

Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL) Policy & Procedure

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Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL) Policy & Procedure

1. Introduction

Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL) allows students to apply for exemption from specific modules where an academic judgment determines that their prior study or experience has already met most or all of the relevant Learning Outcomes.

This policy sets out when and how Oak Hill applies APL.

2. Principles of APL

Oak Hill programmes lead to named awards (such as DipHE or BA). Each award requires students to demonstrate a set of Programme Learning Outcomes (PLOs) at each level, as specified in the relevant Programme Specification.

Programmes are made up of compulsory and optional modules. Each module also has its own Module Learning Outcomes, set out in the relevant Module Outline. Each Programme Specification includes a curriculum map showing which modules map to which PLOs.

An APL assessment judges whether an applicant has already met the Learning Outcomes, at programme or module level, for the portion of the programme they wish to be exempted from. If approved, the student is awarded the equivalent credits at the appropriate level and is exempt from completing those modules.

3. Types of APL

There are two main types of APL:

3.1 Accreditation of Prior Certificated Learning (APCL)

APCL is awarded when the student is judged to have met these Learning Outcomes by passing all or part of a course of study that was formally assessed and certificated by a higher education provider, gaining credits at a level defined by the Framework for Higher

Education Qualifications (FHEQ). If approved, the student receives ungraded credits equal to the credit-weighting of each exempted module at the same level.

In assessing the level and volume of prior credit achieved, the College will refer wherever possible to recognised national frameworks (FHEQ for England, Wales and Northern Ireland; the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications for Scotland (FQHEIS)). For international qualifications, it will draw where appropriate on guidance from the ENIC European Network of Information Centres (ENIC) and the National Academic Recognition Information Centres in the European Union (NARIC).

3.2 Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL)

APEL applies where a student has met the relevant Learning Outcomes through means other than formal certified study - such as work experience, private study, or uncertificated training. The learning gained from the experience, not the experience itself, is awarded credit.

APEL also covers prior learning (such as vocational or employment-based awards) that may be at higher education level but falls outside a recognised UK qualifications framework.

Where prior certificated learning is too old (see *Exhaustion of Credit* below) to support an APCL application, an APEL application may be submitted instead. Applicants will be required to demonstrate how they have kept their learning current; where the certificated learning is only marginally out of currency, the supporting evidence required will be correspondingly minimal.

3.3 Further Variations

Direct Entry

Direct Entry is a special case of APCL in which a student is granted exemption from the whole of Level 4 of a BA programme and enters directly at Level 5. See more on *Direct Entry* below.

Taster Modules

Where the college offers these, a student may take a 10- or 20-credit taster module before formally registering on a Common Awards programme. If they pass a single taster module, those credits and marks are carried into their programme on registration.. If they take more than one taster module, these additional credits cannot be carried into their programme and they must submit an APEL (not APCL) application to have that learning recognised.

4. Advantages of APL

The recognition of prior learning may benefit applicants who:

- Want to avoid repeating learning already achieved elsewhere;
- Are topping up an existing qualification to a higher award;

- previously left a higher education programme without completing it and wish to count that learning towards a new award;
- have prior work-based learning (certificated or non-certificated) they wish to have recognised toward an academic qualification.

5. General Principles

- APL Applications may be made for the following College Common Awards programmes:
 - Certificate of Higher Education in Theology, Ministry and Mission
 - Diploma of Higher Education in Theology, Ministry and Mission
 - BA (Hons) in Theology, Ministry and Mission
 - Postgraduate Certificate in Theology, Ministry and Mission
 - Postgraduate Diploma in Theology, Ministry and Mission
 - MA in Theology, Ministry and Mission
 - MA in Contemporary Christian Leadership
- The College's APL policy and processes are informed by Durham University's *Detailed APL Guidance for Common Awards*.
- All applications will be assessed on a case-by-case basis, in accordance with the College's admissions, programme and assessment regulations currently at the time of application.
- APL is awarded at College's discretion in line with this Policy Durham University's guidance.
- Applications for APL must normally only be made during the Admissions process before the applicant commences a College qualification. Applications will not be accepted once a student has begun their studies at Oak Hill.
- Applicants must also meet the standard undergraduate or postgraduate entry criteria for the programme, as set out in the relevant programme specification and College Admissions Policy (available on the College website).
- Applicants will be provided with clear information on how to apply, the evidence required, process timescales, possible outcomes and the implications for their programme of study if APL is approved.
- The College Admissions Officer will support applicants throughout the APL process.

5.1 Which learning outcomes?

An APL application must demonstrate that the applicant has already met all, or nearly all, of either:

- the Module Learning Outcomes for each module from which exemption is sought ;
or
- the Programme Learning Outcomes, at the appropriate Level, covered by those modules from which he or she wishes to be exempted.

The overarching principle is that the applicant must still be able to meet all Programme Learning Outcomes required for the award that they are joining.

Applicants should begin by consulting the Curriculum Map within the relevant Programme Specification for each programme. This sets out which modules deliver which Programme Learning Outcomes at each Level of each programme. In most cases, applicants can identify the Programme Learning Outcomes met solely by the modules from which they seek exemption, and evidence those.

Where a Programme Learning Outcome is delivered across several modules - each contributing to its full breadth - an applicant may need to evidence the specific contribution of the module from which they seek exemption, even where the Curriculum Map alone might suggest otherwise.

In such cases, the College may advise that the applicant focus on the Module Learning Outcomes rather than on the module's contribution to the Programme Learning Outcomes. The College will exercise academic judgement in making this determination, drawing on its understanding of the programme's cumulative development of the knowledge, skills, experience and personal formation required for pastoral ministry.

On this basis the College will advise the applicant whether their application should address:

- the Programme Learning Outcomes met only by the modules from which exemption is sought;
 - a broader set of relevant Programme Learning Outcomes; or
 - the Module Learning Outcomes for each affected module.
-
- APL recognises existing learning so that students can build on and progress from it. The College will ensure that students granted APL retain a coherent programme of study, appropriate to their level in the relevant subject areas, enabling progression to the highest Level covered by their programme - both overall and within each major subject area. APL will not be used to allow a student who has already reached a higher level to obtain an award through an arbitrary collection of lower-level modules at lower levels.
 - Decisions on the level and amount of credit awarded will be based solely on demonstrable evidence of assessed learning outcomes, normally in the form of certificates, detailed programme information or a portfolio of assessments, submitted at the time of the application.
 - Credit will not be awarded where no official documentation can be produced for the prior study or experience on which the exemption is based.
 - The College will ensure that applicants from disadvantaged backgrounds, under-represented groups, or with disabilities are supported in identifying appropriate ways to demonstrate their prior learning.
 - Where an APL application is rejected, the applicant will receive full written reasons for the decision.
 - The College will retain all APL records in accordance with its Privacy Notices.

6. Specific Principles and Outcomes

- APL will result only in the award of credit towards a specific named qualification. The College will not consider applications for 'general' credit unallocated to a qualification.
- APL credit is ungraded: no mark is attached to credits granted by APL. APL credit contributes to the credit requirements for a qualification but does not contribute to the classification of an award.
- APL will be clearly recorded on a student's final transcript and diploma supplement as *Accredited Prior Learning*.
- APL is not available for the Foundation Award.
- The smallest unit for which exemption may be awarded is a whole module. Exemption will not be awarded for part of a module.

6.1 Maximum APL Permitted

The maximum APL credit that may be counted towards a qualification will :

- normally one third of the total credits required for the qualification;
- comprise no more than 60 credits by APEL, and
- include no more than 40 credits at Level 5 and no more than 40 credits at Level 6.

Award	Total Programme Credits	Maximum APL Claim (APCL and APEL combined)
Foundation Award	60	Not permitted
Certificate of Higher Education	120	Normally one third i.e. 40 credits
Diploma of Higher Education	240	Normally one third i.e. 80 credits
BA (Hons)	360	Normally one third i.e. 120 credits
Postgraduate Certificate	60	Normally one third i.e. 20 credits
Postgraduate Diploma	120	Normally one third i.e. 40 credits
Master of Arts	180	Normally one third i.e. 60 credits

- Within the totals above, APL credit may be awarded at any level. For example , a student may be awarded 60 Level 4 credits and 20 Level 5 credits towards a Diploma.
- APL may not be used to exempt students from:
 - a dissertation or major project (40 credits or more);
 - a 20-credit Independent Learning Project; or
 - the BA requirement to complete either a Dissertation, Extended Project, or Level 6 Independent Learning Project.
- APCL may be awarded only for studies that have been completed and for which credit has been formally awarded by the issuing institution.
- Credits granted on the basis of an APCL request will not exceed the number of credits awarded for the relevant prior study. For example, an applicant to the

Diploma seeking exemption from 80 credits who evidences only 60 credits of certificated prior learning will be granted no more than 60 credits.

- APCL may be awarded for prior study even where the credits have already contributed to another qualification (whether a final or exit award). Credit previously used towards one award may still be recognised as APL towards an Oak Hill qualification.
- For programmes primarily designed to run at a single level above Level 4 (the MA, PGCert and PGDip at Level 7), APL should normally be awarded at that level – that is, only Level 7 APL may count towards an MA, PGCert or PGDip. Exceptions require approval from Durham University.
- At the College's discretion, APCL may be awarded where the evidence shows a minor gap in prior subject knowledge, provided the subsequent higher-level study will cover that gap. In such cases, the College will satisfy itself that the student is well prepared for the higher level module.

6.2 Currency of credit

Credit towards a new qualification should normally have been gained no more than five years before the APL application is submitted. Currency is measured from:

- the date the relevant certificate or transcript was issued (APCL); or
- the date of the original learning, or of more recent events or practice through which the applicant has kept that learning current (APEL).

6.3 Direct Entry

Direct entry into Level 5 of the BA will most often be approved where an applicant has achieved 120 credits at Level 4 in Theology, as this prior learning is likely to map well onto the Common Awards programme.

Applicants without a prior Theology qualification at Level 4 or above may also be considered, provided they evidence readiness for Level 5 work. Such applicants will typically hold a graduate or postgraduate qualification in another discipline and must demonstrate both that:

- they have met the key skills associated with Level 4 of the BA; and their prior learning has prepared them for the specific subject matter of the Common Awards programme at Level 5.

The core principles governing direct entry applications are the same as those governing any APL application. The College must be able to judge, on the evidence available, that the applicant will be able to meet all the Programme Learning Outcomes by the end of the programme, and will not be disadvantaged in doing so by an exemption from the preparation for higher level study normally gained through Level 4.

7. Application Documentation

Applications for APL must normally be made as part of the College Admissions process, before entry to the College. Full information on how to apply is available on the College website. Applications must be submitted directly to the College Admissions Office.

Applicants seeking APL on the basis of prior study in Theology must submit the supporting evidence set out below as part of the application. For APEL applications, an example portfolio may be provided on request to help applicants compile their claim.

7.1 Evidence for APCL Applications

An APCL application must include the following information about the prior certificated Higher Education learning being submitted for assessment:

- modules studied, including levels¹ and credit weightings;
- the institution at which they were taken;
- the awarding or validating Institution (if different);
- grades awarded;
- dates of study (i.e. the date the relevant certificate or transcript was issued);
- qualification(s) achieved; and
- Programme Learning Outcomes and Module Learning Outcomes.

This information is normally expected to be evidenced by:

- the qualification certificate (if relevant);
- the qualification transcript or diploma supplement; and
- module outlines or descriptions setting out module content.

7.2 Evidence for APEL Applications

An APEL application must include the following information about the vocational, employment-based or unaccredited prior training or learning being submitted for assessment:

- the nature of the prior learning, employment, or training;
- the organisation;
- when it took place ;
- whether it involved the study of specific modules or content;
- the learning aims (if relevant); and
- any qualification(s) achieved (if relevant).

This information is normally expected to be evidenced through one or more of the following, as required to enable the College to assess the breadth and depth of learning:

- a portfolio of existing work;
- new work produced to the College's specification, designed to evidence the breadth and depth of prior learning;
- a structured interview with an appropriately qualified assessor, a record of which will be kept by the College;
- an assessment of performance, by an appropriately qualified assessor;
- a training or learning handbook (if relevant);
- any certification (if relevant), or
- module outlines or descriptions (if relevant).

¹ Levels within a higher education setting eg Framework for Higher Education Qualifications

7.3 Authenticity of evidence

The College must be satisfied that:

- all claims made in the APEL application are substantiated by evidence;
- all evidence provided is authentic; and
- The evidence relates to and demonstrates the applicant's personal efforts and attainments.

To this end, applicants may be required to sign a declaration of authenticity, submit a detailed reflective account, or to arrange for the claims to be corroborated by objective sources such as employers.

Reports or references from third parties may corroborate an APEL application, but will not replace the College's APL Panel's own academic judgment, unless they record an academic judgement made by an appropriately qualified person against the relevant Learning Outcomes at the appropriate academic level.

7.4 Submission Deadlines

Deadlines for the submission of full and complete APL applications are published on the College website.

7.5 APL Fees

No fee is payable to the College for the consideration of APL applications.

8. Consideration of APL Applications

Each APL application will be reviewed by the Academic Registrar in the first instance and may then be considered by the College's APL Panel, which acts as a sub-committee of the Teaching & Learning Committee. The Panel comprises:

- the Vice-Principal (Teaching & Learning);
- the Assistant Manager (Teaching & Learning); and
- the Academic Registrar.

Where required, the Panel will seek advice from other College academic staff on the level and content of the prior learning within the relevant subject area.

8.1 Panel assessment

The APL Panel will satisfy itself that:

- the Programme or Module Learning Outcomes the applicant claims to have met through prior learning are clearly identified in the application;
- the evidence is valid, authentic and the applicant's own work;
- the evidence is sufficient to support a judgement; and
- the learning has academic currency (normally within the previous five years).

For each application, the APL Panel will further satisfy itself that:

- the evidence genuinely demonstrates learning broadly similar in level, scope, and quality to that of a student who has passed the relevant Common Awards study, notwithstanding exemption from some of the preparation undertaken by other students (even if the precise syllabus differs);
- the applicant will be able to cope with the proposed Common Awards study, notwithstanding exemption from some of the preparation undertaken by other students;
- absence from the exempted modules will not adversely affect the applicant's wider experience of study;
- the applicant's overall pathway will retain sufficient coherence;
- For APEL applications, the applicant's learning has genuinely been kept current, even where it falls within the five-year time limit; and
- the evidence supplied is sufficient to support these judgments with reasonable confidence.

8.2 Communication of outcomes

The outcome of each APL application – whether successful or not – will be communicated to the applicant by the Admissions Office, together with comprehensive feedback.

The College will endeavour to provide an outcome within six weeks of receiving a full and complete application (including all supporting evidence), subject to the stage of the Admissions process at which the application is received.

8.3 Reporting

All APL decisions will be reported to the College Assessment Board and to Durham University, through the recording of APL credits on students' records and the sharing of APL application forms and evidence. Reporting will follow the deadlines published by Durham University and will normally be in the October following the students' commencement of the programme. APL for late entrants will be reported in the following March.

8.4 Referral to Durham University

Applications may be referred to Durham University where either:

- The College is minded to approve an application that not straightforward ; or
- the College does not feel able to make a judgement on the application.

(A *straightforward* application is one in which all relevant Learning Outcomes are clearly met, or largely met with minor gaps that can readily be covered by subsequent Common Awards study; the quantity of APL falls within the limits set out in this Policy; and the prior learning is current.

In the first case, Durham University's Chair of the Common Awards Management Board will decide whether to confirm the College's judgement. In the second case, the Chair will make an independent judgement based on the evidence provided. In both cases, the College will communicate the University's decision to the applicant.

9. Articulation Agreements

APL must not be used in place of an *articulation agreement* – a standing arrangement permitting students from a specified non-Common Awards programme to receive automatic credit towards a Common Awards programme. Every APL application must be considered individually on its own evidence. For example, the College will not enter into a general agreement allowing all future students who complete a particular non-Common-Awards Certificate to progress directly into Level 5 of a Common Awards BA.

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