



## Quality Assurance Code of Practice

### Accreditation of Prior Learning

**This document is primarily intended for:**

Directors of Studies  
Other departmental staff involved with admissions

**Queries:**

**First point of contact –**  
Assistant Registrars in the Faculty/School or equivalent

**Technical/specialist contact –**  
Academic Registry

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## 1 Purpose and Scope

- 1.1 This statement provides guidelines on the University's procedures for the accreditation of prior learning (APL)\* and accreditation of prior experiential learning (APEL)\*.
- 1.2 It defines the basic terminology associated with such accreditation.
- 1.3 This statement applies to all APL and APEL activities within the University, at both undergraduate and postgraduate level
- 1.4 The procedures for the recognition of APL and APEL for Student Apprentices on apprenticeship courses are outlined in [QA45\(A\)](#).
- 1.5 These guidelines may be varied under the terms of an Institutional Agreement where a course of study is delivered as a collaborative initiative with a partner organisation.
- 1.6 The framework set out in the statement enables the University to assure itself that credit awarded for prior learning and/or prior experiential learning is comparable to that achieved through the teaching and learning activities required for specified units within the University of Bath course on which the learner is or will be registered. The framework reflects the University's commitment to making its provision available to all with the ability to benefit, since it offers alternative paths into and through higher education for a diverse applicant pool.
- 1.7 This statement should be read in association with:
  - [Assessment regulations](#)
  - [QA3 Annex A](#): The University Academic Framework for Taught Courses (10 Credits).

\* Throughout this statement, the abbreviation APL includes APEL unless otherwise stated.

## 2 Principles

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- 2.1 Decisions on APL are a matter of academic judgement.
- 2.2 The decision-making process and outcomes should be transparent and demonstrably rigorous and fair.
- 2.3 Staff and students should be able to access adequate and timely information, guidance and support at all stages of the process ([QAA UK Quality Code Advice and Guidance: Assessment](#); [QAA UK Quality Code Advice and Guidance: Research Degrees](#)).
- 2.4 As applications for APL are considered on academic grounds there will not normally be any right of appeal against the academic judgement.

## 3 Terminology

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- 3.1 **Direct entry qualifications in relation to APL:** The University normally publishes the entry requirements for admission to the first year of a specified course of study. However, the University also recognises that some qualifications provide evidence of academic attainment that would equip the prospective student for direct entry into the second (or in the case of 4-year taught courses, the third) year of a course of study. Formal APL procedures are not required in order to admit students with recognised direct entry qualifications. For information on recognised direct entry qualifications, please refer to the Undergraduate Admissions and the Central Postgraduate Taught Admissions offices.
- 3.2 **Articulation arrangement:** a process whereby an awarding institution reviews provision at another organisation and judges that the curriculum of a specified course (or a specified part) provides an appropriate basis, and is of an appropriate academic standard, to be deemed equivalent to the identified components of one or more specified courses delivered by the awarding institution and thus to enable direct entry to year two, three or four of these course(s). For further information see [QA20: Collaborative Provision](#).
- 3.3 **Accreditation of Prior Learning (APEL)** is the process by which the University recognises that a student has completed formal education in an area related to their course of study which has enabled them to demonstrate achievement of the learning outcomes of one or more of its units.
- 3.4 **Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning** is the procedure by which the University recognises that a student has demonstrated achievement of the learning outcomes of one or more of its units through experience and practice. Students may also be given credit in general terms for prior experience.
- 3.5 **Transfers to alternative courses:** requirements for internal transfer to alternative courses are detailed in the course specification and the [assessment regulations](#).
- 3.6 **Credit** may be awarded in the form of an exemption from an individual unit where the APL procedure has produced evidence that the student has successfully achieved the learning outcomes of that unit. Credit may be awarded against compulsory (*i.e.*, core/Designated Essential Unit (DEU)/Must Pass Unit (MPU)) units or against optional units.
- 3.7 **Maximum and minimum thresholds for APL:** The University will not permit exemptions of fractional units and so the minimum threshold for the application of APL procedures will be a single, free standing unit. The maximum threshold for exemption will normally be 50% of the total credits required for the taught element of the course of study. The normal expectation is

that at least 50% of the total credits required for the taught element of the course of study will be University of Bath credits.

Requests for exemption beyond the permitted limits, up to a maximum of 50% of the total credits required for the course of study, will be considered by Boards of Studies for approval.

## 4 Accreditation Sub-Committees

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- 4.1 Boards of Studies are responsible for setting up Accreditation Sub-Committees constituted from suitably qualified academic staff from within and external to the subject areas of the applicants. Boards of Studies will determine the scope of the Accreditation Sub-Committee in terms of its operation at Faculty, Department or Course level. Accreditation Sub-Committees are chaired by an Associate Dean of the Faculty/School. Terms of Reference and Composition are set out in Appendix 1.
- 4.2 Accreditation Sub-Committees should be convened in an appropriate time-scale to facilitate decision-making on applications before the beginning of the relevant semester in which the specified units run.

## 5 Process

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- 5.1 Applicants are normally required to submit a portfolio of evidence in order to demonstrate that they have successfully achieved the learning outcomes for the unit(s) for which they are seeking exemption. Undergraduate applicants should do this via Student Recruitment & Admissions. Postgraduate applicants are advised to discuss their case with the relevant Director of Studies in the first instance.
- 5.2 Directors of Studies with support from Departments/Faculties/Doctoral College or Course leaders in partner colleges are responsible for ensuring that applicants have access to appropriate guidance and support during the preparation of their portfolios and the evidence required for consideration by Accreditation Sub Committees. However, the responsibility for demonstrating the relevance of their learning and producing the evidence resides with the applicant.
- 5.3 Identifying prior and in particular experiential learning and collecting and assessing the evidence can be very time consuming. Directors of Studies/Course Leaders will normally invite applicants for informal discussions before developing their portfolio in order to identify potentially relevant learning and experience and a realistic expectation of the amount of exemption that might be sought.
- 5.4 The prior learning needs to be up to date within the relevant area of study. Normally, the prior qualification/credit(s) for accreditation should not be more than five years old before the start of the academic year in which the University of Bath unit would normally be undertaken within the course of study. It is however accepted that in some cases there may be grounds for adjustments to this time-frame. Where appropriate this should be recorded in the specific local guidance for the particular course.

## 6 Application/portfolio

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- 6.1 For accreditation of prior learning the application should normally contain a formal transcript of the subjects studied and a description of the content of the formal education undertaken (relevant unit descriptions showing learning outcomes, for example), demonstrating successful achievement of the learning outcomes for the unit(s) for which they are seeking exemption.

- 6.2 For the accreditation of prior *experiential* learning and where appropriate for APL the portfolio is normally expected to contain an account of the student's experience/learning and a reflective analysis of how this experience/learning demonstrates successful achievement of the learning outcomes of the units for which exemption is sought.
- 6.3 Students may meet the learning outcomes through a mixture of APL and APEL demonstrated by portfolio evidence.
- 6.4 In some cases, the student may be invited to complete the summative assessments normally associated with the unit to demonstrate their achievement of its learning outcomes or an alternative assessment may be set.

## 7 Outcomes

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- 7.1 For accreditation of prior learning, in appropriate cases where claims of comparability are well supported through mapping of learning outcomes which are aligned to professional/sector standards of competence, the [Framework for Higher Education Qualifications](#) including level descriptors, and [subject benchmark statements](#) or documents of equivalent status, the Director of Studies/Head of Learning Partnerships may decide the award of credit immediately. The decision will be reported to the Accreditation Sub-Committee of the Board of Studies. Directors of Study may not approve the award of credit in cases where exemption from the normal permitted limits is being requested.
- 7.2 In more complex cases for accreditation of prior learning, and in all instances of applications for accreditation of prior *experiential* learning, the portfolio of evidence is considered for approval by the Accreditation Sub-Committee.
- 7.3 Directors of Studies (with support from Departments/the School/Doctoral College) or Course Leaders in partner organisations are responsible for informing applicants of the outcome of their application.
- 7.4 Directors of Studies/Learning Partnerships Office for partner organisations are responsible for ensuring that a formal record is maintained of credit awarded to each student.
- 7.5 The Department/Doctoral College/School/Learning Partnerships Office is responsible for ensuring that External Examiners are aware of the procedures in place for applying APL.
- 7.6 Academic Registry is responsible for ensuring that credits obtained from units achieved by APL are so noted on the student transcript.

## 8 Marks

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- 8.1 Marks are not normally awarded for APL credits except where the previous study was undertaken at the University of Bath. Where the mark for the unit(s) concerned would normally contribute to the final degree classification, such unit(s) will be excluded from the calculation and the average based on the units taken at the University of Bath only.

## 9 Reporting, monitoring and review

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- 9.1 Accreditation Sub-Committees report to the Boards of Examiners for Units and/or the relevant Board of Examiners for Courses to account for their decisions in relation to the award of credit, and to the Boards of Studies for the purposes of monitoring and decisions on exceeding the normal maximum amount of permitted credit achieved via APL.

- 9.2 Academic Registry will provide data to each Board of Studies on the award of AP(E)L credit during each academic year.

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		5 June 2006	Minute 623(1);
		1 July 2008	Minute 857 (7) (8);
13 July 2010		Minute 1095(9).	
<i>University Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee</i>	13 July 2011	Minute 121	
	25 September 2012	Minute 314	
	9 July 2013	Minute 428	
	8 July 2014	Minute 552	
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	17 July 2018	Minute 1070	
<i>Education, Quality &amp; Standards Committee</i>	15 March 2019	Minute 1050	
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<b>Related Documentation:</b>	QAA UK Quality Code <a href="#">Advice and Guidance: Assessment</a> <a href="#">QAA UK Quality Code Advice and Guidance: Research Degrees</a>		
<b>Author:</b>	Academic Registry		

## Appendix 1: Accreditation Sub-Committee

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### Membership – Faculty/School/Doctoral College

Associate Dean or, in the case of the Doctoral College, the Academic Director (Chair) *ex officio*  
 At least three members of suitably qualified academic staff within and external to the subject areas of the applicants, appointed by the Chair of the Board of Studies. In the case of the Doctoral College, this will normally include the relevant Faculty/School Director of Doctoral Studies.

#### *In attendance:*

The Director(s) of Studies and/or unit leader(s) of the unit(s) for which the AP(E)L application is being made, if not members of the Committee.

The list of those who may routinely attend meetings of the Sub-Committee is subject to approval by the Chair. This may include a member of Student Recruitment & Admissions or other relevant professional service department as appropriate.

### Terms of Reference

The Accreditation Sub-Committee will be responsible to the Board of Studies for:

1. developing and approving specific assessment criteria and/or producing guidance on the expected content, currency and standard of portfolio evidence to verify that the applicant has achieved the specific learning outcomes of a specified unit or units;
2. developing and maintaining guidance specific to particular courses of study to ensure that details of local arrangements are transparent and readily available to applicants;
3. undertaking rigorous and balanced academic scrutiny of each applicant's portfolio of evidence, judged against the requirements of the course, and for approving the level and nature of credits that should be awarded;
4. considering any request requiring an exemption from the normally permitted maximum, for recommendation to the Board of Studies for approval.

#### Notes:

Membership:	An Accreditation Sub-Committee will be convened by the Chair of the Board of Studies as required. It will be chaired by an Associate Dean of the Faculty/School or in the case of the Doctoral College, the Academic Director and will consist of at least three members of suitably qualified academic staff within and external to the subject areas of the applicants.
Co-option:	At the discretion of the Chair of the Board of Studies or Sub-Committee.
Rules for Voting:	None.
Minutes:	Submitted to the Board of Studies.