



Accreditation of Prior Learning Policy

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Version	Revision Summary	Date Approved	Author
044/22	Reordered some sections; amended max credits in para 8; Added paras 27,29,31,37 46; Expanded APEL section para 48-52.	5/9/22	
007/23	Removed the term AP(E)L; now APCL or APEL. Para 20 amendment concerning the double counting of credit.	23/2/23	



Accreditation of Prior Learning Policy

Introduction

1. Accredited Prior Learning (APL) is learning, appropriately evidenced, that has normally been achieved outside the formal education system offered by the College. APL is known by some education providers as Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL).
2. APL can consist of either Accredited Prior Certificated Learning (APCL) or Accredited Prior Experiential (or informal) Learning (APEL).

(a) **Accredited Prior Certificated Learning (APCL)** is

Learning which has been recognised previously by an education provider, evidenced by formal certification, and assessed and recognised for the award of credit by the College. The previous learning must be relevant to the programme for which a student is applying, and if their application is successful, the credit will count towards their chosen programme of study.

(b) **Accredited Prior Experiential Learning (APEL)** is

Learning which has been achieved through experiences outside the formal education and training systems normally associated with a working environment, which has been assessed and recognised for the award of credit by the College.

3. The College will consider applications for both APCL and APEL. This document sets out the policy and procedures for APL at Spurgeon's College (the College).
4. PhD degrees are outside the scope of the policy because they are awarded, by a validating partner, solely on the basis of assessment of the thesis and there are no credit values attached to such programmes.
5. The College has sought to balance the recognition of prior learning with a desire to ensure that awards from the College or a validating partner reflect sufficient evidence of study having been undertaken within the College.
6. No APCL award may be given which implies partial completion of a course unit. Credit can only be given for whole units/modules, where consideration has been given to mapping the Intended Learning Outcomes of the unit to the evidence provided of prior learning.

7. APEL will normally only be granted in the case of programmes with a practical or vocational element.

Maximum Credits for APCL

8. Applicants may apply for admission with advanced standing, having undertaken study or learning elsewhere, or previously at the College. The maximum number of credits for which exemption may be given are as follows:

Undergraduate Level	
Certificate of Higher Education	up to 60 credits
Diploma of Higher Education / Foundation Degree	up to 120 credits with no more than 30 credits at HE level 5
BA Honours Degree	up to 240 credits with no more than 30 at HE level 6

Postgraduate Level	
Postgraduate Certificate	up to 30 credits
Postgraduate Diploma	up to 60 credits
Master's Degree	up to 90 credits

Principles for APL

9. Credits may be given for prior learning, where the level, standard, content and relevance of that learning are appropriate to a particular approved programme of study.
10. A maximum time limit of 10 years should normally apply between award and consideration of APL.
11. Decisions regarding the number of APL credits, if any, for which exemption may be given are a matter of academic judgment, with the main consideration being whether the prior learning is broadly equivalent to the learning that would otherwise have been assessed during the course unit.
12. It is the responsibility of the applicant to make sure that all evidence and supporting application material is submitted in English. Translations into English must be certified, with original documents available on request. Overseas applicants may apply for APL in the same way as UK applicants. All qualifications and institutions will be checked by the College along with all other relevant requirements (such as visa and immigration conditions).
13. Students can receive an exit award if they have APL credit in their profile, providing their performance at the College also satisfies the award requirements of the Undergraduate or Postgraduate Degree Regulations.
14. Special consideration will be given to students who have been granted the full amount of APL on their entry programme but fail the minimum number of credits for the programme and have to be considered to receive an exit award. The College will check that students have completed sufficient credits to leave the College with the relevant exit award; this means that at least half the taught credits of the exit award

have been completed at the College (in line with the Undergraduate and Postgraduate Taught Degree Regulations). If the student has not completed enough credits, they may only be eligible to receive a transcript of their results.

15. Applications for APL are considered on academic grounds and, as such, no formal rights of appeal exist against the final decision of the College, as appeals cannot be made against decisions of academic judgment. Appeals may, however, be made in line with the procedure outlined in Appendix 1, on the grounds of procedural irregularity, the emergence of new material information or evidence of bias or prejudice.

Application Process

16. Applications for APL must normally be made prior to entry and applications after enrolment will only be considered on an exceptional basis. Deadlines for applications are 31st July for APEL and 31st August for APCL, although all applicants are encouraged to apply as early as possible to allow sufficient time for the consideration of their request.
17. Applications for both APCL and APEL should consist of a written request to the Head of Admissions and Placements (see sections below for details), along with documentary evidence of the prior learning. This can be in the form of transcripts, certificates, or other suitable evidence. Module/unit descriptors or equivalent documents indicating the intended learning outcomes of the modules/units previously studied must be supplied if applying for APCL.
18. Applicants will be charged the current APL application fee to cover administration costs¹.
19. Applications for APL will be considered by an APL subject assessor, normally the Director of Undergraduate Studies or the Director of Postgraduate Studies (as appropriate), or a panel of academic staff members within the College if the Director of Undergraduate Studies or the Director of Postgraduate Studies were unavailable. These staff members may include, for example, the unit/module tutor for one of the subjects for which APL is requested, plus two other academics.

Applications for APCL

20. The subject assessor should complete the APL Assessment Form. Consideration of the applications should include a detailed and documented discussion of how the Intended Learning Outcomes of each module/unit, where APL is to be applied, have been met through prior learning or equivalent experience. In cases where the applicant has gained a previous award in theology at Certificate or Diploma level, they may be admitted to the higher level without detailed scrutiny of their previous studies at module/unit level, provided that the Intended Learning Outcomes for the appropriate level of the previous programme as a whole are broadly equivalent to those of the Spurgeon's College programme. The decision to assess an application at unit or award level will be made on a case-by-case basis according to the individual circumstances. Any applications that relate to ministerial formation programmes must be assessed using the ILO's of each module/unit.

¹ Applicants who are registered students with the College will not be charged this fee.

21. If the assessor decides that further evidence is required in addition to the applicant's initial submission, they should inform the student as soon as possible regarding the particular evidence required.
22. If the assessor decides that they wish to see the applicant to ascertain additional information in support of the application, arrangements for an interview should be made as soon as possible.
23. When assessing the evidence against the requirements of the ILO's of the programme and particular course unit, the assessor should consider the following:
 - Subject content and knowledge
 - Volume of learning
 - Level of learning
 - Evidence of achievement
 - Any particular restrictions imposed by Professional or Statutory Bodies, if applicable
24. The assessor should refer to the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications to assess whether the level of the prior learning is acceptable.
25. The Director of Undergraduate Studies or the Director of Postgraduate Studies is expected to provide advice and guidance to current students considering applying to another institution for APCL, in relation to the programme's ILO's and evidence required for an application for APCL.

Applications for APEL

26. The College recognises that students, particularly mature students, enter higher education with an extensive range of expertise, skills and knowledge derived from a variety of professional, vocational, community, leisure and personal contexts. APEL provides students with the opportunity to have their prior experiential learning assessed and included within their validated programme. APEL will normally only be granted in the case of programmes with a practical or vocational element.
27. APEL does not exempt a student from study but allows the use of different routes to the award of credit. All students must meet the learning outcomes as set out in the programme specification in order to qualify for the award.
28. For cases of APEL, assessment must be rigorous in ensuring that the learning that has taken place through experience is equivalent to the learning that would occur from following those elements of the study which the student is seeking exemption from. Credit must only be given for demonstrated learning, where equivalence of learning outcomes can be demonstrated.
29. Examples of experiential learning may include:
 - Work experience (paid or unpaid/ voluntary)
 - A task or project undertaken, a report written, or a course run
 - Non-accredited courses taken, e.g., in-house training
 - Life experience
 - Reading and research

30. Enquiries about APEL are normally received by the Admissions Department. They will refer applications to the relevant Programme Director in the first instance. Applicants are advised to discuss their application with the Programme Director prior to submitting the application form or portfolio, so that guidance can be given on the likely nature of the evidence required.
31. Applicants must submit a personal statement and portfolio of evidence demonstrating the learning achieved. They must also complete the APEL application form to indicate what is being submitted against which ILO. The portfolio might include:
- Practice-based documents
 - Published articles and manuscripts
 - Video/audio recordings or other electronic files, with commentary and analysis related to achievement of learning outcomes
 - Analytical and evaluative description of practice
 - Awards and honours
 - Statements from supervisors or managers in relation to aspects of practice
 - References from colleagues, employees, voluntary organisations, professional bodies
 - CV
 - Book lists
32. The Programme Director will review the portfolio and discuss with the applicant any revisions or supplementary material that might be required.
33. Applicants will also be interviewed to discuss their experiential learning so that assessors can map their learning against the ILO of the relevant unit/level.
34. Applicants should note that it is the level and depth of the experiential learning measured against the learning outcomes for the unit that attracts the credit, not simply the experience.
35. All decisions to grant APEL will be considered, assessed, recorded and communicated according to the principles and processes laid down within this document.

Approval of APL Applications

36. In all cases authorisation of award of credit via APL is a matter to be determined solely by the Academic Director. The Academic Director will do so upon consideration of the recommendation from the appropriate subject assessor/panel.
37. A decision regarding whether an application for APL can be approved will depend on the requirements and specific learning outcomes of the particular programme as well as the details of the individual application.
38. Applications should meet the following criteria:
- Evidence must be current (not more than 10 years from the date of award)
 - Evidence must be authenticated

- Evidence must be acceptable (according to the Framework of Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ))
- Evidence must be sufficient (additional evidence can be requested)

39. The outcome of the assessment will be one of the following:

- Recommended for exemption
- Rejected on academic grounds
- Rejected on presentational grounds
- Referred
- Partially rejected on academic grounds
- Partially rejected on presentational grounds

40. If an application is rejected, then reasons should be clearly documented on the APL Assessment Form.

41. If an application is 'referred' then this should be documented on the APL Assessment Form, along with any actions or timescales for resubmission. The Admissions Department should inform the student of any grounds for resubmission, and any further information required from them.

42. If an application covers several modules/units, APL may be granted for only some of them. In this instance, the outcome will be partially approved/rejected on either academic or non-academic grounds. This should be stated on the APL Assessment Form, and the units/modules which are approved or rejected should be clearly indicated, along with the reasons, so that the student can be informed as such.

43. Applications for APL will normally be assessed within three weeks of receipt.

44. The College reserves the right to terminate an application for study, or withdraw an offer of a place, if the applicant is found to have omitted relevant facts or information in connection with their application or who has falsified or plagiarised any part of their application, both for initial applications for a place at the College or for APL². If this is discovered after the applicant has been granted APL, the College will require the student to sit the units for the which APL have been granted.

Reporting and Record Keeping

45. Decisions about APL applications will be relayed to the Admissions Department. Applicants should be informed and the normal processes for an application to study should be followed.

46. Unsuccessful applicants will be advised of the reasons for the decision and, where appropriate, given an indication of any further evidence which might be required to come to a final decision.

47. Successful applicants who wish to defer their place should be advised that APL may not be available if they do so.

² As stated in the Colleges [Admissions Policy](#)

48. Registry will record successful applications for APL as a credit on the student's record on the student information system.
49. Records of all decisions relating to APL applications will be maintained by Registry for information and reporting purposes (details of numbers of applications received, granted and refused, etc. for information).
50. Monitoring will take place by the College's Academic Quality Assurance Committee (AQAC), to ensure that the criteria for APL remain objective and are being fairly and consistently applied, they will also monitor the progress of students admitted with APL. This is important so that information is built up on the suitability of particular qualifications for the granting of credit exemption.
51. The Admissions Department will send APL monitoring reports to the AQAC and to any validating body as required, using the APL Applications Reporting Form.

Awarded Credit

52. Any credit awarded through APL is treated in the same way as credit awarded through the normal taught route, except that it does not contribute to the calculation of the final award. It will also be represented as 'Prior Learning' on the student's academic transcript.
53. Particular consideration will need to be given to the case of students who have been granted the full amount of APL on their entry programme but fail the minimum number of credits for an award and are consequently considered for an exit award.

Appendix 1 – Appeals Procedure

1. If applicants or prospective students are dissatisfied with the outcome or treatment of their application for APL, the following procedure applies:
 - a) The appeal must be sent to the Head of Admissions and Placements in writing within four weeks of the outcome.
 - b) The appeal must clearly outline the reasons why the applicant believes the decision is incorrect.

NOTE that appeals will only be considered on the grounds of procedural irregularity, the emergence of new material information or evidence of bias or prejudice.

2. On receiving the appeal, the College will undertake the following review of the original decision:
 - a) The Admissions Committee will discuss the appeal and make a response to the applicant within four weeks of the appeal request being received.
 - b) If members of the Admissions Committee have been involved in the original decision, those members will not be involved in appeal process and alternative members of staff with appropriate qualification will be used to assess the appeal.
 - c) If the applicant wishes to appeal further against the decision of the Admissions Committee, this must be lodged with the Head of Admissions and Placements within a further two weeks of receiving the outcome of the Admissions Committee decision.
 - d) At this stage the appeal will be passed to the Principal, whose decision is the final stage of the College's appeal process.
3. Candidates whose appeal is refused by the Principal have the right to appeal to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator.