

University of Manchester

Principles and Guidance for the Application of the Accreditation of Prior Learning (AP(E)L)

1. Introduction and Definitions

- 1.1 This document provides guidance on the application of the Accreditation of Higher Learning in relation to the University's Taught Degree Regulations and Credit Framework.
- 1.2 Accreditation of Prior Learning is the generic term used for the award of credits on the basis of demonstrated learning which has taken place in the past.
- 1.3 There are two main categories within the accreditation of prior learning:-
 - 'APL – the Accreditation of Prior (Certificated) Learning'- learning which has been formally assessed and certified by an educational institution or education/training provider;
 - 'APEL – the Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning' – the formal recognition of prior learning gained through other experience, including paid or unpaid work, self-directed study or through leisure pursuits.
- 1.4 The term 'AP(E)L' encompasses both of the above definitions in this document.
- 1.5 AP(E)L is accepted by the University to encourage wider participation of students, with varying educational experiences and open access to its programmes of study.
- 1.6 For undergraduate study, AP(E)L can be used for partial exemption of credits within Levels 4 and 5 (years 1 and 2) up to a maximum of 120 credits for a three year programme and 240 credits for a four year programme.
- 1.7 Similarly, AP(E)L can also be used for admission into subsequent years of a programme using the maximum credit allowed (i.e. 120 for a three-year programme and 240 for a 4-year programme). Other formal arrangements for entry into later years of a programme may also be in place but fall outside of the AP(E)L framework (see paragraph 1.10 for further details). Examples of full-year exemption using AP(E)L may include:
 - admission into the second year of a three-year programme using all the credits allowed under AP(E)L for a three-year programme (i.e. 120);
 - admission into the second year of a four-year programme using 120 of the maximum number of credits allowed for a four-year programme (i.e. 240). The remaining 120 credits could then be used for partial exemption of credits in future years of that programme if approved;
 - admission into the third year of a four-year programme using all the credits allowed under AP(E)L for a four-year programme (i.e. 240).
- 1.8 For postgraduate study, please refer to Table 1 below for the maximum credits allowed for AP(E)L on Postgraduate Taught Programmes.

Table 1 – Maximum credits allowed for AP(E)L for Postgraduate Taught Programmes

Award	Maximum credits which can be awarded under AP(E)L	Total UoM credits for award
Postgraduate Certificate	Where the PG Certificate is a standalone programme, AP(E)L will be permitted up to a maximum of 15 credits.	60
Postgraduate Diploma	Where the PG Diploma is a standalone programme, AP(E)L will be permitted for up to a maximum of 45 credits.	120
Masters Degree	60 (not dissertation or equivalent).	180
Masters Degree (for longer programmes the total credit requirement will be increased pro rata to the length of the programme)	The amount of AP(E)L credits should be increased pro rata to the length of the programme (not dissertation or equivalent).	e.g. full-time MBA - 360

- 1.9 No AP(E)L award may be given which implies partial completion of a course unit. Credit can only be given for whole course units, where consideration has been given to mapping the Intended Learning Outcomes of the unit to the evidence provided of prior learning.
- 1.10 In addition, articulation arrangements may be in place that have been approved by the Faculty and discussed with Central Admissions (part of the Division of Student Admissions and Administration). These agreements may allow admission into later years of a programme, such as Level 6 (i.e. year 3) of an Undergraduate Degree or level 7 (i.e. year 4) of an Integrated Masters degree. Such arrangements fall outside of the formal AP(E)L framework.

2. Principles

- 2.1 Credits may be given for prior learning, where the level, standard, content and relevance of that learning are appropriate to a particular programme of study.
- 2.2 Decisions regarding the accreditation of prior learning are a matter of academic judgement, 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.
- 2.3 All applicants for AP(E)L must be treated equitably regardless of the sources of the prior learning that is being considered or the age, gender, marital status, ethnicity, disability, religious belief or sexual orientation of the applicant.

- 2.4 APL credit will normally be accepted within a maximum of five years from the date it was awarded. APEL experience will normally be accepted within a maximum of five years from the date of the most recent activity that was undertaken.
- 2.5 Students can receive an exit award if they have AP(E)L credit in their profile, providing their performance at the University of Manchester also satisfies the award requirements found in table 1 of the Undergraduate or Postgraduate Degree Regulations.
- 2.6 Special consideration needs to be given to students who have been granted the full amount of AP(E)L on their entry programme but fail the minimum number of University of Manchester credits for the programme and have to be considered to receive an exit award. Schools would need to check that students have completed sufficient Manchester credits to leave the University with the relevant exit award; this means that at least half the taught credits of the exit award have been completed at the University of Manchester (see paragraphs C7 of the Undergraduate and C8 of the Postgraduate Taught Degree Regulations). If the student has not completed enough credits, they may only be eligible to receive a transcript of their results.

3. The Application Process – for prospective students

- 3.1 Applications for consideration of AP(E)L should be made as early as possible before the study commences for applicants applying for a new place on a University of Manchester programme.
- 3.2 Applications should consist of a written request, stating the University award for which the student seeks AP(E)L credits, along with documentary evidence of the prior learning. This can be in the form of transcripts, certificates or other suitable evidence with respect of experiential learning.

4. The Application Process – for current students

- 4.1 For applicants already on a programme of study wishing to apply for credit exemption, they would normally be expected to apply during the preceding academic year.
- 4.2 Applications should consist of a written request, stating the University award on which the student is already registered, for which the student seeks AP(E)L credits, along with documentary evidence of the prior learning. This can be in the form of transcripts, certificates or other suitable evidence with respect of experiential learning.

5. Consideration of Applications

- 5.1 Applications would normally be considered by an AP(E)L assessor or a panel of academic staff members within the School (depending on the circumstances of the individual School). These staff members may include, for example, the programme director, course unit leader plus one other. Consideration of the applications should include a detailed/ documented discussion of how the Intended Learning Outcomes of each unit, where AP(E)L is to be applied, have been met through prior learning or equivalent experience.

5.2 The Postgraduate / Undergraduate Director (or equivalent) would be expected to provide advice and guidance to current students considering applying for AP(E)L in relation to the programme's intended learning outcomes and evidence required for an application for AP(E)L.

6. Assessment of Applications

6.1 A decision regarding whether an application for AP(E)L 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.

6.2 If the AP(E)L assessor or panel 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.

6.3 If the assessor or panel 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.

6.4 When assessing the evidence against the requirements of the intended learning outcomes of the programme and particular course unit, the assessor or panel 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

6.5 The assessor or panel should refer to the characteristics of the Quality Assurance Agency's (QAA) qualification descriptors to the level of work or course unit to assess whether it is acceptable (see the QAA website - <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/Publications/Documents/The-framework-for-higher-education-qualifications-in-England-Wales-and-Northern-Ireland.pdf>).

6.6 An application for AP(E)L should not be approved until the following criteria are satisfied:-

- The date of the prior learning has been checked and confirmed to have taken place within the past five years
- There is a correlation between the prior learning or experience which has taken place and the level and intended learning outcomes of the course units which will not be taken as a result of the AP(E)L.

6.7 The School should do all they can to get a statement of truth from the applicant; normally, students should be asked to sign a document stating that all the information they have provided on their application for AP(E)L is accurate, to the best of their knowledge. The University reserves the right to terminate an application for study 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 University and for AP(E)L

This is in line with the University's fraud procedure for applicants – see 'Detecting and dealing with applicant fraud' and 'Detecting and dealing with applicant fraud for registered students' on the Student Admissions and Administration webpage:

- [Admissions - Verification](#) (you may need to log into the University system to access this page). Please contact [Student Admissions](#) with any queries about accessing their site.

7. Outcome of Applications

- 7.1 A successful application for AP(E)L does not guarantee an offer of a place on a programme. Meeting entry criteria does not guarantee an offer and admissions tutors choose from a pool of eligible applicants in any given year.
- 7.2 Decisions about AP(E)L applications should be relayed to the School Administrator, applicants should be informed and the normal processes for an application to study should be followed.
- 7.3 Copies of documentation and records of decisions relating to AP(E)L applications should be maintained by the relevant School (and details of numbers of applications received, granted and refused, etc. sent to the relevant Faculty for information). Monitoring should take place, normally at School level, to ensure that the criteria for AP(E)L remain objective and are being fairly and consistently applied to all applicants across the School. It is important that the progress of students admitted with AP(E)L is monitored, so that information is built up on the suitability of particular qualifications for the granting of credit exemption. This could be covered in Schools' annual reviews of programmes.
- 7.4 Schools should record successful applications for AP(E)L as a credit on the student's record on the student system. Information on how to perform this task is available from the Student Records Maintenance Guide, available on the [Campus Solutions page of the Staff Learning and Development website](#).
- 7.5 Where AP(E)L credit has been awarded for a particular course unit, that course unit will be excluded from the calculation for progression (where relevant) or the process of averaging marks. Calculations will only be made in respect of the course units actually completed by the student at the University of Manchester as part of the programme.
- 7.6 Particular consideration will need to be given to the case of students who have been granted the full amount of AP(E)L on their entry programme but fail the minimum number of University of Manchester credits for the award and are consequently considered for an exit award. Please refer to paragraph 2.6 for further information.
- 7.7 Applications for AP(E)L are considered on academic grounds and, as such, no formal rights of appeal exist against the final decision of the University, as appeals cannot be made against decisions of academic judgement. Appeals may, however, be made in line with the University's '[Appeals and Complaints Procedure for Applicants](#)' on grounds of procedural irregularity, the emergence of new material information or evidence of bias or prejudice. Similarly, for current students whose applications for AP(E)L are declined, they would be permitted to make an appeal on the grounds of procedural irregularity, the emergence of new material information or

evidence of bias or prejudice, in line with the University's '[Student Complaints Procedure](#)' (Regulation XVIII).

- 7.8 An administration charge is levied by the University for students whose AP(E)L application is successful. The Tuition Fees and Registration Team in the Student Services Centre administer this on behalf of Schools. The tuition fee is adjusted and then the administrative charge applied. Schools should notify the team of cases via tuitionfees@manchester.ac.uk. The team can also advise on the current charges.

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