

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

Effective from January 2024

1.0 Purpose

- 1.1 This document provides guidance on the application of the accreditation of prior learning in relation to the University's [Taught Degree Regulations](#) and [Credit Framework](#).

2.0 Introduction and Scope

- 2.1 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.
- 2.2 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.
- 2.3 The term 'AP(E)L' encompasses both of the above definitions in this document.
- 2.4 AP(E)L is used by the University to encourage wider participation of students, with varying educational experiences and open access to its programmes of study. This document applies to undergraduate and postgraduate taught students, or applicants applying for undergraduate or postgraduate taught degree programmes at the University of Manchester. It will only apply to Postgraduate Research students when they are studying the taught elements of a doctoral programme of study. Students on Degree Apprenticeship programmes should refer to the [Application of Recognition of Prior Learning for Apprenticeship Programmes](#) document.

3.0 Principles

- 3.1 Credits may be given for prior learning, where the level, standard, content and relevance of that learning is appropriate to a particular programme of study.
- 3.2 Credits awarded both at the University of Manchester (UoM), and those awarded by other institutions, can be considered as accreditation of prior learning, subject to the maximum amounts set out below.
- 3.3 The normal arrangement would be for all approved APL/AP(E)L credit to be used as *credit only* on the programme the student is applying for. Accepted credits are normally recorded as a 'Pass' on the student's record and are not recorded as a numerical mark, used to calculate individual marks or the final degree mark. Any deviation from this arrangement would require Faculty approval.
- 3.4 Approved APL credit can only be accepted for whole course units i.e. where it is demonstrated that the all the ILOs for the Unit have been appropriately met in the prior learning. APL for parts of course units cannot be accepted as credits are only awarded on full course unit completion (see paragraph 4.5).
- 3.5 Special consideration would need to be given to applications for APL between programmes with different credit structures (e.g. 15 credit units for on-campus PGT programmes and 20 credit distance/flexible learning programmes). If a student has previously taken a 20-credit unit which they want to use as APL for a 15-credit unit on their current programme, as long as the ILOs can be mapped, this would normally be acceptable. However, if a student has previously taken a 15-credit unit which they wish to use as APL for a 20-credit unit on another programme, the programme team/School considering the application would have to consider whether there was sufficient evidence of ILOs/learning met from the units already studied to map to the units on the programme the student is applying to move to. In such scenarios, the relevant Admissions Tutor and Programme team should approve these arrangements, and this should be overseen by the Faculty Admissions Team. (Please also see paragraph 3.15 regarding transfers between UoM programmes).
- 3.6 Consideration of APEL between Undergraduate and Postgraduate Taught programmes. Integrated Masters programmes must have 120 credits at Level 7, with some of these units possibly being shared with subsequent PGT programmes. The relevant Admissions Tutor and Programme team can consider approving APL in such scenarios, ensuring that the level of the credits is equivalent and there is sufficient evidence of ILOs/learning met from the units already studied at Integrated Masters level to map to the units on the PGT programme.
- 3.7 If the original UoM award that is being used as APL credit is part of the same cognate programme or award, (e.g. a PG Certificate in Biology) which leads directly to a Masters

degree in the same subject, (e.g. a Masters in Biology), students would be expected to rescind their original award certificate. However, students whose prior qualification at UoM is accepted as APL towards another UoM programme, which is not directly linked to the original award, will not usually be asked to surrender any previously earned degree, diploma or certificate.

- 3.8 Schools can submit a request to their Faculty if they wish for credits from one programme to be routinely considered as acceptable as APL onto another programme. Special consideration would need to be given to programmes of differing credit structures in this instance and any such arrangements must be approved by the Faculty.
- 3.9 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.
- 3.10 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.
- 3.11 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.
- 3.12 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.
- 3.13 Consideration needs to be given to students who have been granted AP(E)L to enter a programme but who are then required to take referrals or to be considered for compensation.

3.13.1 Paragraph E15 of the Postgraduate Taught Degree Regulations states: "The number of credits referred and those compensated cannot exceed half the taught credits in total." If a student has entered a programme with AP(E)L, they are only permitted to have referrals or compensated credits up to a *maximum of half the taught credits studied at UoM* (not half the credits on the full programme).

3.13.2 Paragraph E18 of the Undergraduate Taught Degree Regulations states: "A maximum of 40 credits, per level, can be compensated at Level 4 and 5 of an undergraduate programme." Paragraph F27 states: "Undergraduate students can be offered referrals in up to 80 credits, per level, except level 6 and 7..." If a student has entered a programme with

AP(E)L, they are only permitted to have a pro-rata entitlement of these maximum credits of compensation or referral (e.g. 2/3 of the UoM delivered/assessed units).

- 3.14 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 credits for the programme and have to be considered to receive an exit award.
- 3.14.1 Students must have completed at least half the taught credits of the exit award 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.
- 3.14.2 In cases where AP(E)L credit has been awarded for previous qualifications achieved at UoM, if a student is then being considered for an exit award from the current UoM programme they are registered on, the required number of AP(E)L credits taken into account for the exit award must not exceed those outlined in table 1 (see paragraph 4.4).
- 3.15 For professionally accredited programmes, the requirements of Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs) or the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) may take precedence over these principles. Some professionally accredited programmes do not accept AP(E)L. If a programme would not routinely accept AP(E)L outside these examples, Schools should seek approval from their Faculty.
- 3.16 For students who are degree apprentices, it is a requirement of the ESFA funding rules that Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is taken into account. Schools offering degree apprenticeships should refer to the Application of Recognition of Prior Learning for Apprenticeship Programmes policy for further information.
- 3.17 Transfers between UoM programmes are dealt with separately to AP(E)L, unless students have been exited with an exit award and are requesting the use of credits from their exit award to be accepted to a different UoM programme (e.g. a student has received a PGDip as an exit award and is requesting credits from that programme to be used as APL towards another Masters programme) – see paragraph C7 of the [PGT Degree Regulations](#). Transfers between programmes can normally only take place within a set amount of time to ensure that core requirements/Intended Learning Outcomes are met for the programme that students are transferring onto. (Please also see paragraph 6.3 in relation to transfers).
- 3.18 Where programmes are accredited by Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs) or the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA), their requirements will take precedence over the arrangements outlined within this document. Some PRSBs will not permit AP(E)L credits, for example.

4. Maximum amounts of AP(E)L credits

4.1 The following maximum figures are provided to assist School and programme staff in deciding whether students' applications for consideration of AP(E)L should be approved.

4.2 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.

4.3 Similarly, AP(E)L can also be used for admission into subsequent years of a programme, using the maximum credits 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 4.6 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).

4.3.1 It should be noted that for situations where programmes include Year 1 or Years 1 and 2 (for 4 year programmes) in the degree classification, it is important that the adjusted weightings for these students is specified in the handbook and to students at the point of admission, or at the point at which AP(E)L is agreed.

4.4 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	60

	up to a maximum of 15 credits (for a 15-credit structure award) or 20 credits (for a 2- credit structure award).	
Postgraduate Diploma	Where the PG Diploma is a standalone programme, AP(E)L will be permitted for up to a maximum of 45 credits (or 40 credits for a programme based on a 20-credit unit structure).	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. for a full-time MBA worth 240 credits, the maximum AP(E)L credits permitted would be 80

- 4.5 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.
- 4.6 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.
- 4.7 Other arrangements may be in place where students complete some course units at other institutions as part of consortiums (e.g. doctoral training programmes which include a taught element), where teaching is undertaken at more than one institution. In such cases, agreements should be made between the programme team, School and Faculty regarding whether the numerical marks achieved at another institution within the consortium are recorded on Campus Solutions and counted towards the student's final award at the University of Manchester (including exit awards, if relevant). Where this forms part of a taught course unit, the approval must include relevant Teaching and Learning School and Faculty approval.

5.0 The Application Process – for prospective students

- 5.1 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. Prospective applicants should submit their application to the relevant Faculty/School/Department.
- 5.2 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.

6.0 The Application Process – for current UoM students

- 6.1 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.
- 6.2 Applications should be made to the relevant programme or School office and 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.
- 6.3 For transfers between PGT programmes (e.g. from an on-campus programme to a distance learning programme), students may request to transfer units already taken.
 - 6.3.1 If students are considering changing programme between two Schools at the University, this could be considered under an internal transfer normally no later than the latest date of enrolment on the new programme. If the request is approved by the receiving admissions team, the transfer would be processed in the student record. If, however, the student is considering changing between internal programmes after the latest date of enrolment, they would then normally need to apply for the next entry point for the new programme and this would constitute a new application through the Online Admissions Application form (see <https://www.manchester.ac.uk/study/masters/admissions/how-to-apply/>).
 - 6.3.2. Students should be made aware that it may not always be possible to move between specific programmes, for example, if the ILOs do not sufficiently map between the two programmes or due to distance learning programmes having different timings/mandatory units, etc. Schools should seek advice from their relevant Faculty team if they are unsure of the suitability of a student's request to transfer between two internal programmes.

6.4 Students who wish to start a new programme at the same academic level as their current programme and wish to AP(E)L credit from it to the new programme, will be required to withdraw from the current programme and make an application for the new programme. Students should ensure they have achieved enough UoM credits to meet the award criteria and request it is awarded before withdrawing.

7.0 Consideration of Applications

7.1 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 and 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.

7.2 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.

8.0 Assessment of Applications

8.1 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 and/or course unit, as well as the details of the individual application.

8.2 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/applicant as soon as possible regarding the particular evidence required.

8.3 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.

8.4 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

- 8.5 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 - <https://www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code/higher-education-credit-framework-for-england>).
- 8.6 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.
- 8.7 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 if they are found to have 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 Student Recruitment, Selection & Admissions Policy: <https://documents.manchester.ac.uk/display.aspx?DocID=6523>.

9.0 Outcome of Applications

- 9.1 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.
- 9.2 Decisions about AP(E)L applications should be relayed to the School Administrator within the relevant School TLSE Team. Applicants should be informed and the normal processes for an application to study should be followed. Admissions staff should inform applicants of the outcome of their AP(E)L application, and TLSE should inform current student of the outcome of their AP(E)L application.
- 9.3 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.

- 9.4 Schools should record successful applications for AP(E)L as a credit on the student's record in the student system. Information on how to perform this task is available in the [Student Records Management credit transfer guidance](#).
- 9.5 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; AP(E)L credit is excluded from the calculation of the year mark or final classification.
- 9.6 Mandatory units are not normally used for AP(E)L; however, they can be permitted as long as School colleagues consider that they map onto the ILOs of the programme. If a student is transferring from one UoM programme to another and has already completed the required mandatory units, then they should be permitted to use those for AP(E)L.
- 9.7 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*).
- 9.8 For students who are successful in their AP(E)L application, a fee amendment will need to be made. The Student Finance Team in Student Admissions and Administration, Student and Academic Services (SAS), will adjust the fee accordingly upon receipt of the details of the case being emailed to tuitionfees@manchester.ac.uk.

Version amendment history: Principles and Guidance for the Application of the Accreditation of Prior Learning (AP(E)L)

Version	Date	Reason for change
1.0	July 2009	Approved by TLG
1.1	July 2013	Clarification that the document is aimed at students registered on UG or PGT Degree Registrations from September 2012, to accompany the main principles concerning AP(E)L found within these new Degree Regulations. Update of credit maximum figures. Addition of information re fees for AP(E)L.
1.2	March 2014	Review of document and revision of maximum number of credits which can be awarded under AP(E)L. Separate new section on application procedure for current students. Clarification of routes for appeal.
1.3	May 2014	Addition of information about articulation arrangements; confirmation that at least half the taught credits of an exit award must have been completed at UoM.
1.3	August 2017	Website links updated.
1.4	September 2019	Revised to amend the figure for the maximum number of credits which can be awarded under AP(E)L for Postgraduate Certificate, relating to the move to 20 credit units.
1.5	December 2023	Revisions as approved by TLSIG and TLSG, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The document has been put into the new approved format and template for TLD owned T&L policies/procedures; • The addition of references to Degree Apprenticeships (paragraphs 2.4 and 3.16); • Clarification that AP(E)L can be used for credits awarded both at the University of Manchester and externally (paragraphs 3.2, 3.5 to 3.9 and 3.12); • Clarification of arrangements for AP(E)L between programmes of different credit structures (paragraph 3.5); • Clarification about AP(E)L for consortium programmes (where students complete some course units at other institutions as part of consortiums, e.g. doctoral training programmes which include a

		<p>taught element), where teaching is undertaken at more than one institution (paragraph 4.7);</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Updating of maximum number of credits for programmes which have a 20-credit unit structure (Table 1, paragraph 4.4); • New paragraphs relating to transfers between programmes (paragraphs 3.17 and 6.3).
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Related Statutes, Ordinances, General Regulations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Undergraduate Degree Regulations • Postgraduate Taught Regulations • Credit Framework
Related Policies:	Student Admissions Policy , part C4
Related Procedures and Guidance:	N/A
Policy owner:	Head of Student and Academic Services (SAS)
Lead contact:	Teaching and Learning Manager, Policy and Degree Apprenticeships <i>For any queries or questions relating to this document, please direct your email to teaching-policy@manchester.ac.uk</i>