

Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL) Policy

Introduction

1. This Policy applies when an applicant, existing or previous student wishes to gain credit towards a Birkbeck, University of London award on the basis that they have prior certified or experiential (normally work-based) learning relevant to the programme concerned. The College also facilitates the transfer of internal credits when a student wishes to transfer programmes internally and believes that credits already studied at the College are relevant to the new programme. A decision will be made by the “receiving” Sub-Board of Examiners (or nominee of the Sub-Board) as to the currency and relevancy of the prior credits and to what extent it can be credited towards the new programme.
2. The College’s Common Award Scheme - Regulations for Taught Programmes of Study (CAS), contains provision for APL (see section 2 of CAS). This policy defines the principles by which the College will assess applications for accreditation of prior learning and how that credit will be treated when assessing College awards, in accordance with these regulations.

General principles

3. The minimum numbers of credits to be awarded for prior learning is 15. CAS Regulations stipulate the maximum amount of credit that may be awarded towards any given award. The amount of credit to be awarded by the College for previous assessed learning will be with regard to the programme structure that the award is credited against.
4. Accredited Prior Certificated Learning (APCL) credits are awarded for previously assessed and certificated learning from another Higher Education institution or professional body, or from another programme within the same institution.
5. Accredited Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) credits are awarded for assessed learning through experience in the workplace or elsewhere that is relevant to the specific programme of study.
6. Accredited Prior Learning (APL) is the generic term used to describe both Accredited Prior Certificated Learning (APCL) and Accredited Prior Experiential Learning (APEL).
7. Applicants should apply for any APL credit as part of the admissions process. However, in exceptional cases, credit may be awarded retrospectively at the discretion of the relevant Sub-Board of Examiners. If an application for assessment of prior learning is received

after the applicant has registered for a programme, the College may choose not to consider that application.

8. Credit will be awarded at the discretion of the relevant Sub-Board of Examiners¹ for previous certificated or experiential learning that is deemed to be equivalent to the learning outcomes of individual modules or some the learning outcomes of programmes of study.
9. The decision to award APL credit is an academic judgement based on the currency, relevancy, validity, volume and level of prior learning undertaken by a student. The College may choose to reject applications for the award of such credit where, in the judgement of the relevant Sub-Board of Examiners, there is insufficient evidence that the applicant's prior learning is adequate and relevant to the module and/or programme. The College may also choose not to award the full amount of credit that has been awarded by another institution for learning undertaken elsewhere.
10. Learning credited towards an award should be reasonably current; a judgement on currency will be dependent upon the subject area. The prior learning must have been undertaken no more than ten years before the proposed date of entry to the programme of study for which exemption/credit is being sought.
11. Credit is awarded to those students who have demonstrated their achievement of specified learning. Students applying for accreditation of prior experiential learning will need to be able to demonstrate, through a specified form of assessment, the learning gained from their prior experience.
12. The award of APL credit against an individual module, whether core, compulsory or optional, exempts a student from taking that module. It does not exempt the student from any other components of the programme unless specifically stated.
13. Professional or accrediting bodies may specify restrictions in the amount of APL credit that may be awarded on an accredited programme. Should the maximum amount of credit permitted by the accrediting institution be lower than that permitted by the College, then the regulations of the accrediting body shall override those of the College.
14. The award of credit for individual modules or towards an award is the responsibility of

¹ See the College Policy on the Operation of Boards and Sub-Boards of Examiners (Sub-board of Examiners Policy) for guidance on the respective roles of Boards and Sub-Boards.

the appropriate Sub-Board of Examiners. Where a Sub-Board delegates responsibility to an individual, such as the admissions tutor, for a given programme, they should then receive reports of credit that has been awarded, on an annual basis.

Accreditation of prior certificated learning (APCL)

15. Any application for accreditation of prior certificated learning should be accompanied by relevant documentation. This should include a transcript from the institution or professional body concerned, confirming any results received by the applicant. Sub-boards or their nominees may request additional documentation in order to satisfy themselves that previous learning has been evidenced and meets the learning outcomes of the module and or programme.
16. Credit from prior learning may not be awarded at a higher level than that which it was studied at (e.g., a student with credit from another institution at level 4 may not be awarded APL credit for this module at level 5 or above).
17. Credit from prior learning can be at a higher level than that required (e.g. a student may use credit from Level 5 against Level 4 requirements).
18. Credit that has already been used towards an award cannot be considered for APL towards an equivalent or lower-level award.
19. Credit that has already been used towards an award can be considered for APL towards a higher level award. This includes instances where students wish to further their study at Postgraduate level and progress from a PgCert to a PgDip, PgCert to MA/MSc or PgDip to MA/MSc, which are all Level 7 awards.
20. APL credit will not be awarded for a module that has been failed, condoned or compensated.

Accreditation of prior experiential learning (APEL)

21. Methods for accrediting prior experiential learning will be devised by the relevant Sub-Board of Examiners or nominee. Any assessment devised for this purpose will normally be subject to College policies on marking and moderation, including the College policy on second (double) marking.

Internal credit transfer and degree classification

22. Credits accumulated on programmes at the College may be transferred between College programmes at the discretion of the relevant Sub-Board of Examiners (or nominee of the Sub-Board), and subject to CAS Regulations. In addition, marks obtained on these modules may be transferred and considered when assessing the classification of award. Transfer of any such credit and/or marks will be a matter of academic judgement of the Sub-Board of Examiners responsible for the “receiving” programme.

APL credit and degree classification

23. APCL Credits gained from other Colleges of the University of London may have an overall module mark or element mark awarded and may therefore count towards the degree classification. Marks for these modules should only be awarded where there is evidence that the marking and moderation processes of the institution are commensurate with those of the College; where there is no such evidence, credit may be awarded without a mark assigned, with the modules not included in any degree classification index.
24. Where APCL credit obtained at institutions outside of the University of London is accepted by a Sub-Board of Examiners towards a programme of the College, it will not be possible to transfer marks for that credit. The Sub-Board of Examiners should make the student aware of how this will impact on the method of deriving their degree classification, as the credit will not be counted towards the determination of the award classification. Where students are studying abroad (via Erasmus+ or another approved formal collaborative agreement) as a formal part of their programme of study, it will be possible to transfer marks for that credit.
25. Overall module marks or element marks are not awarded for any APEL credit; therefore, do not count towards the determination of the award classification.

Credit gained at the College

26. Credit accumulated from previous study at the College by a student who has withdrawn from the College can be considered towards the same (or an alternative) programme, subject to CAS Regulations (see section 2 and section 3).
27. Where a student withdraws from a programme and then wishes to resume their studies at a later date either on the same (or an alternative) programme and use credit accumulated from their previous study at the College, a new application must be submitted by the student.

28. Students who withdraw from a programme at the College, with or without an intermediate exit award, are obliged to wait until at least one academic year has elapsed before using any credit achieved to rejoin the programme or to enrol on an alternative programme. This is to aid progression and avoid students from consistently starting and then withdrawing from the same programme.
29. Students whose registration has been terminated on either academic or non-academic grounds will not automatically be permitted to use credit from previous study at the College to rejoin the same programme or an alternative programme, even if they comply with paragraph 28 and at least one academic year has passed. The College reserves the right not to re-admit students who have had their registration previously terminated.

International students

30. UKVI student visa regulations require that students must study full-time. Within an academic level, international students taking only some and not all the modules of the programme are deemed not to be studying full time, and therefore APL may not be given for modules which make up part of a Level. However, exemptions for the programme level of the programme are acceptable.

Appeal

31. There is no right of appeal against a decision relating to the award of any APL credit.

Academic Board, June 2022