

DRAFT DOCUMENT

ACCREDITATION OF PRIOR LEARNING (APL)

A. What is APL?

APL is Accreditation of Prior Learning – that is the process by which a student can obtain credit towards a qualification for something which he/she has learnt in the past. This means that he/she does not have to learn it again and so can be exempted from certain modules, or even a whole year, of study on the new programme. To gain APL a student therefore has to prove that he/she really does have that learning and that it is sufficiently recent ('current') to be something that he/she could use readily in his/her new programme of study.

APL takes several forms, some of which are sometimes given different names but they all amount to the same thing – that previous learning is given credit.

- Learning may be from a previous course which was assessed and for which the student gained a qualification. This is sometimes called APCL, Accreditation of Prior *Certificated* Learning.
- Learning may have been gained from experience of doing a job, and the student may have plenty of evidence to show what he/she can do but no formal qualification. This is sometimes called APEL: Accreditation of Prior *Experiential* Learning.
- A student may be asking for entry to the university 'skipping' a whole year of more of study because he/she has already covered that ground. This is sometimes called 'entry with advanced standing'.
- APL is sometimes also referred to as APA (Accreditation of Prior Achievement).
- For convenience the term APL is used below to cover all these definitions.

B. How is APL or advanced standing achieved?

To get APL the student has to prove that he/she has the knowledge and skills which he/she would have gained in the part of the programme from which he/she is seeking exemption, and that the knowledge is current. To do this the student has to provide evidence of his/her knowledge and skills match against the learning outcomes of the relevant part of the programme. Learning outcomes are a statement of what the student should know, understand or be able to do at the end of the module, Stage or programme of study, so matching or mapping the evidence to the learning outcomes is equivalent to being assessed in the module or Stage of study. If the evidence shows that the student has indeed already gained the relevant knowledge and skills, then APL may be given.

C. What are the limits of APL or advanced standing?

There are limits to APL to ensure that when a qualification is awarded as a Coventry University degree or diploma or certificate it can genuinely be said to be from

Coventry. Some part of the programme of study must therefore have been pursued with the University – it cannot all be awarded by APL. The limits are as follows.

1. Up to two-thirds of a qualification may be given by APL or advanced standing.
2. If a student has already gained a target award at the same level as, or a higher level than, the target award for which he/she is seeking APL he/she may not use APL to gain credit. However, if a student has gained an exit or interim award towards the target award he/she may use that towards a target award at a higher level.

So for example, if a student has a BA or BSc he/she cannot use any of that to gain APL from another Bachelor's degree or for a lower qualification such as a Foundation Degree (FD). Similarly if a student has a Master's degree he/she cannot use that to gain APL towards a Bachelor's degree. This is because the award the student has is at the same level as, or a higher level than, the award towards which APL is being sought.

However if a student has a Certificate of Higher Education (Cert HE) or equivalent he/she can use it to gain APL towards a BA or BSc because the BA/BSc is at a higher level than the Certificate. But if the student then leaves without completing the BA he/she cannot be given a Certificate of HE as an exit qualification – though he/she could be given a Diploma. Similarly, a Postgraduate Certificate or Diploma may be used to gain credit towards a Masters award, as these are exit awards from a Masters degree.

Note: This is subject to the limit that only two-thirds of a programme may be awarded by APL so that up to 240 credits from a non-honours degree may contribute by APL to an Honours award. However a student who has an Ordinary degree *from Coventry* may bring up to 300 credits from an Ordinary degree into the related Honours degree provided that the learning from the Ordinary degree meets the usual requirements for currency; this permission does not apply to Ordinary degrees from other institutions.

3. A student is eligible for an interim award (e.g. Certificate or Diploma of Higher Education as an exit award from an Honours degree) only if he/she has completed at least one third of that interim award at Coventry. A student cannot be given an exit award at (for example) Certificate level if the credits for the Certificate were all awarded by APL.
4. Notwithstanding 3 above, if a student is admitted to Stage 3 of an undergraduate programme, he/she may be awarded an Ordinary degree as an exit award provided that:
 - a) the student has registered for the full diet of 120 credits at Stage 3;
 - b) the student has gained at least 60 credits from the Stage 3 work.A student who fails to complete at least 60 credits in this way is not eligible for any award but will be given a transcript showing the credits which he/she has obtained.
5. APL may be given for any combination of modules across any years. It is normally given either for a few modules within Stage 1 of an undergraduate programme or for a whole year (Stage 1) or even two years (Stages 1 and 2 – i.e. Stage 3 entry). But it would be possible to be exempted from a 'strand' of the programme across all three years: so if a student was studying Basket-

Weaving and already knew a lot about Practical Basket-Weaving but did not know much about the theory, he/she could be given APL against all the practical modules at Stages 1, 2 and 3 – maybe 40 credits in each Stage.

6. Where APL is sought for a whole Stage the programme leader may also require that the student maps his/her experience against one or more of the core modules for the Stage(s) in question. This would be to ensure that key learning outcomes have been met.
7. Some subject areas may not be able to give APL, or may not be able to give it for certain modules, because of professional body (PSRB) requirements.
8. APL cannot be given for part of a module. This is because APL is judged against the learning outcomes for the module as a whole and either they have been met or they have not. For APL to be given for part of a Stage it would be necessary to have mapped the student's prior learning against the modules within the Stage for which APL is to be given.

D. How is APL graded?

It isn't. APL is given for achieving the learning outcomes which is a threshold standard (bare pass). The transcripts of students given credit by APL show the

relevant module(s) or Stage(s) as having been passed by APL; the student's achievement is recorded as a pass, not as a percentage or numerical mark. Modules awarded by APL are excluded from any calculation of an average for progression or for the final award (e.g. degree classification or distinction).

E. What is the process for obtaining APL?

Note:

- a) *The process described below is applicable for individuals seeking APL in situations where no progression route has been approved and where direct entry by advanced standing cannot be offered. It is particularly appropriate:*
- i) where the prior learning is experiential;*
 - ii) where certificated prior learning cannot be reliably verified;*
 - iii) where the student is seeking APL for selected module(s) rather than direct entry to a later stage of the programme*
- b) *in the process outlined below the role of the Programme Leader may be delegated to the admissions tutor or to a named nominee who is a specialist in the academic area concerned. Such a nominee must be approved by the relevant Head of School..*

1. The student contacts the department or faculty to ask for advice. The student should be directed to the Programme Leader (or nominee) to discuss in person, by phone, letter or email, what he/she has already achieved, which module(s) or Stage(s) it might apply to and what evidence the student would be able to show.

2. If the student wishes to proceed with an APL application:

- a) the Programme Leader informs the Registry Office;
- b) the Programme Leader offers further advice to the student if requested and/or may pass the student on to a relevant colleague - e.g. a module leader (see 3 below);

The relevant Registry Officer:

- a) provides the student with these APL guidelines;
- b) provides the student with the relevant information about the learning outcomes of the module(s) and/or Stage(s) and/or postgraduate phases for which he/she wishes to seek APL. This will include programme and module handbooks, the programme specification and the relevant module descriptor(s);
- c) Logs the request and subsequently tracks it;
- d) agrees with the student a submission date for the APL application, confirms this in writing or by email and logs it. This date must allow time for the APL decision to be made before the start of the relevant semester. Every effort must be made to assess the application within 4 weeks of the submission date and it must be assessed within 8 weeks;
- e) either:

- ensures that the APL application will be considered by a forthcoming Programme Assessment Board;

Or

- liaises with the relevant Head of School to set up an APL Assessment Panel meeting a few days after the agreed submission date, so that a decision can be made in time for the start of the study period.

3. Advice to the student from the Programme Leader or nominee and/or module leader(s) should focus on:
 - a) what the learning outcomes really 'mean';
 - b) how they are achieved and assessed in the programme;
 - c) what sort of evidence would be appropriate.
 - d) how the form should be completed.

Colleagues should not read or comment on draft APL applications.

Students should expect a minimum of two hours' and a maximum of four hours' consultation including time spent in face-to-face meetings, telephone calls and emails.

4. The student completes the relevant forms and submits this to the Registry Office by the agreed date. If the student fails to meet this deadline no guarantee can be given that a decision will be made before the start of the module(s) / Stage and the student will have to register for and study that part of the programme, or defer entry to the next occasion.
5. All evidence must be submitted in English. Where original documents are in a language other than English the originals must be submitted together with a translation by an independent professional translator. Contact details for the translator(s) must be supplied. Any expense associated with this must be met by the student.
6. The Registry Office administrator submits the APL request and evidence: **either** to a meeting of the Programme Assessment Board **or** to an APL Assessment Panel consisting of:
 - the Programme Leader or nominee (approved by the relevant Head of School);
 - the Head of School (or in his/her absence the Campus Director);
 - a senior member of the Programme Assessment Board (Senior or Principal Lecturer).

Where APL is to be given for a module or Stage which an external examiner would normally oversee the external examiner must be consulted either in person or by post / telephone / letter / email. If the consultation is at a distance the evidence presented by the student must be sent to the external and the correspondence with the external must be presented to the Assessment Board / APL Assessment Panel and kept on file.

If an APL Assessment Panel is used and its members are unable to agree on whether APL may be given, a further member of the Programme Assessment Board should be involved and if there remains doubt the external examiner must be consulted.

7. The panel makes one of the following decisions:
 - a) to award APL as requested;
 - b) to award no APL;

- c) to award limited APL – e.g. for one module but not another, for one Stage but not another.
- d) to seek further evidence from the student in respect of some aspect(s) of the application;
- e) to set a test to ascertain whether the student has achieved some aspect(s) of the learning outcomes and/or whether that learning is current. This test may take any appropriate form including a timed assessment, a piece of coursework or an interview. Interviews and other face-to-face tests should be conducted by at least two members of academic staff and notes kept.

If further evidence or a test is required the results should be considered by:

- the original APL Assessment Panel (if necessary with a further member of the Assessment Board and/or or the external examiner);
- a full Programme Assessment Board (PAB);
- on behalf of the PAB: the Chair of the PAB, the Programme Leader, another senior member of the PAB, (with the external examiner if applicable who may be consulted by post / phone / letter / email. A record of any such consultation must be kept.)

Where a student has sought APL for a whole Stage of study and this cannot be given, the panel may seek further evidence against specific modules to consider whether APL could be given for some of the Stage.

The University reserves the right to require evidence that the documentation presented is authentic and to reject an application if it has reason to believe that certificates or other evidence are not genuine. Any student admitted on the basis of APL which is subsequently found to be fraudulent will be subject to the University's disciplinary processes and may be required to withdraw from his/her programme.

The judgement of the panel is recorded and stored.

8. The student is informed of the decision. The Registry Officer is responsible for communicating the decision to the student and, where applicable, ensuring that the student understands any request for further information and arranging a date for that to be submitted / a test or interview to be taken. Where the decision to seek further evidence or set a test will delay the process until after the start of term the student must either:
 - defer entry until the APL application is resolved;
 Or
 - register in the normal way, taking the modules in question.
9. When a final decision has been reached the outcome is reported to:
 - the student;
 - the admissions tutor in cases of direct entry to Stage 2 or 3 so that the admissions decision can be confirmed;
 - the Registry SITS Officer (who logs the details on the student's SITS record if the student takes up a place to study at Coventry);

- if the PAB did not make the final decision, the next meeting of the Programme Assessment Board;
10. In the case of students who want 'traditional' entry (e.g. undergraduate Stage 1) but then want exemption from one or more modules, the admissions decision should be kept separate from the APL process. The admissions tutor should make a decision as to whether the student may be admitted on the basis of his/her qualifications. The student then enters separately into the APL process. The student may hold back a final decision as to whether to come to Coventry until the APL process has been concluded but the offer should be made in the usual way and APL should be pursued separately.

E. What sort of evidence is appropriate?

There are no fixed rules about this because the evidence will vary from module to module and person to person. Anything which shows that the student has achieved the learning outcomes may be appropriate. However the programme leader must agree that the proposed evidence will be appropriate to the academic subject in question and the type of learning outcomes to be assessed.

The academic panel assessing the application will also take into account the currency of the learning – something which the student knew well 10 years ago may itself now be out of date and even if it is not, the student may not be sufficiently familiar with it to be able to use the knowledge flexibly within a programme of study. As a general guide we would expect the evidence offered for an APL application to come from qualifications and experiences gained not more than 5 years ago. The programme leader or his/her nominee will advise the student of any particular restrictions in terms of timing, because of professional body requirements or for other reasons.

Examples of the kind of evidence which could be used are:

- a training course for which the syllabus is available with evidence that the student passed the course;
- a report written for an employer showing evidence that the student can analyse complex information and has knowledge of a particular topic;
- organising a fund-raising programme for a voluntary group may show evidence of project management – this would probably have to be written up specially for the APL application;
- a presentation given to any group of people could show evidence of knowledge of a topic, presentation skills and analytical ability. It might be necessary to supplement the presentation with a brief explanation about how it was prepared.

G. Alternative Methods of Assessment for APL claims

The standard method by which APL claims are submitted and assessed is through paper-based evidence. However alternative methods such as a presentation, interview, physical artefacts and audio and video materials may be used where:

- the subject matter and the learning outcomes make this appropriate;

Or

- the student has a disability for which an alternative mode of assessment is a reasonable adjustment. In such a case the alternative mode of assessment should be one which would be acceptable to the University for a registered student in respect of standard assessment processes.

The Programme Leader must seek the approval of the relevant Head of School for any variation to the standard mode of assessment. The Registry Office must confirm this in writing (or by email) to the student and keep a record of the permission given. Any alternative mode of submission and assessment must not jeopardise verification of the learning outcomes. The Programme Leader may wish to seek advice from the Disability Support team at Coventry and Coventry University Branch at The Knowledge Hub in respect of reasonable adjustments for students with disabilities.

H. Timing of APL applications

Many people apply for APL at the same time as they apply to enter the programme and APL requests may be submitted at any time of year. The Programme Leader or Registry Office will be able to advise students on the most appropriate timescale, for example if an Assessment Board is already scheduled to meet and could consider the APL application.

Students are advised to allow **at least 12 weeks** for the APL process before the start of the programme, Stage or module(s) in question. So for a programme starting on September 10th the student should make initial contact with the Programme Leader not later than June 10th. This allows time for the student to obtain advice from the Programme Leader or nominee and then to prepare and submit his/her evidence, and for this to be assessed. The University will make every effort to make an initial decision on the application within 4 weeks of receiving the final submission, and will in any case do so within 8 weeks. (An initial decision may take longer during the vacation than during term-time.) This decision may take one of three forms:

- to award APL in full or in part;
- to reject the request;
- to seek further information from the student.

Students are reminded that:

- they should not under-estimate the time it takes to prepare an APL submission;
- during the vacation individual staff will take holiday and may not be available to give advice. Therefore it is in the student's interests to give the longest possible lead-time for the process;
- the panel may raise queries which require further information to be submitted before a final decision can be taken.

It is possible for a student to apply for APL for individual modules after he/she has started the programme. If he/she has already started the module in question then it is too late. However if he/she realises that he/she could provide evidence of APL for a module which is due to start later then the student may apply for APL in the usual way.

The University will make every effort to assess APL claims before the start of the programme / module in question. However if a student does not follow the guidelines above in relation to time-scales the University cannot guarantee to assess the APL application in time for the start of the module or programme. This may result in the student having to defer entry for a further year while the application is considered or to undertake the modules for which APL was being sought.

I. Cost

The University does not normally make a charge for considering an application for APL. However, where a case is particularly complex and requires a significant amount of staff time, the University reserves the right to make an exceptional charge to a maximum of £200 sterling.

J. Direct entry by advanced standing

1. Where the student is applying for direct entry to Stage 2 or 3 of an undergraduate programme by certificated learning (i.e. is seeking entry with advanced standing) the need for a process to ensure that relevant learning outcomes have previously been met still applies. However in these situations:
 - the programme leader or an alternative nominee such as an admissions tutor may complete documentation on the basis of the application to show that the student has achieved the relevant learning outcomes;
 - any such person must be a member of academic staff who is a member of the relevant Programme Assessment Board;
 - no fee is charged to the student;

Programme leaders and admissions tutors are reminded that:

- a. **where a qualification has been approved through the Articulations and Related Processes procedures and where a curricula mapping has been undertaken in line with that process for the programme in question it is not necessary to undertake further 'APL' mapping for an individual applicant.** (So for example if an applicant has an HND which is an approved qualification and the HND has been mapped for your programme for Stage 3 entry a student with an HND does not need to have their qualifications further mapped.)
- b. **this process is *only* for use in cases where the qualification(s) offered have not previously been authorised through the Articulations and Related Processes procedures;**
- c. it is essential to keep the evidence of the process which has been authorised for admission by direct entry;

- d. if you start to receive large numbers of applications from a common feeder qualification you may wish to explore the possibility of registering the qualification under the Articulations and Related Processes procedures;
- e. if the application form does not provide sufficient information about the knowledge and skills which an applicant possesses to allow you to map the relevant learning outcomes you may reject the application or obtain further details or you may choose to refer the student to the individual APL process. In the end this is in the interests of the student since it is not to their advantage to be admitted to a programme which they are not in fact equipped to study successfully.

K. Appeal

Applicants for APL may appeal against the process by which an APL decision has been made using the University's standard appeals procedure. This is the appropriate procedure because APL is an assessment decision.

L. Monitoring of APL/advanced standing

1. Individual APL.

Programme Assessment Boards should receive a report on the individual APL which has been awarded. Programme Leaders should monitor the use of APL and the success of students given APL and draw the attention of the Programme Studies Board to any issues arising.

2. Direct entry with Advanced Standing

- a. There is moderation of applications for direct entry with advanced standing both internally and by the external examiner. This recognises that APL / advanced standing are a proxy for the assessment process and is designed to secure standards. While this will happen after an offer has been made and the offer cannot be revoked or amended at that point, action can and must be taken if issues are identified for the next round of applications. The outcome of the moderation process must be reported to the next appropriate Programme Assessment Board together with any actions identified.
- b. Moderation is as follows. Note that percentages are of the applications in response to which an offer was made – those where no offer was made are not sampled:
 - i. Internal: per programme: 10% subject to a minimum of 5 and a maximum of 20.
 - ii. External examiner: per programme 5% subject to a minimum of 5 and a maximum of 10.
 - iii. In either case more may be sampled if concerns are identified in relation to academic standards to clarify the problem.
- c. a list of approved entry with advanced standing is received by the next appropriate Programme Assessment Board. This must list the student's name, the prior qualification(s) on the basis of which advanced standing was given, and any conditions which were attached (e.g. 'a credit was required in the theory module').

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