

# SCHEME FOR THE ADMISSION OF STUDENTS WITH ADVANCED STANDING FOLLOWING ACCREDITATION OF PRIOR LEARNING

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## **Changes for 2008/09:**

- Minor updating to conform with revision of the University's credit framework and the decision of Academic Board relating to GMSA AP(E)L arrangements
- Further guidance on general and specific credit

## SCHEME FOR THE ADMISSION OF STUDENTS WITH ADVANCED STANDING FOLLOWING THE ACCREDITATION OF PRIOR LEARNING

1. This scheme is to be used for the accreditation of prior learning of applicants seeking admission with advanced standing to a programme, either undergraduate or taught postgraduate, of the University.
2. APL involves assessing and, where appropriate, recognising certificated or experiential prior learning for the purpose of admitting students with advanced standing, i.e. to a point after the normal beginning of the programme.
3. Consideration of applications for admission with advanced standing shall only be given to applicants considered to be qualified and/or suitable for admission to the programme and judged to have the ability and motivation to complete it and gain the award to which it leads.
4. Admission with advanced standing will exempt students from studying one or more programme Units or Levels, subject to the limits set out in 10 and 11 below.
5. No award may be granted retrospectively in respect of any learning that is accredited and/or any programme Units or Levels which have been exempted.
6. Exemption from part(s) of a programme may only be given if the applicant has demonstrated achievement of the learning outcomes and progression requirements specified for the Unit(s) or Level(s) in question by means other than attendance on the planned programme, and will be able by completing the remaining requirements to fulfil the objectives of the programme and attain the standard required for the award.
7. The amount of exemption that may be granted under this scheme will be subject to programme requirements and regulations and 10-11 below.
8. Where exemption is sought of the supervised work experience component of a Sandwich award, then the applicant can only be a candidate for an award in the non-sandwich mode unless the exemption is sought on the basis of previously completed comparable supervised work experience as part of a previously studied programme.
9. Exemption for supervised work experience on Sandwich programmes may not be given for work experience undertaken outside the programme except in the case of a transfer between equivalent courses.
10. Exemptions granted under this scheme shall not exceed 50% of a programme except in undergraduate cases covered by 11 below. Note: Students admitted to a taught postgraduate programme are subject to this limit except that they may be given **specific credit** for the whole of a PgCert or PgDip already gained in a subject cognate to the Diploma or Masters programme being entered.

Note: For the University's FHEQ awards offered under the GMSA Advance Framework, exemption granted under this scheme shall not exceed 66% of a programme.

11. Exemption of up to 240 credits at levels 4 and 5 of an undergraduate degree programme may be granted in respect of prior certificated learning (defined below) accepted as fulfilling the attendance, progression and assessment requirements of those Units and/or Levels for which exemption is sought, and where a student so exempted will be able by completing the remaining programme requirements to fulfil the programme objectives, demonstrate the required learning outcomes and attain the standard required for the award to which the programme leads. Note: This provision does not apply to taught postgraduate awards.
12. Notwithstanding the provisions of this scheme, students may be allowed to **transfer** from a point on one programme of study within or outside the University to the same point on another within the University where it can be shown that the two programmes are equivalent in terms of the curriculum and learning outcomes. Such transfers will not require to be accredited under this scheme.
13. An applicant may apply to be admitted with advanced standing only on the basis of his/her **prior certificated learning** or **prior experiential learning**.
14. Admission with advanced standing shall only be given in cases where the prior certificated or experiential learning is accepted as equivalent to that of the learning that might otherwise have been achieved by following the programme of study.
15. **Prior certificated learning** refers to learning undertaken as part of a recognised programme of studies completed satisfactorily in whole or in part for which formal recognition or certification has been given. An Award Certificate, Transcript of Studies or Diploma Supplement from the awarding institution verifying the learning undertaken and its outcomes will form acceptable evidence of certificated learning.
16. To be considered for admission with advanced standing on the basis of prior certificated learning, the applicant must have undertaken acceptable Units or Levels on another programme of study, under the auspices of a recognised educational institution, for which (s)he has received certificated academic credit in the form of an official Certificate, Transcript of Studies or some other acceptable documentary evidence. Where the certificated learning corresponds to that covered by the syllabus and learning outcomes of the programme applied for ['specific credit'], the applicant may be considered for admission with advanced standing and be exempted from any or all of the corresponding Units/Levels subject to the maximum specified above. Where the certificated learning does not correspond to that covered by the syllabus and learning outcomes of the programme applied for ['general credit'], it may be acceptable for application to an alternative programme.

17. **Prior experiential learning** refers to learning achieved outside the recognised educational or training systems; it will not, therefore, be certificated.
18. To be considered for admission with advanced standing on the basis of prior experiential learning, the applicant must articulate the learning outcomes of his/her experience/s and provide acceptable documentary evidence to substantiate their achievement. Where the experiential learning corresponds to that covered by the syllabus and learning outcomes of the programme applied for, the applicant may be considered for admission with advanced standing and be exempted from any or all of the corresponding Units/Levels subject to the maximum of 50% of a programme.
19. Prior certificated or experiential learning recognised under this scheme shall be given an appropriate Credit-value counting towards the Credit total required for completion of the programme and the gaining of any award to which it leads.
20. A student given Credit for prior learning accredited under this scheme shall, where it possible to do so, be graded in terms of the Units/Levels for which Credit has been given so that the relevant undergraduate or taught postgraduate award classification schemes can be applied. Where it is not possible to do so, the final result of the student shall be based on the results of those Units undertaken whilst on the programme.
21. Where it is considered not possible to grade accredited learning and where this may restrict the award classification or the standing of the award in relation to recognition by a professional body, this must be clearly conveyed in writing to the applicant prior to him/her joining the programme.
22. Claims may be judged to be successful in whole or in part, or unsuccessful. Appeals will not be considered but re-submissions will be considered.

## PROCEDURE

23. Applications for advanced standing in respect of an entire stage of a programme must normally be made **prior** to the student commencing the programme concerned. Applications for advanced standing in respect of part of a stage(s) of a programme will normally be made no later than the end of the student's first term. The accreditation of learning from any employment or other activity being undertaken in parallel to the programme shall not be eligible for consideration under this scheme for purposes of advanced standing but may, where programme regulations permit, attract Credit as independent study modules.
24. Prior learning, whether certificated or experiential, accredited under this scheme shall be recorded on the student's transcript of learning and Diploma Supplement.
25. A student seeking to **transfer** from a point on one programme of study within or outside the University to the same point on another within the University where it can be shown that the two programmes are equivalent in terms of the curriculum and learning outcomes shall apply to do so in writing to the relevant

Head of Department/School. The student shall provide such information as may be required for a decision on the transfer to be made. A record of a transfer and of the evidence on which it was approved shall be kept on the student's file and included in the Diploma Supplement.

26. Applications for exemption on the basis of either **prior certificated learning** and/or **prior experiential learning** shall be submitted on the Form APL2 Application. The completed form shall be considered by the relevant Programme Admissions Tutor(s) with advice from subject specialist(s) where the subject matter of any part of the claim is outside the professional competence of the Admissions Tutor(s). Any exemptions or decisions taken on the basis of the appropriateness of general and specific credit, and the **currency** of such credit must be approved by the Programme Leader or relevant Head of Department/School (or equivalent) (i.e decision always taken by more than one person).
27. Where the prior learning has been Credit rated and marked/graded and it is possible to do so, corresponding Credit, marks and grades on the new programme shall be given and recorded (on the Form APL1 Decision). Where this is not possible, the student shall be informed in writing of the Unit(s)/Level(s) of the new Programme he/she will be exempted from and of the implications this may have for any final award in terms of degree or other classification or the standing of the award in relation to recognition by a professional body.
28. Applicants must be informed in writing of any exemptions that would subsequently debar them from professional body recognition.
29. Applications for exemption on the basis of **prior experiential learning** and the decisions made on these should be included in the sample of student's work considered by external examiners. There is no requirement placed on programme teams to involve external examiners beyond this.
30. Decisions on the nature and range of evidence appropriate to support a claim for the accreditation of prior learning shall be made having regard for the following criteria:
  - (a) Acceptability – is there an appropriate match between the evidence presented and the learning being demonstrated? Is the evidence valid and reliable?
  - (b) Sufficiency – is there sufficient evidence to demonstrate fully the achievement of the learning claimed?
  - (c) Authenticity – is the evidence clearly related to the applicant's own efforts and achievements?
  - (d) Currency – does the evidence being assessed relate to current learning? Do any relevant professional, statutory or regulatory bodies have specific requirements in this respect?

## GUIDANCE

31. Programme teams must make information available to applicants, staff and examiners that will include an explanation of:

- The roles and responsibilities of staff and applicants
- Deadline dates for the submission of claims
- The nature of the support and advice available to applicants
- How claims are to be presented and submitted, including information on: the scope and nature of the evidence required; time limits to be applied to the currency of evidence; the assessment procedures and methods and guidance on these; the assessment criteria that will be applied; the amount of credit that can be awarded; to whom claims are to be submitted
- In the case of prior certificated learning, any requirements concerning general or specific credit and the currency of such credit
- How accredited learning will affect the availability of any potential awards or classifications (Note: the Undergraduate Assessment Regulations state that only Level 6 credits shall be considered in the classification of an Honours award [Regulation F.1.7]. This does not apply to Taught Postgraduate awards.)
- How accredited learning might have implications for the choice of options that can be followed in the programme after admission
- The fee to be charged [this will reflect the scale of exemption granted and the level of activity that its authentication requires].

\* *Normally the fee is £75 per 20 Credit Unit for which exemption is sought at the discretion of the faculty concerned. This fee to be kept under review by the Finance Director*

32. Programme teams must offer active support for applicants. This will include guidance on the knowledge, skills and understanding that have to be demonstrated. Support might be in the form of documentation that will assist applicants to reflect upon their experiences and/or prior study and to identify and evidence the learning gained, or it might be in the form of a short course, workshop or unit.

33. Programme teams must provide appropriate feedback to applicants and consider how such feedback can promote future learning and progression.

## ROLES

34. Applicants:

- To prepare a claim for entry or credit based on the criteria provided by the Programme Team;
- to identify how they can make their experience count by reflecting on their learning from experience and reviewing their academic and professional needs;
- to negotiate credit that can be awarded for specific modules given other appropriate certificated or experiential learning;

- to produce a claim based on the appropriate mechanism that has been agreed with the advisor and assessor.

35. **Advisors:**

Enable each learner to:

- review their academic and professional needs;
- reflect on their learning from experience or prior certificated learning;
- work through the APL process and use the appropriate mechanism to provide supporting evidence to demonstrate learning;
- review the plan and draft of their portfolio and check it against the criteria defined by the member(s) of the Programme Team.

36. **Assessors:**

- to assess the evidence against the criteria defined;
- to confirm the outcome of the assessment they have made and report their recommendation to the Programme Leader.

37. **Programme Leaders:**

- to provide details of the APL procedures when submitting either a new programme proposal or the re-specification of an existing programme;
- to inform the External Examiner that APL is being used on the programme and provide the External Examiner with a copy of documentation used by the Programme Team;
- in respect of APEL claims, to make completed portfolios and evidence from candidates available for the External Examiner to sample;
- to monitor the number of learners making APL claims, track their progress and report to the programme committee;
- to approve, or have the Head of Department approve, APL decisions;
- to ensure that all colleagues use the appropriate documentation.

38 **Notes for programme teams**

1. All programme teams operating APL should identify a formal mechanism for the operation of APL. This might include the appointment of an APL coordinator at programme level, who would have responsibility for the development of APL procedures and of programme-specific APL guidance and support materials for staff and applicants, and for staff development of colleagues involved in APL.
2. There are various methods which programme teams can use in order to help support claimants.
  - formally organised class/es,
  - individual tutorials,
  - guidance manuals,
  - a combination of any of the above.

3. Programme teams will also need to decide on assessment methods, especially in relation to APEL. For example, will assessment of claims be conducted by:
- interview,
  - observation of performance,
  - reading of portfolios?

Of paramount importance is the matter of evidence. Here it must be recognised that APL is not about the candidates' experience per se, but about the learning which has come about from these. Evidence must be authentic, acceptable, sufficient and current.

The issue of what evidence is required within a claim will be, of course, an important aspect of the work in guiding candidates in making claims.

### 39. Guidelines for APL Assessors

The function of an Assessor is to make an academic judgement upon an APL claim. The judgement will relate to the award, on the basis of the claim, of admission with credit/advanced standing.

It is important to appreciate that each claim is the product of an extended and rigorous process involving systematic reflection on the learning outcomes of one or more experiences.

Each claim has been prepared with a particular objective in mind: to match learning outcomes against the programme aims generally, and/or specific units. It should be judged in relation to this objective.

Each individual will have attempted to direct his/her claim to achieving the desired objective by meeting the demands of an appropriate 'checklist' which sets out what is required of applicants. They must:

- (a) identify relevant experiences
- (b) identify the relevant learning
- (c) present appropriate evidence

It is important to determine whether and to what extent the appropriate requirements are met by the learning claims in the claim and by the evidence given in support of the claim.

Check that the evidence supports the learning which is claimed. Wherever possible, the evidence provided should be direct (i.e. in a form which the claimant has produced using the skills/knowledge claimed) rather than indirect (i.e. from some source other than the claimant.) But it is important to appreciate that it can take a variety of forms.

The evidence should be considered in relation to any programme-specific criteria and to four generic criteria:

- (i) relevance: does it relate to the knowledge, understanding and skills appropriate to the programme?
- (ii) authenticity: does it relate to the applicant's work?
- (iii) currency: can the applicant do now what s/he has previously done? Is the knowledge relevant to the subject today?
- (iv) sufficiency: does it relate to all of the learning claimed?

Where a claim to learning cannot be supported by direct or indirect evidence, you may suggest additional means of providing evidence e.g. by some form of test, interview, corroboration by third parties, etc.

In the last analysis the assessor retains the right to be satisfied as to the validity of the learning claims in whatever way he/she feels is necessary. The decision of the assessor/s may be one of the following:

- the award of specific credit;
- the award of general credit, conditional upon completing a programme of work, e.g. a bridging programme;
- a request for further evidence e.g. more precise documentation, an oral interview, completion of a test or simulation exercise;
- refusal of credit with or without recommendation

If credit is awarded, then a grade(s)/mark(s) in the subject should be given where this possibility is allowed for in programme regulations. Assessors must, of course, give a numeric value in credit points to the claim, and indicate the appropriate credit level/s.

## 40 Guidance Notes for Applicants

### Introduction

These notes are designed to help you identify the learning you have gained from your past experiences and to put this into a form in which it can be recognised and assessed. They take you through the stages involved in doing this.

You will be asking yourself:

- o what have been the experiences relevant to the programme I am registering for?
- o what have I learned from them which I can match against the programme aims generally and/or those of specific units?
- o what evidence can I present in support of my claim?

## Identifying Your Experiences

What follows is a prompt list, by no means comprehensive, which may help you to identify your past experiences. Do remember that these must be limited to those which you think will be relevant to your programme; it is important, therefore, that you are familiar with the relevant programme documentation.

Formal academic qualifications  
Attendance on short programmes  
Correspondence programmes  
Training schemes  
Apprenticeship served  
Work experience  
General interests and hobbies  
Life experience e.g. domestic roles  
Voluntary activities

## Identifying the Resultant Learning

This is possibly the most difficult task of all. You may find it useful to distinguish between:

- knowledge and understanding (of, for example, content, concepts, procedures, principles);
- skills, techniques and application of knowledge: what you can do;
- different 'levels' of learning e.g. how 'in-depth' is your knowledge? How sophisticated is your understanding of a concept?
- Credit achieved for prior certificate learning [NB: some credit, although achieved [general credit], may not be relevant or current for the particular programme in question.]

You will certainly find it useful to study material in your programme documentation, for example unit descriptions, which deals with programme content, intended learning outcomes or objectives, and unit levels.

## Identifying the Evidence

The reflections on your experiences which lead you to identify learning outcomes is in itself a source of evidence of some learning. You will, however, need to gather and prepare other proof that you really know, understand, and can do what you say you can.

Such proof might include:

- anything that you yourself have produced (e.g. reports, databases, artefacts or, in the case of bulky items, authenticated photographs);
- a letter of confirmation by an employer or supervisor;
- documentation which details the work which led to the learning e.g. a programme transcript.

Your learning may also be ascertained by being interviewed by tutors or by being set some form of assessment.

This might be necessary if assessors of your claim feel, for instance, that there are gaps in the evidence you present; it is quite often the case that it is difficult to assemble evidence. In such cases it is useful to alert your tutor to this fact in advance of submitting your claim.

In order to present the strongest possible evidence you should keep in mind the criteria which assessors will apply in considering your evidence. These will include a number of generic criteria:

1. **relevance:** the learning you identify and your evidence of this must relate to the knowledge, understanding and skills appropriate to your programme [eg. whether previously achieved credits are considered to be specific, ie directly related to the programme's curriculum and learning outcomes, or general, ie. not directly related, and therefore not sufficient to grant exemption];
2. **authenticity:** the evidence must be your work or about your work; here, it is often important to show your particular contribution to the work undertaken as a member of a group;
3. **currency:** your assessors will want to make sure that you can do now what you have previously done, and that the knowledge you have previously acquired is relevant to the subject today;
4. **sufficiency:** you need to provide enough evidence. In particular, it needs to relate to all of the prior learning you are claiming. This does not necessarily mean that you need to have a separate piece of evidence for each element of learning; many pieces of evidence relate to more than one element.

### **Developing your application for APL**

Your application for APL should be submitted on the form prepared for this purpose obtainable from the department/unit in which you are seeking to study. This should be accompanied by:

- i A brief account of your experiences, together with appropriate information e.g. dates/lengths/topics covered in uncertificated courses and details of the course provider/s; e.g. dates, nature and tasks involved re work/voluntary experience.
- ii Reflections on the learning which resulted. You should regard this as the key element of your claim.

You might find it appropriate to match particular experiences against particular learning outcomes, in which case you could treat i) and ii) together, dealing with each experience and associated learning one at a time.

- iii Your evidence, each piece of which should be numbered to aid cross-referencing between sections i) and/or ii) and the evidence. Also, unless it is self-explanatory, it may be useful to write a brief description or explanation of each piece of evidence.

### Assessing your claim

Once you have submitted your claim, it will be evaluated by assessors from the programme team. Their job is to make sure you really do know, understand and can do what you claim, and to decide on how many credit points, and at what level, your claim justifies. Your claim form and associated documentation is the starting point of that confirmation, and in many cases it is all that will be required. However, it is possible that the assessors might ask you to provide further evidence of your learning. Alternatively, they might ask to interview you and/or recommend or require that you undertake an assignment or other test or top-up your study. Please ensure that your claim is neatly presented, error-free, and carefully 'bound' so that none of the contents can be lost.