



## Higher Education Accreditation of Prior Learning SOP

**SOP Number:**  
325-05-2022

**Academic Year:** 2024/2025 Onwards

**Date Of This Issue:** October 2024

**Responsible Owner:** Head of Higher  
Education

### Summary of Contents

College's procedures in relation to Accredited  
Prior Learning for Higher Education.

- APL
- APEL
- APCL
- RPL
- HE

**RO Review Information:**  
Reviewed: October 2024

**Next Review Due:** October 2026

**Requires CMT Approval (yes/no):** Yes

**Previous Reference (for control  
purposes):** N/A

**First Created:** May 2022

**Last CMT Approval Date:** 28 October 2024

**Date of Equality of Opportunity and Good  
Relations Screening (Section 75):** N/A

**Date of Last Accessibility Screening:**  
August 2023

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## **1.0 Change History**

- 1.1 Changes to this SOP are documented in Appendix 1 of this document. When reading electronic copies of this document, [you can click here to view the change history](#).

## 2.0 Background

- 2.1 This Standard Operating Procedure outlines the procedures that the College follows in relation to Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL) for Higher Education provision. Depending upon Awarding Body (AB) this process can also be referred to as Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), however the procedural processes are the same and will be referred to as APL throughout the documentation.
- 2.2 Two forms of prior learning are recognised.
1. *Accredited Prior Certificated Learning (APCL)*. This is learning associated with a structured, formal course of study, which has already been assessed and accredited, either in higher education or by a professional body. Depending upon AB this process can also be referred to as Recognition of Prior Certificated Learning (RPCL), however the procedural processes are the same and will be referred to as APCL throughout the documentation.
  2. *Accredited Prior Experiential Learning (APEL)*. This is learning acquired through life, work experience and study not previously attested through formal education or certification. Depending upon AB this process can also be referred to as Recognition of Prior Experiential Learning (RPEL), however the procedural processes are the same and will be referred to as APEL throughout the documentation.

### **3.0 Overview and Scope**

- 3.1 The College Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL) process is one which aims to recognise learning in whatever context it has taken place. It is based on the premise that learning can be identified, measured, assessed and accredited within academic courses, regardless of the context in which it is acquired.
- 3.2 Two forms of prior learning are recognised:
  1. *Accredited Prior Certificated Learning (APCL)*
  2. *Accredited Prior Experiential Learning (APEL)*
- 3.3 To be given credit on this programme, such previous learning needs to be at the appropriate level or have the potential to reach that level with further study and reflection.
- 3.4 The procedure is informed by the DfE working group on APL and QAA UK Quality Code advice and guidance on Admissions, Recruitment and Widening Access, Assessment, Learning and Teaching and Enabling Student Achievement.
- 3.5 The general principles apply to all HE students but processes may be shaped by AB requirements.

## 4.0 Principles

4.1 The following principles are fundamental to the achievement of awards that meet nationally recognised standards of achievement.

- › Learning shall be recognised irrespective of the context in which it is achieved.
- › It is the achievement of learning, or the outcomes of that learning, and not just the experience of the activities alone that shall be accredited.
- › Claims for APL must be made using the application form ([Appendix 2](#)) and submitted with evidence of learning, evidenced in writing and authenticated at the appropriate level.
- › Applicants will be entitled to support of an initial interview with the APL Adviser and two further support sessions of up to one hour in total to complete their APL claim.
- › All claims for APL shall be considered with the same degree of rigour and shall be comparable in terms of evidence and effort.
- › The APL process shall be transparent to all stakeholders and demonstrably rigorous and fair.
- › Decisions regarding the accreditation of prior learning are a matter of academic judgement, informed by professional bodies and other stakeholders.
- › Feedback shall be provided to applicants at each stage of the process.
- › Applicants shall be informed of the outcome following the Board's decision in a timely basis.
- › Appropriate training and support shall be available to all staff associated with the guidance and assessment of claims for the accreditation of prior learning. This will include the definition of roles and responsibilities at each stage of the process.
- › Approved exemptions shall be recorded on the student's Higher Education Academic Record (HEAR).
- › Limitations to APL shall be clearly defined. These will be reviewed in light of the AB requirements.

## 5.0 General Policy

- (i) Exemptions will be considered for a minimum of one module only.
- (ii) Exemptions may be granted for whole modules only, save in the exception where a module is clearly defined into theoretical and practical elements. In this case, claims may be considered for either the theoretical or practical components.
- (iii) Exemptions will only be considered for a maximum credit value or programme percentage in line with the AB requirements. This is summarised in the table below.

Awarding Body	Maximum Credit Exemption and Stipulation
Ulster University	<p>For programmes of 180 or more credit points, students must register for modules amounting to at least the final third of the credit value of the award at the highest level.</p> <p>For programmes of up to and including 120 credit points, students must register for modules amounting to at least the final half of the credit value of the award at the highest level.</p> <p>Exemptions shall not be permitted for these modules.</p> <p>Approved exemptions shall be recorded on the student's record. Where required, in accordance with programme regulations, marks achieved in prior studies or awarded for experiential learning through assessment of a portfolio of evidence, shall be used to calculate the student's overall result.</p>
Open University	<p>A student may be awarded APL towards the requirements of an FD up to a maximum of 50%. For an FD (240 credits) this equates to a maximum of 120 credits and for a CertHE (120 credits) this equates to 60 credits.</p> <p>APL is not permitted at level 6 of a Bachelor Honours Degree or for the thesis/dissertation module where students are expected to complete 120 credits in order to gain the award. APL is not permitted for the thesis dissertation module on a Post Graduate programme.</p> <p>Performance in work for which an award of credit for prior learning has been made is not taken into account in the calculation of the final award.</p>
Pearson Higher Nationals	<p>APL processes should not be used for any more than 50% of the total credit value of a Higher National award.</p>
VTCT	<p>APL only evidence is assessed to decide whether or not a learner can proceed straight to summative internal/external assessment, as applicable. APL does not exempt learners from any element of the mandatory summative internal/external requirements of a qualification.</p>

- (iv) Duly constituted College APL Board shall take decisions on claims for APL. This will include at least two members of staff and should normally include the Course Director/Co-ordinator, the APL Adviser and a subject expert.
- (v) The duly constituted APL Board shall have due regard for the authenticity, currency, validity, reliability and sufficiency of the evidence provided.

- (vi) Subject/Course Teams shall make explicit any modules where an APL claim cannot be considered and also make explicit the rationale and justification.
- (vii) Claims must be evidenced by certification or in writing.
- (viii) Schools shall have due regard for core elements of the programme to ensure that applicants have met the requisite learning outcomes within APL claims.
- (ix) The process for considering APL claims shall be transparent to all stakeholders and demonstrably rigorous and fair.
- (x) Feedback shall be provided to applicants at each stage of the process.
- (xi) Schools shall appoint an APL Adviser(s) to provide advice and guidance to applicants on claims for APL. This will normally be the Course Director/ Coordinator.
- (xii) Learning from a higher level can be counted down where appropriate (E.g. Credit from a Level 5 programme can be used to award credit to a level 4 qualification),
- (xiii) Prior study gained at an external institution will be considered providing the requested evidence is met,
- (xiv) Any APL exemptions granted will be recorded on the learners Higher Education Academic Record (HEAR) against the module, upon completion of their qualification at SERC. (\* denotes module exemption, \*\* denotes general exemption)

### **5.1 APCL for exemptions from individual modules**

- (i) Regard shall be taken in relation to the currency of the certificated evidence. Qualifications and/or HE credits that have been achieved within the previous five academic years will be considered for exemptions.
- (ii) The APL Board shall determine whether the certificated evidence is commensurate with the learning outcomes within the module(s) for which exemption is sought.
- (iii) It shall be the responsibility of the student to furnish the APL Board with the requisite information of the learning achieved within a certified claim by providing evidence such as full certificates and academic transcripts.
- (iv) Applications for exemptions for individual modules via APCL will only be considered from applicants who have secured a place on an HE programme at SERC. All applicants must meet the entry requirements for individual programmes before an APCL request will be considered.
- (v) Applications for APCL will only be considered prior to commencement on the programme and up to 5 weeks after commencement on the programme.

### **5.2 APCL for direct entry via stage exemption of a programme without award of OU credit**

This applies to OU provision only.

- (i) The APL policy allows for candidates to enter stage 2 or stage 3 of an undergraduate qualification on the basis of completion of an appropriate certificated qualification from a recognised UK HE programme of study.
- (ii) With stage exemption of this kind, it will be recorded on the student's transcript that stage exemption was awarded, but credit for the stage(s) from which the student was exempted would not be transferred to OU validated awards.



### **5.3 APEL for Admission**

- (i) The APL Adviser shall, in consultation with the applicant, determine whether the evidence presented is likely to meet the criteria of being authentic, current, valid, reliable and sufficient.
- (ii) Undergraduate Admissions.

Admission to undergraduate programmes is based upon prospective students, with considerable life and work experience, demonstrating evidence of their ability to undertake the programme. A portfolio of evidence shall be presented for consideration. Course Committees shall specify the minimum outcomes to be demonstrated for admission to the programme.

### **5.4 APEL for exemptions from individual modules**

- (i) The APL Adviser shall advise applicants on whether an APEL claim is appropriate and against which module(s) exemption may be sought.
- (ii) The APL Adviser shall, in consultation with the applicant, determine whether the evidence presented is likely to meet the criteria of being authentic, current, valid, reliable and sufficient.
- (iii) Applications for exemptions for individual modules via APEL will only be considered from applicants who have secured a place on an HE programme at SERC. All applicants must meet the entry requirements for individual programmes before an APEL request will be considered.
- (iv) Applications for APEL will only be considered prior to commencement on the programme and up to 5 weeks after commencement on the programme.

## 6.0 Procedure

- (i) All initial enquiries regarding APL shall be directed to the APL Adviser who will normally be the Course Director/Co-ordinator who shall advise the applicant on the process and its requirements.
- (ii) All APL applications shall be made using the form [\(Appendix 2\)](#).
- (iii) All applications must include evidence of the prior certificated and/or experiential learning, provided by the applicant.
- (iv) All applications for APL shall normally be made prior to the student's date of enrolment.
- (v) All formal written applications shall be made in the first instance to the APL Adviser to determine whether the evidence to be presented is likely to meet the required criteria of being authentic, current, valid, reliable and sufficient before forwarding to the APL Board for consideration.
- (vi) All applications for the accreditation of a prior experiential learning shall be presented in the form of a portfolio of evidence. A typical portfolio should be presented as indicated below. Additional material may be required. The portfolio shall contain written material which clearly demonstrates how the student's prior experience is evidence of his/her achievement of the requisite learning outcomes. The assessment criteria included at [Appendix 3](#) may be used to assess and award a mark for the portfolio.

A typical portfolio should contain:

- Title Page
- Table of Contents
- Curriculum Vitae
- Employment History
- Education and Training History
- Training and Professional Qualifications

A typical portfolio should include the following sections:

Section	Guidance
<b>Introduction</b>	Setting the context of the claim in the overall academic and career plans of the student
<b>Experience</b>	An expansion on a curriculum vitae or other significant life events including a description of experiences including informal learning activities e.g. conferences/workshops.
<b>Learning Account</b>	An account of the learning that has resulted and reflections on what has been learned from the experience.
<b>Learning Outcomes</b>	Clear statements of demonstrable behavioural change/performance resulting from the learning together with a list of demonstrable learning outcomes
<b>Evidence</b>	Evidence of the achievement of each learning outcome
<b>Authenticity</b>	Evidence demonstrating that the prior learning claimed was completed by the applicant

- (vii) All applications shall be formally considered by an APL Board including at least two members of staff and should normally be drawn from:
- Faculty Partnership Manager (Ulster University programmes only)
  - The Head of Higher Education (QED)
  - Course Director/APL Adviser
  - Subject Expert
  - Head of School/ Principal Lecturer/ Deputy Head of School/ Curriculum Manager
- (viii) For Ulster University programmes the Faculty Partnership Manager should be kept fully informed and involved at all stages of the process. For all other programmes the External Verifier or Examiner should be informed.
- (ix) Applicants seeking exemption based on prior experiential learning may be invited to attend for interview by the APL Board. A record of the interview shall be made using the form in [Appendix 4](#). Recommendations of the APL Board will be recorded on the form in [Appendix 5](#). For UU programmes recommendations of the APL Board will be recorded on the form in Appendix 6 and sent to the FPM for confirmation.
- (x) All claims will be decided as follows: Approved / Insufficient Evidence / Not approved.
- (xi) Applicants shall be informed of the outcome following the Board's decision in a timely basis.
- (xii) Where a claim has been determined as a) 'insufficient evidence' or b) 'not approved', applicants shall be provided with detailed feedback including, in respect of a), identification of those areas where the claim has been deemed deficient and, in respect of b), clear explanation for the claim being determined 'not approved'.
- (xiii) Where the decision is of insufficient evidence, there shall be one opportunity for the student to provide additional evidence to the Board if this is considered necessary and appropriate, within a timeframe determined by the Board.
- (xiv) The decision of the Board shall be final (no right of appeal except on grounds of procedural irregularity).
- (xv) Course Committees shall give consideration to the currency of the evidence submitted in relation to subject specific requirements.
- (xvi) All successful claims for admission to a programme or exemption from a module(s) or part of a programme shall be reported by the Course Director/Co-ordinator at the Subject/Course Committee and subsequently noted at January/June Progress/Examination Board.
- (xvii) Each School shall ensure that the APL process is monitored at School level to ensure equitable and consistent treatment of claims.
- (xviii) There shall be no fee applied to APL applications.
- (xix) APL Application forms should be stored in the Secure Exam Board Team site area for the programme in the application year. All APL applications and outcomes should be recorded in the APL Register available on the HE@SERC site. A copy of the

Recommendations from APL Panel form should be uploaded to the student manager document section for student record.

## **7.0 Communication Plan**

This Procedure will be uploaded to the College intranet and website and referred to in staff induction and training.

## **8.0 Review**

This procedure will be reviewed biennially, or when the need for change has been identified.

## Appendix 1: Document Change History

Version	Date	Change Detail
1.0	March 22	Creation of separate HE APL policy. Includes ref to RPL in line with AB requirements. Update of AB credit requirements and appendix documentation.
2.0	August 22	Amendment to APL application forms to account for direct entry option
3.0	June 23	Revision to APL Appendix- Appendix 4 now Recommendations of APL Board/ Appendix 5 now APL Application Process
4.0	August 23	Transferred to new Accessibility Template
5.0	August 24	Declaration of own work added to APL Application form – Appendix 2
5.1	October 24	Panel members updated to reflect College restructure Appendix 6 added for UU approval form Additional step around record keeping added to Section 6.0

## Appendix 2: APL Application Form

### SOUTH EASTERN REGIONAL COLLEGE

**PRIVACY NOTICE:** Information gathered on this form will be processed within the provisions of the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) and used for the purpose of recording and managing accreditation of prior learning applications. The College is permitted to process personal data where there is a 'lawful basis' to do so. This processing is necessary for the performance of your contract. Your information may be shared with relevant College staff for the purpose of recording and managing accreditation of prior learning applications.

Further information on data protection and your rights are available on our website <https://www.serc.ac.uk/customer-privacy>

### APL Application Form

PART 1: PERSONAL INFORMATION	
Surname:	
Forename(s):	
Title:	
Date of Birth:	
Home Address:	
Post Code:	
Email Address:	
Contact Number:	
EMPLOYMENT DETAILS (WHERE APPLICABLE)	
Company Name:	
Employer Contact:	
Employer Contact Number:	
Employer Address:	
PART 2: PROPOSED COURSE OF STUDY	
Programme Title:	
Mode of Attendance:	
Year of Entry:	
Proposed Start Date:	

Please tick the level of APL for which you are applying:		
(i)	APEL for Admissions	<input type="checkbox"/>
(ii)	APEL for exemption from individual modules	<input type="checkbox"/>
(iii)	APCL for exemption from individual modules	<input type="checkbox"/>
(iv)	APCL for direct entry	<input type="checkbox"/>

For APEL or APCL exemption from individual modules only. Please identify the modules you are seeking exemption from.
1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6.

PART 3: OUTLINE OF APL CLAIM		
(i)	APL Application Form	<input type="checkbox"/>
(ii)	Certified Evidence	<input type="checkbox"/>
(iii)	Portfolio of Evidence	<input type="checkbox"/>

I declare that this is my own work and that any material I have referred to has been accurately and consistently referenced.

The material presented has not been copied or provided from another source, including artificial intelligence software.

<b>Signed:</b>		<b>Date:</b>	
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**Please return this form and evidence to the APL Adviser**



## Appendix 3: APL Assessment Criteria

### SOUTH EASTERN REGIONAL COLLEGE

<b>Programme Title:</b>	
<b>Applicant Name:</b>	
<b>Panel Members</b>	
<b>Date:</b>	

#### Criteria for Assessment of APEL Portfolios

Criteria for Assessment	Panel Comments
<p><b>1. <u>DESCRIPTION OF EXPERIENCE (10%)</u></b></p> <p>1.1 <b>Clarity</b> in terms of:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Specification of amount of time devoted to the activity</li> <li>Precision of description of activity</li> </ol> <p>1.2 <b>Relevance</b> in terms of:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Linkage to learning outcomes of Teaching and Training Studies course units</li> </ol>	
<p><b>2. <u>REFLECTION ON EXPERIENCE (30%)</u></b></p> <p>2.1 <b>Depth</b>, in that the reflection:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Moves from anecdotal/personal to make generalisations</li> <li>Moves from the descriptive to the analytical and evaluative levels</li> <li>Demonstrates change in behaviour as a result of reflection on experience</li> </ol> <p>2.2 <b>Breadth</b> in that it:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Relates to each of the learning outcomes identified</li> </ol>	
<p><b>3. <u>DESCRIPTION OF LEARNING OUTCOMES (30%)</u></b></p> <p>3.1 <b>Specificity</b> in terms of:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Clear identification of changes in knowledge, understanding or competence</li> <li>Currency: the learning outcomes are relevant now</li> </ol>	
<p><b>4. <u>EVIDENCE (20%)</u></b></p> <p>4.1 <b>Relevance</b> insofar as it is:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Clearly linked to learning outcomes identified above</li> <li>Relevant today: evidence of <i>recent</i> application where learning outcomes were acquired some time ago</li> </ol> <p>4.2 <b>Authenticity</b> in that:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The evidence demonstrates that the student actually did what is claimed</li> </ol>	
<p><b>5. <u>PORTFOLIO (10%)</u></b></p> <p>5.1 <b>Organisation</b> in terms of:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Clear mapping of experience → reflection → learning outcomes → evidence</li> </ol> <p>5.2 <b>Clarity</b> in terms of:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Accessibility to non-specialists</li> </ol>	

## Appendix 4: APL Assessment/ Interview Pro-forma

### SOUTH EASTERN REGIONAL COLLEGE

#### APL Assessment / Interview Pro-forma

##### INSTRUCTIONS TO APL BOARD / INTERVIEWERS

Where an applicant is not to be interviewed, the pro-forma should be used for recording assessment of the evidence presented and the decision of the APL Board. The form shall be signed by each participating member of staff.

Where an applicant is to be interviewed, at least two members of academic staff should be present and the form signed by each.

Sections A and B should always be completed. If an applicant is interviewed, section C must be completed. If the applicant is seeking exemption from an individual module(s) section D must also be completed. Recommendations should be recorded in Appendix 5 or Appendix 6 (UU programmes only)

SECTION A: Candidate Details	
Surname:	
Forename(s):	
Title of Course applied for:	
Mode of attendance (P/T or F/T):	
Date of interview (if applicable):	
Evidence presented (certificated / experiential):	
Exemption sought - admission/module/direct entry:	

SECTION B: Evaluation of evidence presented (certificated or experiential learning)
<b>NOTE: Appendix 3 may be used for detailed assessment of a portfolio of evidence.</b> <i>A copy of the evidence produced for interview should be retained by the APL Board.</i>

## SECTION C: Evaluation of APL Application

**NOTE:** *The APL Board should assess the candidate's suitability for the course on the basis of the criteria outlined below. They should base their decision both on evidence from the interview and from the evidence produced. A score of between 1 and 5 should be awarded under each heading.*

*The APL Board shall have due regard for the authenticity, currency, validity, reliability and sufficiency of the evidence provided.*

Criteria	Assessment of candidate's ability to meet criteria based on evidence presented	Score (1–5) See below*
Relevant experience (professional, industrial or education) <i>Please explain how the candidate's prior experience is relevant to the selected course of study</i>		
Academic skills (e.g. critical thinking, reflective writing, knowledge of subject area etc). <i>Please outline how the candidate shows an appropriate understanding of the academic skills required for the selected course of study</i>		
Awareness of course expectations <i>Please outline how the candidate shows an appropriate understanding of the content and workload for the selected course of study</i>		
<b>TOTAL SCORE:</b>		
<p><i>An aggregate score of 11 is normally necessary for admission to a programme. Where the number of applications for places exceeds the number of places available on programme, the score awarded in this interview may be used to rank candidates in order of preference.</i></p>		<b>/15</b>

\*A score of between 1 and 5 should be awarded for each of the criteria listed above, where 1 suggests the candidate does not show enough merit in the area and 5 suggests the candidate shows considerable merit in the area.

**SECTION D: Module Exemption**

**NOTE: ONLY to be completed for candidates applying for APL to gain exemption from an individual module(s).** Please indicate how the candidate's prior learning or prior experiential learning meets the relevant learning outcomes for each module for which an exemption is sought.

<b>Title and code of module for which an exemption is sought:</b>	<b>Outline of evidence presented by candidate that has met the learning outcomes of the module</b>	<b>Module exemption recommended? Yes/No</b>

## Appendix 5: Recommendations of APL Board

Recommendations of APL Board	
Applicant Surname:	
Applicant Forename(s):	
Title of Course applied for:	
Mode of attendance (P/T or F/T):	
Date of interview (if applicable):	
Evidence presented (certificated / experiential):	
Exemption sought - admission/module(s)/direct entry:	

Notes:
<p><b>NOTE:</b> Please add any additional information you feel may be relevant when considering this applicant's request for APL</p>

Overall Recommendation	
Approved:	
Insufficient evidence:	
Not approved:	

Signature:		Position:		Date:	
Signature:		Position:		Date:	
Signature:		Position:		Date:	

## Appendix 6: Ulster University SERC APEL Summary

Section A: Candidate Details	
Name of candidate:	
Title of course applied for:	
Mode of Attendance (P/T or F/T):	
Date of interview (if applicable):	
Evidence presented (certified / experiential):	
Exemptions sought- admission / module(s) / advanced standing:	

Section F: Overall Recommendation	
Approved:	
Insufficient evidence:	
Not approved:	

Signature:		Position:		Date:	
Signature:		Position:		Date:	
Signature:		Position:		Date:	

Confirmation of College Decision	
FPM:	
Date of Confirmation:	