- 1.14 University of Exeter students wishing to withdraw from their current programme and transfer to a programme at another institution are advised to consider guidance provided on [withdrawing from study](#) and should also contact their Hub Office. They can also seek further support and guidance from the [Students' Guild Advice Unit/ Students' Union Advice and Welfare](#).

2. Applications

- 2.1 A nominated Admissions Tutor within each Faculty (or delegated School) should act as the central contact for all APL requests. Appropriate references to applications for APL will be included in admissions statements. Students wishing to transfer credit from University of Exeter standalone modules should initially discuss their application with the student support team.
- 2.2 All applications for APL should normally be made prior to the student's date of registration. All applications must include evidence of the prior learning, provided by the applicant.

- 2.3 Applications for APL should be considered by the relevant Admissions Tutor. The Admissions Tutor will need to consider whether the student's prior learning (certified and/ or experiential) adequately demonstrates achievement of the Intended Learning Outcomes for the module(s) from which exemption is sought. For experiential learning, the student may be required to complete a portfolio to demonstrate their learning, or to undertake some other form of assessment as appropriate. If a Faculty (or delegated School) is satisfied that the experiential learning is equivalent to the standard of a module(s) that the student is requesting exemption from, then assessment may not be required.
- 2.4 Applications may be rejected at any stage. Appeals against judgments on applications for APL will be treated in the same way as appeals on admissions applications.
- 2.5 APL should be recorded on the student record system and clearly identified on a student's transcript, including the amount and level of credit from which exemption has been granted.
- 2.6 The University has devolved the management of all APL applications to the Faculty (or delegated School).

3. APCL General Principles

- 3.1 The Faculty (or delegated School) should assure itself that the prior certified study is equivalent to the standard of learning that would otherwise have been achieved from study in the relevant module(s) in the programme on to which the student is being accepted. This is usually done by analysis of the Intended Learning Outcomes of the module(s). This is particularly relevant to professional programmes where fitness to practice is pertinent.
- 3.2 The Faculty (or delegated School) should consider the learning that has been previously accredited and decide, in the best interests of the student, how this can be taken into account. It is at the discretion of the Faculty (or delegated School) to decide if the subject content and therefore knowledge gained is sufficiently similar for a student to be exempt from the module(s). Evidence for acceptance of APCL should demonstrate that the learner has a reasonable expectation of satisfactorily completing the programme for which they are applying.
- 3.3 Prior credit obtained from another institution can be recognised, but given that the University could not have full confidence in marks awarded in all circumstances, the

marks awarded from prior certified learning will not be used for the purpose of classification of the Exeter award. This does not apply to credits awarded at the University of Exeter which may, if the Faculty (or delegated School) considers this appropriate in the individual circumstances, be counted towards the final classification. Where previous University of Exeter credits have been allowed under APL these will be shown on the student transcript.

- 3.4 Exceptionally, the nature of the BMBS programme is such that no recognition of prior learning or exemption from study is normally permissible, other than transfer at an appropriate level of study from another UK Medical School, at the discretion of the Pro Vice-Chancellor and Executive Dean of the Faculty of Health and Life Sciences.

4. APEL General Principles

- 4.1 Faculties (or delegated Schools) should consider the learning demonstrated through the student's experience in order to decide whether the Intended Learning Outcomes for the module to be exempted have been demonstrated. Appropriate assessments may be set in order that the student may demonstrate achievement of these learning outcomes, including assessment of a portfolio of the student's work.
- 4.2 APEL does not exempt a student from study but allows the use of different routes to the award of credit. All students must meet the Intended Learning Outcomes as set out in the programme specification in order to qualify for the award.

5. Procedure for APL

5.1 Stage 1 – Application

All applications for APL should normally be made prior to the student's date of registration. Students should be able to seek guidance from the Faculty (or delegated School) prior to completion of their APL application. The nominated Admissions Tutors in Faculties (or delegated Schools) should act as a central contact for all APL requests. Students should be able to meet with appropriate Faculty (or delegated School) staff to discuss the type of evidence that may be required and the likely timetable of the process. Appropriate reference to applications for APL should be included in Faculties (or delegated School's) admissions material. Section 6 provides a summary of information that should be made available to the students.

5.2 Stage 2 – Initial assessment of case

The Admissions Tutor should discuss the APEL application form with the student and:

- a. Clarify what Intended Learning Outcomes the student is seeking credit for.
- b. Discuss with the student how experiential learning might most appropriately be evidenced.
- c. Advise the student on how and when to submit the necessary portfolio of evidence.
- d. Consult with the programme director and other colleagues as necessary on the appropriate method(s) to be used to assess the applicant's experiential learning and the evidence submitted.

5.3 The degree of advice and guidance required by APEL applicants will vary from case to case. (Whereas an application for APCL might be supported via email or a one-to-one interview, APEL applications are likely to require more detailed and frequent discussion in order to reach a satisfactory outcome). Students should submit the appropriate application fee. Where a Faculty (or delegated School) is accrediting prior experiential learning as part of a student's programme of study, then a fee may be charged to cover the costs of administering and assessing the application. The normal fee will be 25% of the fee for the module with half payable for the assessment of the student's learning and half payable when the application is accepted.

5.4 **Stage 3 - Submission of Evidence**

The third stage requires the candidate to submit a portfolio of evidence demonstrating the learning achieved and to complete the application form to indicate what is being submitted against which Intended Learning Outcomes. The portfolio might include:

APEL	APCL
Direct evidence: • Practice-based documents. • Published articles and manuscripts. • Video/audio tapes/computer discs/electronic files, with commentary and analysis related to the achievement of Intended Learning Outcomes. • Analytical and evaluative description of practice. • Awards and honours. • Viva. • Artefacts.	• Any relevant transcripts from previous institutions. • In addition to the submission of a portfolio, assessment of learning can include oral examinations, and/or one or more traditional examinations. Faculties (or delegated Schools) might also wish to request a reflective account (with a word limit).
Indirect evidence: • Statements from supervisors or managers in relation to aspects of practice. • References from colleagues, employees, voluntary organisations, professional bodies.	

5.5 Stage 4 – Assessment

The submission of evidence should be considered by the relevant Admissions Tutor. Whatever the form of evidence, the assessment process must evaluate a submission in terms of the following criteria:

- Validity – it must be appropriate in terms of level, volume (i.e. match that for which the claim is made, although higher level credit may substitute for lower level credit) and relevance for the purpose of the particular claim. If lower incoming credit is requested for substitution for higher University of Exeter credit, approval is required from the Dean for Taught Students or Dean of Postgraduate Research (in the case of Professional Doctorates). Clear justifications must be provided, including assurance that the Intended Learning Outcomes have been met.

- b. Sufficiency – it must be enough to satisfy the Intended Learning Outcomes of the module(s), level claimed.
- c. Currency – it must represent the applicant’s present knowledge and abilities.
- d. Authenticity – it must be indicative of the applicant’s own learning achievements.
For cases of APEL, assessment must be rigorous in ensuring that the learning that has taken place through experience is equivalent to the learning that would occur from following those elements of the study which the student is seeking exemption from. Credit must only be given for demonstrated learning, where the equivalence of the Intended Learning Outcomes can be demonstrated.

The Admissions Tutor will review the portfolio and discuss with the student any revisions or supplementary material that might be required. Once the assessment is complete the Admissions Tutor should sign off the recommendation section of the form, following approval from the Associate Pro-Vice-Chancellor Education for UG/PGT programmes, or the Associate Pro-Vice-Chancellor Research & Impact (or Faculty DPGR, or Department DPGR (or equivalent)) for Professional Doctorates.

The Dean for Taught Students or Dean for Postgraduate Research (whichever is relevant) should review and complete the form as appropriate if exceptional circumstances apply.

The form should indicate the specific academic credit to be awarded in respect of the named module.

The Faculty (or delegated School) should assure itself that the prior certified study is equivalent to the standard of learning that would otherwise have been achieved from study in the relevant module(s) in the programme on to which the student is being accepted. This is usually done by analysis of the Intended Learning Outcomes of the module(s). This is particularly relevant to professional programmes where Fitness to Practice is pertinent.

5.6 Stage 5 - Outcome and feedback

Students should be informed by Admissions in writing of the decision on their application as soon as possible. APL decisions should be recorded on the student record system and clearly identified on a student's transcript, including the amount and level of credit from which exemption has been granted.

6. Checklist of information to be provided to students

Students (current or potential) should be provided with clear information and guidance on APL including:

- a. The nature of any support and advice available to students.
- b. Definitions and boundaries of terminology used in University APL processes.
- c. Roles and responsibilities of all those involved in the APL process, including students themselves.
- d. Any applicable limits for recognition of credit (institutional and programme-specific).
- e. How claims for accreditation should be presented and submitted.
- f. Point(s) at which APL claims can be made, and likely timescales
- g. The scope and nature of the evidence that will be required to support claims, and any time limits applied to the currency of that evidence.
- h. Any applicable requirements of professional and regulatory bodies.
- i. Effect of APL on the availability of any potential awards, interim qualifications or qualification classifications.
- j. Assessment procedures, methods and criteria.
- k. How and when feedback will be given.
- l. Information on the possible outcomes of a claim and opportunities for the re-submission of an unsuccessful claim.
- m. The circumstances in which an appeal against a decision on the accreditation of prior learning would be considered, and the procedures to be followed.
- n. how a successful APL claim will be presented on a transcript of learning, and whether used for admission, entry with advanced standing, or progression.
- o. Fees charged for the consideration of claims (compiling and/or assessing).

See [Annex 1](#): APL Process Flow Diagram

See [Annex 2](#): APCL Application Form

See [Annex 3](#): APEL Application Form