

ERMC Accreditation of Prior Learning Policy

Introduction

The following guidelines reflect definitions and procedures for the management of APL for the Common Awards as taught by the Eastern region Ministry Course. The principles are in line with those of the Common Awards validating body, Durham University, and with the further guidelines set out for all TEIs on the Common Awards website. More information may be found here:

<https://www.durham.ac.uk/departments/academic/common-awards/policies-processes/admissions/apl/>

Definitions and Background

As the awarding body, Durham University is accountable for admissions decisions relating to the Common Awards programmes. Consequently, the University needs to ensure that students are appropriately prepared for the programmes to which they are admitted. The University recognises, however, that TEIs have their own tried and tested admissions processes, and extensive experience operating those processes. In light of this, the University's expectation is that TEIs will develop their own approaches for making decisions about APL in line with the University's Principles for the Award of APL at Durham and this additional guidance. Where claims fall outside those parameters, the TEI will be expected to refer those claims to the University for consideration. The present guidance is designed to facilitate this approach.

APL (Accreditation of Prior Learning) can take either of two forms:

- APEL: Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning, which is learning acquired through life experiences including work and uncertificated training, for which no formal qualification has been gained;
- APCL: Accreditation of Prior Certificated Learning, which is any learning for which an award has been achieved.

In the text below, APL subsumes both APEL and APCL.

Since APL is now current within the sector in increasingly diverse ways, it is important that the Eastern Region Ministry Course should:

- have a clearly articulated position on APL consistent with its mission;
- be able to explain this position to students;
- have procedures in place to ensure that any APL policy is equitable and consistent.

Durham's Expectations of ERMC

Durham's expectations for ERMC's consideration of APL claims are as follows:

- (a) ERMC should operate in line with the 'Principles for the Award of APL at Durham'.

- (b) ERM C should use the APL Checklist to determine who has responsibility for approving each APL claim.
- (c) All APL claims should be considered and assessed in light of a clear mapping of learning outcomes that takes into account the volume and level of prior learning. The Mapping Document template is designed to facilitate this.
- (d) Should ERM C choose to support an application that does not demonstrate unequivocally that all the relevant learning outcomes have been achieved, ERM C will highlight the gaps clearly and comment on this explicitly within the Mapping Document. The final decision regarding approval of such claims will rest with the Common Awards Management Board.
- (e) ERM C will establish the authenticity of evidence submitted in support of APL claims.
- (f) ERM C will be responsible for all direct communications with individuals who wish to claim APL, including: making students aware of the opportunities for APL claims; providing support and advice in relation to the application process; ensuring that applicants are fully aware of how APL will be considered during classification, and how it will be recorded on their transcript; formally communicating to applicants the outcomes of all APL claims; providing feedback on rejected applications (if applicable). In non-standard cases where University approval is required, the Common Awards Team will report the outcome to ERM C with the expectation that ERM C will communicate the outcome to the applicant.
- (g) Any APL claims for consideration by the University should be submitted – along with supporting documentation – to the Common Awards Team in good time.
- (h) For the purposes of reporting and review, ERM C should create and retain clear records of all APL claims, ERM C's decisions and the rationale for those decisions, and the evidence that ERM C has received and consulted as part of the decision-making process. ERM C will therefore use and retain the APL Checklist and the APL Mapping Document issued by the Common Awards Team, and all supporting evidence. These documents will: be used to support and evidence the APL credit on student records and transcripts; form part of the evidence-base for periodic external reviews; inform the monitoring and review of APL processes across the Common Awards Scheme.

Principles

1. **Demonstrable achievement of learning outcomes.** Durham University's approach to APL is dependent on the demonstrable prior achievement of learning outcomes. In order to be approved, APL claims must clearly demonstrate that the applicant has already achieved the learning outcomes for the module(s) or Level from which they are claiming exemption. It is paramount, therefore, that APL decisions are made on the basis of students' prior achievement of the Common Awards learning outcomes. However, in circumstances where the applicant may have achieved some – but not all – of the learning outcomes for a given module or Level, ERM C may consider it appropriate to approve the APL claim on the condition that, once registered on the Common Awards programme, the student study and complete specific modules that will enable him or her

to achieve the outstanding learning outcomes (and therefore, ultimately, meet all of the programme learning outcomes relating to the award for which he or she will be registered). There are some instances, therefore, when ERMCC may support the approval of an APL claim from an applicant who has not already achieved all the relevant learning outcomes but with the proviso that, as a condition of approval, the student complete the outstanding learning outcomes as part of the Common Awards programme. As such cases would be outside the parameters of the 'Principles for the Award of APL at Durham', the Undergraduate or Postgraduate Programme Manager shall forward the APL claim, together with its recommendations, for consideration by the Common Awards Management Board.

2. **Maximum credit limits.** The University's maximum credit limit for APL is normally one-third of the standard programme. Up to 60 credits of that may be APEL.

Award	Programme credits	Maximum APL claim
Certificate	120	Normally $\frac{1}{3}$ (i.e. 40 credits) of APL (APEL and APCL combined).
Certificate	180	Normally $\frac{1}{3}$ (i.e. 60 credits) of APL (APEL and APCL combined).
Diploma	240	Normally $\frac{1}{3}$ (i.e. 80 credits) of APL (APEL and APCL combined), including no more than 60 credits of APEL.
Graduate Certificate	60	Normally $\frac{1}{3}$ (i.e. 20 credits) of APL (APEL and APCL combined).
Graduate Diploma	120	Normally $\frac{1}{3}$ (i.e. 40 credits) of APL (APEL and APCL combined).
BA	360	Normally $\frac{1}{3}$ (i.e. 120 credits) of APL (APEL and APCL combined), including no more than 60 credits of APEL.
Postgraduate Certificate	60	Normally $\frac{1}{3}$ (i.e. 20 credits) of APL (APEL and APCL combined).
Postgraduate Diploma	120	Normally $\frac{1}{3}$ (i.e. 40 credits) of APL (APEL and APCL combined).
MA	180	Normally $\frac{1}{3}$ (i.e. 60 credits) of APL (APEL and APCL combined).

The standard maximum credit limit of one-third applies to the Common Awards programmes.

The Common Awards Scheme permits prospective students to undertake one 'taster module' before registering on the programmes. The APL process should not be used as a route to permit students to undertake a greater number of taster modules.

3. **Scope of credit.** Credit under APL may be given for any element of the programme at any stage, but normally within the exception of a major project or dissertation.
4. **Taught modules only.** APL can only be given for a taught module.
5. **Full modules only.** APL can only be given for a full module – not for parts of it.
6. **Final or exit award.** APL can be awarded irrespective of whether the credits gained previously contributed to a final award or an exit award.
7. **Currency of credit.** The University specifies that normally APL-related learning should have been completed no longer than five years before the student's proposed start date on the Common Awards programmes. When calculating the currency of previous learning, Directors of Studies and the Programme Managers should calculate this period from the date when the previous qualification was awarded.

While the maximum currency length is five years, ERMIC will exercise discretion when considering whether APL requests of up to five years; in some circumstances (for example, if the prior learning was completed over an extended period of time, or if the prior learning is unusually specialist and/or tangential to the proposed Common Awards programme), ERMIC staff members involved in the request may wish to take additional steps to assure themselves of the currency of the prior learning.

8. **APL is not a right.** As specified in the 'Principles for the Award of APL at Durham', APL is not a right. Initially, in standard cases, APL decisions are delegated to ERMIC and will be determined at ERMIC's discretion in line with the University's 'Principles' and this additional guidance. ERMIC will report to the Common Awards Management Board on its use of APL. The Management Board will consider the reports alongside ERMIC APL policies and related statistics.

The Common Awards Management Board will be responsible for the approval of all nonstandard cases (i.e. claims that are outside the parameters of the 'Principles') to ensure that such decisions are made consistently across the Common Awards programmes.

9. ERMIC has the right to decide, as a matter of principle, whether APL requests will be considered for any of its programmes.
10. **Student's responsibility.** Responsibility rests with the student for demonstrating that he/she has achieved the learning outcomes of the Common Awards module(s) from which he/she wants exemption.
11. **Admissions.** The use of APL has no implications for admissions criteria.
12. **The granting of APL shall not affect degree classifications.** The Banner system will record the number of credits and the level of study for which APL has been given as a

threshold pass without a numerical mark. Modules for which APL has been given should not raise or lower degree classifications. They should therefore be excluded from any calculation such as averaging to determine the level of the final award.

The only exception to this principle shall be where a student has undertaken a Durham module as a credit bearing short course, and has successfully applied to be granted APL in respect of the same module in a Durham programme. In this situation the mark(s) gained from the credit bearing short course(s) shall be carried forward to the student's full programme.

Details and Procedure

1. ERMCM will consider applications for APL, following the principles set out by Durham University in its [Learning and Teaching Handbook \(Section 1.6.1\)](#) and in the [Common Awards TEI Handbook](#).
2. All APL requests should be made first by the student to his or her Director of Studies by the end of the June prior to the (re)commencement of studies in September. The student should ensure that all supporting documentation is provided to his or her Director of Studies. Following review and approval the Director of Studies will then collect the applications and submit them to the Chair, Board of Examiners, for approval and then brought to the Board of Examiners (Reserved Business standing agenda item) for ratification by the middle of July. All non-standard requests will be forwarded promptly to the Durham Common Awards Management Board with accompanying recommendations.

The outcome of all APL requests will be communicated by the Programme Manager to the relevant Director of Studies, who will in turn inform the student.

3. Information on APL will be made available for prospective and incoming students on the ERMCM Moodle site. Students interested in applying for APL are encouraged to contact their Directors of Studies.

Appendix: Definitions

Advanced standing (See 'Direct entry' [below])

Accreditation of Prior Learning

Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL) can take either of two forms:

- APEL: Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning, which is learning acquired through life experiences including work and uncertificated training, for which no formal qualification has been gained;
- APCL: Accreditation of Prior Certificated Learning, which is any learning for which an award has been achieved.

Credit

Credit is awarded to recognise a student's achievement of learning outcomes at a specified Level of study. Durham University's APL process relates to what is sometimes referred to as specific credit: i.e. where the outcomes of prior learning within a relevant subject area are directly equivalent to the Common Awards module or Level learning outcomes.

Direct entry

Students may claim for direct entry into Level 5 of a programme. This is a form of APL that relates to exemption from an entire Level of study; any claims should be considered and granted according to the APL principles. Students may apply for direct entry if they can demonstrate that they have achieved all the learning outcomes for the Level from which they apply to be exempt. It is not necessary to establish equivalence module by module, but the student must have covered all the Level learning outcomes. Direct entry claims should normally be made and considered on a case-by-case basis.

Direct entry should not be confused with the more formal arrangements for articulation agreements, which are outside the scope of the Common Awards Scheme. The APL process should not be used to provide an automatic or ongoing entry route into the Common Awards programmes for groups or cohorts of students. This would represent a serial sub-contracting arrangement, which is prohibited by the standard validation contract, and therefore not permitted within the Common Awards Scheme.

Learning outcomes

The subject-specific knowledge, subject-specific skills, and key skills that a student must demonstrate in order to complete a module or programme successfully. Learning outcomes are defined at modular level (in each of the module outlines) and at programme level (in the relevant programme specifications). Durham University's approach to APL centres on the demonstration of the applicant's prior achievement of module or programme learning outcomes at the relevant Level of study.

Level

A 'Level' refers to the stage of study within a programme, and so to the order in which particular modules would typically be studied. Levels, therefore, indicate the intellectual challenge of a module within a programme of study. The University's Level Descriptors provide a common framework for this. Undergraduate levels in the Common Awards Scheme reflect the level numbering and descriptors of the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (England, Wales and Northern Ireland):

FHEQ LEVEL	FULL-TIME EQUIVALENT	TYPICAL QUALIFICATION EQUIVALENT
Level 4	FT UG Year 1	Certificate
Level 5	FT UG Year 2	Diploma
Level 6	FT UG Year 3	Honours Degree
Level 7	FT PGT Year 1	PG Certificate / PG Diploma / MA

Module

A module is a defined course of study which is self-contained and which receives a specified number of credits. Credits are gained when a student has passed the module by satisfying the Board of Examiners in respect of the assessment requirements for the module concerned. Each module is set at a given Level of study appropriate to its learning outcomes and is assessed against appropriate criteria.

The minimum unit of credit that can be granted to a student as APL is a full module; APL cannot be granted for part of a module.

Programme specifications

In some programmes, APL is not accepted. The programme specifications for the Common Awards programmes outline key information about the programmes and indicate whether students are able to apply for APL for any given programme.

Year

A year is a 12- month period of study, normally beginning from the start of the academic year (for the purposes of the contractual relationship, the academic year begins on 1st September). The defined Level of study remains fixed irrespective of the actual year of study of a particular student. So, for example, a part-time student undertaking a Certificate in Higher Education over the course of two years will progress from Year 1 to Year 2, while remaining at Level 4 throughout.

Approved by the Board of Studies on 24th May 2021