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Introduction

The College may admit a student to the beginning of a course, or with advanced standing beyond the beginning of a course, through the assessment of that student's prior learning, whether certificated or uncertificated. The process for making such a decision is known as the Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL).

This policy has been formulated with close reference to the QAA's UK Quality Code for Higher Education and the *Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL)* requirements contained in Nottingham Trent University's Quality Handbook. QHS15 C available at:

https://www4.ntu.ac.uk/adq/document_uploads/quality_handbook/148406.pdf

1. DEFINITIONS

1.1 In its documentation, Faculties and course teams should adopt the definitions set out below so that there is consistency in the use of language across the College.

- **Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL)** – a process for assessing and, as appropriate, recognising prior experiential learning or prior certificated learning for academic purposes. This recognition may lead to credits that can be counted towards the completion of a course and the award(s) associated with it – i.e. admission with advanced standing.
- **Accreditation of Prior Certificated Learning (APCL)** – a subset of APL – a process through which previously assessed and certificated learning is considered and, as appropriate, recognised for academic purposes.
- **Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL)** – a subset of APL – a process through which learning achieved outside education or training systems is assessed and, as appropriate, recognised for academic purposes.
- **Recognition (of learning)** – a process that acknowledges and establishes that appropriate learning has taken place and can be assessed to have done so.
- **Advanced Standing** – the term used to describe the admission of a student beyond the beginning of a course.

2. PRINCIPLES

- 2.1 Decisions regarding APL are a matter of academic judgement. The decision-making process and outcomes adopted by Faculties/Course teams should be transparent and demonstrably rigorous and fair.
- 2.2 The normal credit limit for admission with APL is two thirds of the total credits required for the course award. In applying this principle, Faculties/Course teams should make clear to students the implications for their progression, the conferment of interim awards and the classification or grading of final awards.
- 2.3 Where cohorts of students are to be admitted with advanced standing on a regular basis, the arrangement should be subject to an Articulation (Advanced Standing) Agreement.
- 2.4 APL will be clearly identified on students' transcripts.
- 2.5 Faculties/Course teams should provide clear and accessible information for applicants, academic staff and examiners about their APL procedures. Care should be taken to ensure that the information to potential students is equally accessible to all groups of applicants.
- 2.6 Faculties/Course teams should give clear guidance to applicants on the timescale for considering APL claims and providing the outcomes.
- 2.7 In its documentation, Faculties/Course teams should adopt the definitions set out in paragraph 1.1 above so that consistency in the use of language across the College is maintained.
- 2.8 The range and form(s) of evidence used to substantiate an APL claim – together with the assessments utilised to consider those claims – should be clearly set out to students.
- 2.9 In claims involving international students particular attention should be paid to the English language competence of such students and the College's standard entry requirements.
- 2.10 Appropriate arrangements should be in place to support applicants submitting claims for APL and to provide feedback to applicants on those decisions.
- 2.11 The criteria to be used in judging a claim for APL should be made explicit to applicants, academic staff and examiners.
- 2.12 The authority and responsibilities for making and verifying decisions about APL should be clearly specified in the Faculty/Course team procedures.
- 2.13 All staff associated with APL should have their roles clearly and explicitly defined.
- 2.14 External examiners should be informed about a course's APL procedures and may be involved in sampling assessments that contribute to the final award.
- 2.15 APL procedures should be subject to interim and periodic course monitoring and any salient action points (including enhancements/good practice) noted within annual course standards and quality reports. It is acknowledged that the level of monitoring should be consistent with the importance of APL within that particular context.
- 2.16 The College will develop training and support for staff associated with the support, guidance and assessment of claims for APL (including that covering equality and diversity).
- 2.17 The Academic Board will review the College's APL policy from time to time in the light of emerging good practice within and outside the College.

3. APL FOR ADMISSION TO THE BEGINNING OF A COURSE

- 3.1 Admission requirements are set for each course by the Faculty responsible for delivery and must state the basis on which an applicant without the formal entry qualifications may demonstrate their suitability for entry to the beginning of the course.
- 3.2 Students may be admitted on the basis of APEL or APCL.
- 3.3 The APL procedures for a particular course will be considered at validation. Alternatively, a Faculty may seek approval for generic APL procedures that apply to all its courses. Once approved, these procedures should be kept under review during annual reporting and may be considered as an item at periodic collaborative review where appropriate.
- 3.4 In translating these procedures into promotional materials, a Course team should ensure that the materials are relevant, accurate at the time of publication, not misleading, accessible, and provide information that will enable applicants to make informed decisions about their options – including students with disabilities.

Timing of applications

- 3.5 Applications must be made and completed before a student is admitted to the course. Course publicity material should make clear the lead in time necessary to submit and process a claim for APL, which may be short in the case of APCL but longer in the case of APEL.

Making decisions

- 3.6 The decision should rest with the course leader based upon a recommendation from staff involved in the admissions process. Where appropriate, the Course Leader and admissions staff may wish to consult with other course team members.
- 3.7 The decision does not need to be reported to the chair of the Examination Board or the external examiner.

Role of the external examiner

- 3.8 The external examiner should be made aware of the APL requirements and should be sent a copy of the requirements or procedures if so requested.

Annual reporting

- 3.9 The course team should monitor the effectiveness of its APL procedures as part of its routine course monitoring arrangements and therefore take staff and applicant feedback to monitor their progress and performance.

Fees

- 3.10 In respect of Office for Students (OfS) regulated courses, an applicant should not normally be charged a fee for consideration of their APL application. Other courses may make a charge and the costs should be made known to the applicant at the outset.

4. APL FOR ADMISSION WITH ADVANCED STANDING

- 4.1 Admission requirements are set for each course by the Faculty responsible for delivery, and must state the APL procedure to be used for those intending to enter the course with credit (advanced standing).
- 4.2 Applicants may be admitted with credit for specific modules, levels or stages within the course that they wish to study. Credit can be granted on the basis of prior study (APCL) or experiential learning (APEL), and is normally granted in respect of specific modules.
- 4.3 An applicant has to demonstrate that the relevant course and module learning outcomes have been reasonably met. Where credit is sought for an entire level or stage of a course, then the applicant should demonstrate that the level/interim stage learning outcomes have also been reasonably met.
- 4.4 Faculties may wish to consider establishing multiple entry (and exit) points when submitting a course for approval or review, and include regulations for admission with APL in the course documentation.
- 4.5 The APL procedures for a particular course will be considered for approval. Alternatively, a Faculty (or an academic team within it) may seek approval for generic APL procedures that apply to all its courses. Once approved, these procedures will be kept under review during annual reporting and will be considered as part of collaborative review by the awarding institution.
- 4.6 If students with a particular prior qualification are to be admitted regularly with a standard amount of credit, this should be included in the course specification and approval obtained at validation, or subsequently, by the awarding institution.
- 4.7 In order to admit students from another institution on a regular basis, the course team should undertake a mapping exercise to determine an appropriate match between the two courses. A simple Advanced Standing Agreement (ASA) should be drafted, which should include a monitoring process. In some cases, it may not be necessary to have individual course mappings – in the case of recognised national awards with broadly standard curricula (either UK based or overseas) it may be possible for the award rather than each course itself to be recognised for advanced standing.
- 4.8 In translating these requirements into promotional materials, the course team should ensure that the materials are relevant, accurate at the time of publication, not misleading, accessible and provide information that will enable applicants to make informed decisions about their options.

Timing of claims

- 4.9 Applications may be made and completed before a student is admitted to a course; this is particularly likely to be so in the case of full-time undergraduate funded courses. Course publicity material should state the lead in time necessary to submit and process a claim for APL, which is likely to be longer in the case of APEL.
- 4.10 It may be possible, particularly in respect of part-time courses, to allow a student to submit a claim after the student has registered if the logistics of the course allow. In such cases, the course team may set a deadline for the submission of such claims or may allow such claims to be made at any time during the course, which may be possible in experiential courses, reflective practice courses.

Information for students applying for APEL with advanced standing

- 4.11 Course leaders are ultimately responsible for ensuring that the main features of the course's APL requirements are explained to prospective students at the point of firm enquiry (see list in next sub-section).
- 4.12 Where courses allow for on-course APL, course leaders are also responsible for ensuring that its APL requirements are included in the course handbook provided at induction (these requirements may be supplemented with additional information and guidance).

Making decisions

- 4.13 The decision to admit a student with advanced standing should ultimately rest with the course leader. A course leader may process the claim themselves or may delegate authority to staff involved in the admissions process; such staff may need to consult with the appropriate module leader(s) and coordinate a complex claim across several modules. In such cases, module leaders are responsible for assessing the claim and ensuring that the learning derived from APCL or APEL reasonably demonstrates the achievement of the module learning outcomes.
- 4.14 Where a student is claiming APCL for a level or stage, the course leader and admissions staff need not consult with the module leader, for example, where the applicant has successfully completed a comparable level or stage at another Higher Education Institution (HEI) or successfully completed a course set out in the course specification.
- 4.15 Where a student is claiming APEL, another member of the module team should moderate the portfolio or other form of assessment. Any disputes or significant differences in opinion should be subject to the College's standard moderation policy (see Quality Handbook).
- 4.16 Advanced standing decisions should be reported to the external examiner and the chair of the Examination Board as soon as possible after the decision has been made. The external examiner would not normally be expected to moderate the APL claim but may do so if they so wish at levels that contribute to the final award. Formally, the decision would not be ratified until a meeting of the Examination Board but provided the approved procedures have been followed, a Board should not overturn the provisional decision.
- 4.17 Wherever possible, the criteria to be used when judging an advanced standing claim should be those normally applied to the module or level (the interim award outcomes). These criteria should be made known to the applicants.
- 4.18 Applicants should normally receive a communication setting out the outcomes of their APL claim within two weeks of the decision being taken. An applicant should be given the right to resubmit their claim on one further occasion.

Credit limits

- 4.19 The normal minimum credit limit for a claim for APL is one module. If so specified in the course admission requirements, a student may make an APL claim for part of a module but will not be awarded the credit for that module until they have satisfied the full set of module outcomes.
- 4.20 The normal maximum credit limit is two thirds of the total credits required for the course award.
- 4.21 Credit may be awarded through APL for the work experience, residence abroad or professional placement components a College course, in addition to the taught modules. For sandwich courses, APL will normally be limited to 50% of the weeks necessary to satisfy the placement requirements.
- 4.22 Normally, prior learning will only remain current for a period of time. The College has not determined a standard period of currency as this will vary depending on the discipline. Rapidly changing disciplines may establish a three-year currency, while disciplines that are subject to less change may have a longer shelf life. Course teams should define a normal period based upon its academic professional judgement (and taking into account any PSRB requirements) and should provide guidance on this to applicants.

Grading

- 4.23 Where a student is admitted to a course with advanced standing for previous certificate study (APCL), they may be graded for the accredited section of the College course provided the course team can make a satisfactory translation between the two marking schemes. Grading is not normally available for APEL learning. In such cases, a pass grade should be recorded.

- 4.24 Where an APL claim cannot be graded, the learning will not contribute to the calculations of the overall level aggregate for that student and therefore will not count to the overall classification. The course leader should make an applicant aware of any limitations on progression, obtaining an interim award and/or the range of grades or classifications available to them before the student formally accepts the APL credits – this must include any implications for fulfilling PSRB requirements.

Transcripts

- 4.25 Each student receives a transcript from the College's Examination Board records. A special code 'APL' will be recorded for any module recorded following this procedure and attached to the student's record. The amount of outstanding credit should be adjusted for each individual to reflect the APL assigned.

The re-use of credit

- 4.26 A student who has obtained an award (with or without APL) should be able to re-use the credit from that award towards an award at a high level – normally on one occasion only. It is also possible for such a student to seek to obtain a second award at the same level using credit from the first award (subject to the maximum two thirds rule). The student must demonstrate good grounds for wishing to transfer and will be allowed to make only one such credit transfer. Faculties and course teams must guard against students collecting awards on the basis of substantially the same learning. In the context of international exchange courses, it is becoming the norm for students to obtain second awards at the same level using credits for the same learning.
- 4.27 The Academic Standards and Quality Committee may consider proposals to re-use credit for a second award on a standard basis within a course where this might be appropriate, for example, in the context of lifelong learning, international exchange courses. Exemplar: a student may have obtained an FdA in Business Management but within a few years, for career purposes, wishes to obtain an FdA in Law for which there may be no suitable graduate conversion course. In these, and similar circumstances, it may be appropriate for the student to be granted APCL for the second award on the basis of relevant modules taken on the initial FdA Business Management course.

Role of the external examiner

- 4.28 The external examiner should receive the course team's advanced standing documentation on appointment and be provided with an overview of the requirements at induction. The external examiner should have the opportunity to agree with the course team the extent of their involvement with the advanced standing process. The extent of their involvement is likely to reflect the importance of advanced standing within the course.
- 4.29 Normally, the external examiner will not be expected to moderate advanced standing claims but may, from time to time, wish to sample one or two APEL decisions at levels that contribute to the final award (particularly in respect of courses which extensively use such a procedure).
- 4.30 In all cases, the external examiner should be informed of advanced standing decisions and has the right to be provided with full documentation for any advanced standing decisions taken in the academic year if they so request.
- 4.31 The external examiner has an opportunity to report on their experience of the advanced standing procedure in their annual report.

Fees

- 4.32 In respect of APEL, Faculties should charge a fee for assisting applicants with the preparation of portfolios and for assessing the evidence. The following guidance is offered:
- a. OfS funded courses – a nominal administration charge.

- b. Other courses – either the full cost of the assessment or normal tuition fee for the module(s) for which APL is being claimed.
- 4.33 Whichever fee regime is chosen Faculties should ensure that they have transparent mechanisms for setting and approving advanced standing fees.
- 4.34 The fee should be made clear to the applicant before the beginning of the process. If an element of the portfolio is to be submitted in a language other than English, the costs of translation should be estimated and made known to the applicant before they agree to start the formal process.

Annual reporting

- 4.35 The course team should monitor the effectiveness of its advanced standing procedures, where appropriate, at course review.
- 4.36 In such cases, as well as evaluating staff reflections on the advanced standing process, the course team is expected to collect, consider and act upon feedback from applicants who have made a claim for advanced standing. A course team should also have mechanisms for tracking and monitoring the progress and performance of applicants who have made a successful claim for advanced standing, including in relation to other applicants who have not made similar claims for accreditation.
- 4.37 The comments from external examiners (if any) should be evaluated within the annual Course Standards and Quality Report. Where common APL themes occur across several reports, a Faculty may wish to consider these and report on to the Academic Standards and Quality Committee.

5. SPECIFIC GUIDANCE ON APEL FOR ADMISSION WITH ADVANCED STANDING

- 5.1 Applicants should be informed about the nature and range of evidence considered appropriate to support a claim for advanced standing via an APEL process.
- 5.2 Typically, the evidence is provided in the form of a portfolio, accompanied by clear, written statements detailing the learning acquired and mapping this to the appropriate learning outcomes of the proposed course modules. The applicant is responsible for providing the evidence and the mapping; however, the course team should provide assistance in this task through personal interviews, tutorials or specially designed manuals or study packs.
- 5.3 The academic assessment of the portfolio is the responsibility of the course team. In some cases, the portfolio may completely satisfy the intended learning outcomes, while in other cases there may be gaps in the evidence that require the student to demonstrate the achievement of the missing outcomes through other means.
- 5.4 Besides the portfolio of evidence, assessment tools might include:
 - a. a focused interview or viva;
 - b. artefacts, models, drawings, etc;
 - c. specially designed projects, coursework or assignments;
 - d. completion of a reflective account or diary of the learning achieved through experience;
 - e. the normal module assessments.
- 5.5 Staff employ any appropriate methods of assessment but the chosen method must enable an external examiner and Examination Board to verify the decision taken. Where assistance is given to an applicant in preparing the portfolio of evidence or other assessment, and the individual responsible for providing that support determines the outcome, it is particularly important to ensure that there is independent moderation of the assessment decision reached.
- 5.6 In determining the nature of the evidence and its assessment, a course team should consult the following criteria:
 - a. Acceptability – is there an appropriate match between the evidence presented and the learning being demonstrated? Is the evidence valid and reliable?

- b. Sufficiency – is there sufficient evidence to demonstrate fully the achievement of the learning claimed?
 - c. Authenticity – is the evidence clearly related to the applicant’s own efforts and achievements?
 - d. Currency – does the evidence relate to current learning? Where the course team or PSRB has specific requirements and/or time limits for the currency of evidence, certification, or demonstration of learning, these should be clear and transparent.
- 5.7 Active support for applicants making a claim may be in the form of a short course or module to prepare applicants to reflect upon their experiences and describe and analyse their learning, or via tools to assist applicants to reflect upon their experiences and identify the evidence of the learning gained from experience.
- 5.8 Appendix 1 provides an exemplar of the key stages in making a claim for advanced standing via an APEL process.

6. NOTES FOR ADMISSION STAFF

- 6.1 Admissions staff are expected to be familiar with the range of post-16 qualifications acceptable for entry, any compact arrangements which affect their courses, and any standard APL routes. They should also have up-to-date knowledge of the sources of information on equivalent international qualifications.
- 6.2 Admission staff will receive staff development covering the College’s admissions regulations, any changes to the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) system, any changes to the national qualification and relevant regulatory or legislative developments that affect entry requirements.
- 6.3 Admission staff, and the course team as a whole, are responsible for ensuring that the admissions process is followed fairly, courteously and expeditiously, and that information concerning applicants remains confidential between designated parties.
- 6.4 The college will provide training, support and staff development for all those staff associated with the support, guidance and assessment of claims for APL, typically as part of the staff development for admissions staff.

7. BTEC PROGRAMMES AND RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING

- 7.1 The Recognition of Prior learning (RPL) of BTEC programmes is in line with Pearson’s practice [click here](#) for detailed information and processes.

Useful reference links

QAA’s UK Quality Code for Higher Education:

<https://www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code>

...specifically advice and guidance on assessment: https://www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/quality-code/advice-and-guidance-assessment.pdf?sfvrsn=ca29c181_4

Professional, Statutory and Regulatory bodies:

<https://www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us/who-we-work-with/professional-statutory-and-regulatory-bodies>

Nottingham Trent University Quality Handbook:

<https://www.ntu.ac.uk/about-us/academic-development-and-quality/regulatory-information/quality-handbook>

Supplement QHS15C: Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL) requirements:

https://www4.ntu.ac.uk/adq/document_uploads/quality_handbook/148406.pdf

Appendix 1

Key stages in typical claim for advanced standing via an APEL process

