

## HIGHER EDUCATION

### ACCREDITATION OF PRIOR LEARNING (APL)

AND

### ACCREDITATION OF PRIOR EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING (APEL)

## GUIDANCE FOR APPLICANTS

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## INTRODUCTION

The accreditation of prior learning (**APL**) is a process enabling people of all ages, backgrounds and abilities to receive formal recognition and credit for learning acquired in the past. The learning may have been gained through the successful completion of a course of study (certificated learning - **APCL**) or through work, voluntary work and business/leisure related activities (experiential learning – **APEL**). In order to receive credit for prior learning you have to produce evidence that will reflect on the learning taken place. Decisions regarding accreditation of prior learning are a matter of academic judgement.

### 1. WHAT IS ACCREDITATION OF PRIOR LEARNING (APL)?

The accreditation of prior learning (APL) is the **account taken of traditional study or course-based learning that has been formally assessed** by an educational institution and resulted in the award of a qualification or part-credit for an uncompleted course of study. Through the APL process it may be possible for you to gain initial entry or advanced standing to a higher education course of study at the College.

Typical qualifications on entry include: A levels; BTEC Nationals; Advanced/Progression Diplomas; an Access to Higher Education Diploma; Higher National Certificates or Diplomas; Foundation Degrees.

If you do not possess any of these qualifications, or have gained partial credits from an advanced or higher level vocational or professional qualification, you may still be able to gain access to a higher education course through APL. It may be that, for example, your study was at a relevant level and in a similar subject area to the course you are interested in taking at this College; or you may already have a Foundation Degree or HND and wish to gain entry to a BA (Hons) QCF Level 6 top-up degree course at the College.

### 2. WHAT IS ACCREDITATION OF PRIOR EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING (APEL)?

The accreditation of prior experiential learning (APEL) is the **account taken of learning experiences gained through life, work or business** that by their nature cannot be evidenced through formally assessed certification or transcripts. Through the APEL process staff at the College can assess the skills and knowledge base you have gained through relevant work experiences and map against learning outcomes on the course you wish to study.

APEL is open to anyone who may, over a period of time, have acquired skills or knowledge in one or several areas without necessarily receiving formal training or qualifications. You may be employed but would like to further your career, or you may be unemployed and seeking a new direction.

### 3. HOW WILL APEL BE ASSESSED?

Applicants who have achieved the outcomes identified for a whole unit or module prior to joining the course will be eligible to apply for accreditation of prior experiential learning.

Your past learning and practical achievements can be given credit as long as you can provide sufficient evidence to show that you meet the standards of the qualifications you would be gaining. This will involve you in providing a portfolio of evidence to support the application, which will be assessed during the interview process by the Course Leader in consultation with the relevant Module Leader. Any evidence produced needs to be clearly attributed to yourself and show that you have reliably demonstrated the skills and/or knowledge to the required standard.

Responsibility for providing evidence of prior experiential learning and for demonstrating how specific course and module learning outcomes have been met rests with the applicant, although assistance may be given by College staff through personal interviews. The evidence should normally be provided through clear, written statements detailing the learning acquired and mapping this to the appropriate learning outcomes of the proposed course and must be supported by a portfolio of evidence.

Compiling your portfolio of evidence will assist you in organising your learning into a form that will help subject experts assess your level or skill. You will discuss your evidence with this specialist; you will often be asked probing questioning to prove that you actually produced the items yourself. When evidence is produced for the purpose of proving a practical skill you can expect to undergo a testing of some or all of that skill, either at your workplace or at College. The same evidence may be acceptable of proof of learning in more than one area.

Depending on the course of study, consideration will not be given to experiential learning achieved more than a maximum of five years prior to application for entry to the course. You will be asked to provide evidence of currency.

#### **4. WHAT ARE CREDITS?**

*Credit*, sometimes referred to as CATS (credit accumulation and transfer system) points, is a national educational currency which provides a means of quantifying learning achieved at a given level of study. It is a system which enables students to accumulate credit and which facilitates the transfer of that credit within and between education providers. Successful completion of a year of full-time study at undergraduate level may, for example, earn 120 credits. Partial completion could earn a lower number of credits, dependent on the study undertaken and achieved.

Credit is awarded to a student in recognition of the verified achievement of designated learning outcomes at a specified level. The *credit level* gives an indicator of the relative complexity, demand and/or depth of learning and of learner autonomy. *Credit value* is the number of credits, at a particular level, assigned to a body of learning. For example, a module may be ascribed 20 or 30 credit points; the number of credits being based on the estimated notional learning hours for the module (where one credit represents 10 notional hours of learning).

#### **5. HOW APL/APEL OR CREDITS CAN BE USED**

Prior learning, gained elsewhere, can be used by the College in the decision to allow you to enter one of its courses of study.

- (a) In place of the normal entry qualifications, to join a course at the start of QCF Level 4 – with exemption from studying individual modules/units for which you have already gained formal credit elsewhere;

- (b) For advanced standing – a situation where you have already achieved the same learning outcomes as those covered in specific modules/units of study and you therefore wish to avoid repetition of that work.
- (c) Using credits (CATS) or APL for the purposes of *advanced standing*, that is, entry to QCF Level 5 or 6 of a degree course, should not normally exceed a gap of more than two academic years between achieving the prior credit and the resumption of learning.
- (d) Entry to QCF Level 6 (BA honours) is very much dependent on the receiving course, as some of the College’s undergraduate top-up courses have specific pre-entry conditions to be met.
- (e) Using APL to gain initial entry to QCF Level 4 of a degree course should not normally be subject to any elapsed time. However, in circumstances where an applicant obtained relevant prior learning more than 10 years previously and where the applicant has had no further demonstrable evidence of written critical analysis, it may be necessary to request an example of written work in support of an APL claim.
- (f) Using APEL to gain initial entry to QCF Level 4 of a degree course, the experiential learning being claimed should normally be within a maximum of the last five calendar years.
- (g) APL and APEL claims should, depending on the course, account for no more than a maximum of two thirds of the total award being applied for.

## 6. FEES AND COSTS

There is no additional fee for applicants wishing to make an application for entry to a Higher Education course through APEL, or for making an application to study at the College utilising credits or APL.

Note: There are no reductions in the amount of tuition fees paid at undergraduate level for students seeking APL/APEL. This reflects the costs of additional assessment required to verify each individual application.

## 7. HOW TO APPLY

In the first instance, contact the Course Leader for the course in which you are interested, via the College Call Centre (0115 9100 100), to discuss your individual circumstances and arrange an interview to discuss your application. Note: any advice you may be given by College staff during the APL/APEL process has no implications for whether your application will be successful.

The whole process may take up to 4 weeks as there are potentially 4 stages to complete and is highly dependent on your provision of as much information as possible (such as student transcripts, certificates, etc).

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| Stage 1 | Contact and informal discussion between yourself and Course Leader in relation to your prior learning and its relevance to the course you wish to apply for, including information and guidance on the College’s APL/APEL process |
| Stage 2 | In addition to the normal application form for the course you wish to apply for, you will also have to complete an APL Claim for Academic Credit form   |

- Stage 3            The College then assesses your individual claim
- Stage 4            Assessment follow-up, which may involve the College seeking verification from universities or colleges that you have previously attended or places you have worked and received experiential learning (as named on your APL/APEL application)

## **8. COMPLETING THE APL CLAIM FOR ACADEMIC CREDIT FORM**

Please note: you do not have to complete this claim form if you already possess the typical entry requirements for your intended course of study.

### **PART A – Personal Information**

- **Course Title** – for course you are interested in
- **Student ID** – College ID if existing/previous student of the College; current UCAS personal ID number if you are applying for undergraduate study
- **Family name and First name/s**, including any name you may have previously been known by
- **Contact details:** Postal and e-mail addresses, including daytime telephone number
- **Date of Birth**

### **PART B – Claim for Individual Modules**

Complete details of modules and specific credit being claimed (in conjunction with Course Leader if necessary)

### **PART C – Claim for Entire Stage/Level**

Complete details of modules and specific credit being claimed (in conjunction with Course Leader if necessary)

## **9. WHAT ARE LEARNING OUTCOMES?**

Universities and Colleges use learning outcomes to identify whether students have demonstrated, through assessment, the minimum level of learning required to pass study at different levels. Learning outcomes are set at various levels; they are the specific intentions of a course or module, written in specific terms, and describe what you should know, understand, or be able to do at the end of that course or module.

During initial discussion of your application, the Course Leader will make available to you the course learning outcomes and module learning outcomes for the course you are interested in studying.

## **10. CONTACT DETAILS**

If you require further information, please contact the Call Centre on 0115 9100 100 who can arrange for you to talk to a member of the course team.