

Accreditation of Prior Learning Policy



BATH SPA
UNIVERSITY

1. Introduction

1.1 The Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL) is the assessment and acknowledgement of the full range of an individual's skills, competencies, knowledge and work ethos obtained through informal training, certificated learning, non-accredited courses, workshops, work and life experience.

1.2 At Bath Spa University APL can be used to grant:

- admission to the start of a foundation, undergraduate or postgraduate course for applicants who do not meet the minimum entry requirements or who have been out of full-time education for a period of more than five years; or
- admission with advanced standing to year 2 or 3 of an undergraduate degree; or
- claiming credit or exemption for individual course modules.

1.3 Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL) can relate to:

- a. Accreditation of Prior Certificated Learning (APCL) where learning that has been assessed and certified by another education or training provider is potentially recognised.
- b. Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) where learning gained through experience is assessed and potentially recognised.

Applications for APL may include both APCL and APEL.

1.4 APL can be applied to all Bath Spa University (BSU) undergraduate and postgraduate taught programmes. It allows the University to acknowledge the wider skills, experience and qualifications which students can bring with them when they start a course of study and to encourage the wider participation of students from non-traditional learning backgrounds with varying experiences of education. However, courses with professional accreditation may have a requirement that students hold a particular formal qualification. In those circumstances, APL will either not apply, or the maximum amount of APL awarded may be reduced.

1.5 APL for courses offered in collaboration with Educational Partners will follow the principles outlined in this policy, closely aligned to our standard operating procedures. The expectation is that every effort will be made to ensure consistency between the University and our Educational Partnerships across all areas of admissions, including APL.

1.6 Currently enrolled students at Bath Spa University wishing to transfer internally to another course at the University should instead refer to the Transfers policy at: <https://www.bathspa.ac.uk/about-us/governance/policies/>

2. General Principles

- 2.1 Whether the APL is based on prior certificated learning or prior experiential learning, it is the outcomes of that learning, being recognised rather than the activity of learning itself.
- 2.2 Decisions on prior learning are a matter of academic judgement and will be undertaken by academic and senior admissions staff with appropriate subject, discipline and/or professional expertise. The main consideration will be whether the prior learning is equivalent, in the main part, to the learning outcomes required to begin the proposed course of study, and/or is equivalent to the level of modules that would have been otherwise studied.
- 2.3 All applications for APL will be assessed consistently and equitably regardless of the sources of the prior learning and based upon evidence provided by the applicant. All applicants will be treated equitably regardless of their age, gender, marital or civil partnership status, ethnicity, disability, religious belief, sexual orientation or pregnancy, maternity or paternity status, and in accordance with the University's Admissions Policy.
- 2.4 In order to demonstrate the currency of the learning, applicants can normally only seek to claim prior learning accumulated within a maximum of five years prior to the start date of the programme of study applied for. However, learning in subjects where there has been a rapid technological change may have a shorter "shelf life". In other cases, the five-year maximum may be extended if the learning is supported by evidence to show the applicant has maintained their knowledge/understanding, for example by working in a sector directly related to the proposed course of study.
- 2.5 Applicants should list all prior certificated learning in their APL application, even if it was achieved more than five years previously. Applicants should also note all, if any, prior periods of Higher Education registration, even if no credit was achieved.

3. APL for the purpose of admission to the beginning of a course

- 3.1 Bath Spa University encourages applicants to apply for courses based on learning that has taken place in formal and non-formal settings. APL may therefore be used as the basis for consideration of applicants who do not meet the stated entry requirements in full. In these instances, the admissions team and an academic from the course will assess the applicant based on a written assessment using our APL template and/or interview and record the outcome on an APL form. The Admissions and Applicant Services Team will notify the applicant of the outcome of the application and note the admission via APL on the student record.

4. **APL for the exemption of modules or admission with advanced standing**

- 4.1 APL is commonly used to recognise prior learning for credit exemption - the exemption of individual modules or to allow applicants to enter with advanced standing (to year 2 or 3 of an undergraduate degree).
- 4.2 Applications for credit exemption via APL should normally be made during the application stage – and prior to the student enrolling on the programme.
- 4.3 Applicants seeking admission with advanced standing should, in their APL application, explicitly list all relevant prior certificated learning, even if it was undertaken more than five years ago, together with information on any prior periods of registration with an HE Provider.
- 4.4 An APL application can be made only for a complete module, and not part of a module.
- 4.5 Only marks from modules studied at BSU are used to calculate the degree classification. No marks from credits earned at another institution, learning provider or experiential learning will be used to calculate the final award classification.
- 4.6 The APL process is not required to be followed by an individual where an Articulation Agreement is in place. Articulation Agreements are used where the course leader has already assessed the learning outcomes, content and levelness of a specific award or credits from another Higher Education provider or other recognised awarding body and the holder would not be required to make a separate APL application for entry with advanced standing to the relevant course at Bath Spa University.
- 4.7 Taught Programmes: The maximum APL credits allowed for taught programmes is outlined in the following table. However the maximum amount of APL awarded may be reduced for courses with professional accreditation.

Course	Level	Total Number of Credits	Max APCL credits allowed
Foundation Degree	5	240	120
Honours Degree	6	360	240
Honours Degree with professional placement year	6	480	240
Integrated Masters	7	480	240
Postgraduate Certificate	7	60	30

Postgraduate Diploma	7	120	60
Masters (Taught)*	7	180	120
Masters (Research)	7	180	60

* In general, the maximum number of APL credits allowed for taught Masters courses is 120. However, there may be exceptions to this general rule where the maximum number APL credit is reduced to 90 credits. This exception is to ensure that all students have completed any compulsory and/or core content of the course. An academic from the course will consider this aspect, and feed back to applicants, at the Initial Discussion stage (see Accompanying Guidance, 13.1 below) of the application for APL. If the academic decides that the prior learning sufficiently covers compulsory/core modules, then 120 credits can be awarded. However, if the prior learning is insufficient, then a maximum of 90 will be awarded.

4.8 Degree Apprenticeships:

Higher and degree apprenticeships combine work with study, and students usually study part-time whilst working. The aim is to gain relevant professional skills and/or qualifications alongside an academic qualification. Typically, apprenticeships take between one and five years to complete.

Admission with advanced standing to Level 5, 6 or 7 of a degree apprenticeship can be approved through either APCL (via student towards Bachelors Degree, Foundation Degree, HND, HNC and/or Higher Apprenticeships); or APEL.

5. Accreditation of Prior Certificated Learning (APCL)

- 5.1 APCL is the process by which the University will formally assess and recognise learning that has been awarded and certified by another education or training provider. An academic from the course will review the academic transcript and course content from the previous institution to ensure that the learning derived from these previous studies is equivalent to the learning that might otherwise have been achieved by following the full programme of study at BSU. However, it may be possible to match optional modules within the BSU course where the level is equivalent but the content does not match.
- 5.2 APCL may allow an applicant to be given advanced standing or direct entry to year 2 (Level 5) or year 3 (Level 6) of an undergraduate degree, or exemption from individual modules.
- 5.3 Credits awarded in this way would allow the applicant to receive exemption from the modules against which the credit has been mapped, but the marks achieved

from previous studies would not count towards the final degree classification at BSU.

6. Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL)

6.1 APEL is the process for the recognition of knowledge and skills which have been gained from experience, rather than a certificated programme of study or training. Such learning may have been gained through paid work, unpaid or voluntary work, leisure activities, or uncertificated learning from self-directed study.

6.2 APEL is more difficult to assess and requires consideration of what has been learned and comparing this with the intended outcomes of the course or module for potential exemption. Without certificates, a portfolio of evidence will usually be required to look at and assess both the content of the learning and the level. The portfolio could include:

- A completed APEL application form, including an essay related to the course (500 words for undergraduate and 1000 words for postgraduate courses)
- CV
- Evidence of relevant activity that the applicant has produced personally, been responsible for, or been involved in, such as reports, plans, handbooks, articles, presentations, budgets, photographs, minutes from meetings, newspaper reports, etc
- Letters confirming employment, references from employers or statements of support from colleagues or clients
- Employment contracts, job descriptions and evidence of employment periods
- Certificates of attendance from courses
- Applicants should also indicate how each piece of evidence supports their APEL application

6.3 An academic from the course will review the APEL application and portfolio to assess whether the applicant may be given admission to the start of the course, advanced standing or direct entry to year 2 (Level 5) or year 3 (Level 6) of an undergraduate degree, or exemption from individual modules.

6.4 Consideration of the evidence will cover:

- Content: that the applicant has acquired the types of knowledge, understanding, learning outcomes and skills required
- Level: that the experience has been at the appropriate level for the course applied for. This is a matter of academic/professional judgement, but as an example for the MBA course we would expect a minimum of two years employment at a managerial level
- Volume: that the learning has been of sufficient volume
- Currency: that the learning is still current

- Authenticity: that the evidence and learning is authentic

7. Outcomes of APL applications

- 7.1 The decision to formally approve or reject an application for APL will be notified to the applicant by the Admissions and Applicant Support Team and the application form and evidence added to the applicant's student record.
- 7.2 The outcome of APL applications may include Conditions, such as complete intermediary/bridging work to address learning gaps, or engage with additional learning support services. Any Conditions will be included in the notification sent by Admissions.
- 7.3 Certified Prior Learning will only be recognised where the completed and passed credit for the award meets equivalent University and sector credit standards (e.g. a Foundation Year award is the equivalent of a minimum of 120 completed and passed credits).
- 7.4 Additionally, APL applications may have implications for:
- Eligibility for, and titling of any exit/concessionary awards
 - Student Finance England Loan arrangements
 - Tuition fee liability, payment points and charges
 - Professional Body and Accreditation requirements
 - Council Tax exemption and other benefits
 - UKVI and Student Route Visa rules and regulations
 - Bursaries/Scholarships
 - Accommodation Costs/Halls of Residence Entitlement
 - Academic Implications - module marks, study registration periods, the submission/resubmission of assessment items.

8. Degree Classifications

- 8.1 Modules exempted via APCL and APEL will not be assigned a mark. Where the mark for the module(s) concerned would normally contribute to the final degree classification, such module(s) will be excluded from the calculation and classification will be based on the modules taken at Bath Spa University only.

9. International Students

- 9.1 International students should note that

- unless part of a formal articulation agreement, it is not normally possible to assess non-UK qualifications as part of APCL applications for advanced standing or exemption from individual modules
- BSU can only sponsor international students for full time courses at the University, therefore exemption from modules may also impact on the provision of a CAS for a Student Route Visa

In assessing prior international experiential learning, the admissions team and an academic from the course will seek to verify the information provided, including (but not limited to) certificates, employment contracts, references, salary and periods of employment. The admissions team will make every effort to resolve the verification challenges, but if any of the information cannot be verified then it will not be accepted as part of the assessment.

10. Appeals

- 10.1 The University will not review an APL decision where the grounds for requesting a review are simply that the applicant disagrees with the academic judgment that has been applied, and where there is no evidence that the correct procedures have not been followed. The University shall not be obliged to consider an appeal simply on the grounds that the applicant is unwilling to accept the original decision not to grant credit, and seeks to overturn that decision.
- 10.2 Applicants whose claims for APL are unsuccessful may request a review of the decision only on the basis of additional evidence that was unavailable at the time of the application or if there is evidence that the correct procedures have not been followed. For example, if the applicant subsequently obtains additional documentation pertaining to their prior certificated study which supports their claim. In this instance a request for a formal review of the APL decision should be made in writing and addressed to the Admissions and Applicant Support Team.

11. Reporting, Monitoring and Review

- 11.1 The Director of Student Recruitment and Marketing will review the effectiveness of this policy and review the outcomes for students who have entered the University via this route annually, and prepare a report for Academic Board.

Accompanying Guidance

12. Process and Procedures

12.1 APL Process for admission to the beginning of a course

Before making a formal application, applicants who do not meet the minimum course requirements and would like to be admitted on the basis of APL should first contact the Admissions and Applicant Support Team to discuss their application. Based on that discussion, a senior member of the admissions team, in conjunction with an academic from the course (if necessary) will make an initial assessment of whether the application for admission via APL can proceed. If it can proceed, the Admissions and Applicant Support team will invite the applicant to complete an APL submission including an essay question. The applicant may then also be invited for an interview.

The academic will assess the applicant's suitability for the course. The outcome will be notified to the applicant by the Admissions and Applicant Support Team.

12.2 APCL Application Process

Before making a formal application, applicants should first contact the Admissions and Applicant Support Team to discuss possible APCL. Detailed transcripts of the prior certificated learning should be provided, as well as detailed module descriptors and the amount of credit awarded.

Applicants should list all prior certificated learning in their APL application, even if it was achieved more than five years previously. Applicants should also note all, if any, prior periods of Higher Education registration, even if no credit was achieved. This note should include the name of the provider, dates of registration and reason for any early withdrawal.

If the certificated learning meets a basic threshold (e.g. that the prior learning is relevant to the course applied for and was awarded in the last five years), the detailed transcript would be forwarded to a relevant academic for a decision.

The academic will map and review the previous learning to ensure that the content, credit volume and the currency (age) of the learning matches the learning outcomes of the BSU course. The course leader will decide whether the prior learning is sufficient for entry to either Level 5 or 6 of the course, or for exemption from individual modules.

The outcome will be notified to the applicant by the Admissions and Applicant Support Team.

12.3 APEL Application Process

Applications for Accreditation of Prior Experiential learning can take a minimum of three weeks to complete, so sufficient time should be allowed before the application deadline for the course.

Before making a formal application, applicants should first contact the Admissions and Applicant Support Team to discuss a possible APEL application. A senior member of the admissions team or an academic from the course will make an initial assessment of whether the APEL application can proceed and provide guidance on the supporting portfolio and essay question.

Applicants will be asked to complete and return an APEL application, including an essay, and portfolio of supporting evidence.

The academic will assess the application form (e.g. personal statement and work experience), APEL application, essay and portfolio against the learning outcomes for the module(s) and will decide whether the prior learning is sufficient for entry to the start of the course, advanced standing to a higher level of the course, or for exemption from individual modules.

The outcome will be notified to the applicant by the Admissions and Applicant Support Team.

Only those marks achieved from modules undertaken at Bath Spa will count towards the final degree classification.

13. Definitions

- 13.1 'Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL)': The assessment and acknowledgement of the full range of an individual's skills, competencies, knowledge and work ethos obtained through informal training, certificated learning, non-accredited courses, workshops, work and life experience. Can be used to grant admission to year 1 (or normal start) of a course for students who do not meet the minimum entry requirements, admission with advanced standing to year 2 or 3 of a degree, or claiming credit or exemption for individual course modules. It encompasses APCL and APEL.
- 13.2 'Accreditation of Prior Certificated Learning (APCL)': Recognition of learning that has been assessed and certified by another education or training provider.
- 13.3 'Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL)': Recognition of learning gained through life and work experience.
- 13.4 'Advanced Standing': where students are admitted onto a programme at a stage later than the normal admission stage either as a result of successful APCL and/or APEL applications, or through an Articulation Agreement.

- 13.5 'Articulation Agreement': a formal arrangement that allows specific credit that has been gained from one Higher Education provider or recognised awarding body to be transferred to another institution as a means of allowing consideration for entry to a course with advanced standing, without the requirement for individual applications for APL.
- 13.6 'Credit': Credit is awarded to a learner in recognition of the verified achievement of designated learning outcomes at a specified level.
- 13.7 'Exemption': A term given where a learner is awarded credits for a module without them having to undertake the module content or assessment.
- 13.8 'Learning Outcomes': These are descriptors of the knowledge, understanding and skills a student should be able to demonstrate following the study of a module or course.
- 13.9 'Module': A discrete unit of learning at a specified level normally leading to the award of credit and/or which contributes to a qualification.

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