



BISHOP GROSSETESTE UNIVERSITY

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Introduction

1. In line with the priority which it gives to promoting opportunities for lifelong learning and widening access to Higher Education, the University welcomes applications from prospective students who are seeking to gain exemption from some parts of an academic programme by gaining accreditation for prior learning. Such claims may be based either on a previous course of study or on experience gained in paid employment or voluntary activities.
2. This *Code of Practice* sets out the regulations governing such applications and explains the processes that are to be followed by prospective students and the staff of the University. It follows the guidance contained in the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) *UK Quality Code for Higher Education*, specifically *Chapter B6 – Assessment of students and the recognition of prior learning* [2013] 2015 and, in particular, it seeks to ensure that the University follows the general principles of good practice in assuring and enhancing quality and standards in HE which are set out in that document, namely that:
 - higher education providers take into account the entitlements of their students who reflect the diversity of protected characteristics and prior educational experience, and promote the development of inclusive practice;
 - policies and procedures should be explicit and fair and applied consistently;
 - information available to applicants and staff should be clear, explicit and accessible;
 - roles and responsibilities of staff and applicants should be defined clearly;
 - appropriate support should be offered to applicants;
 - policies and procedures should be monitored and reviewed.

It is to be noted that this process does not represent any full admissions process to the University; for instance any assessment as to the immigration status of the applicant and other checks will be done separately as part of the University's general admissions processes.

It should be read with reference to other University Codes of Practice notably: the *Code of Practice for the Assessment of Students* and the *Code of Practice for External Examining*.

Definitions and Scope

3. The term *Accreditation of Prior Learning* (APL) is used to denote the process by which a reasonably substantial and significant element of prior learning is identified, assessed and formally acknowledged.
4. Such learning may have been gained through the pursuit of a programme of study offered by an education provider and publicly recognised through certification. In such cases, the term *Accreditation of Prior Certificated Learning* (APCL) is adopted. The certification may or may not have been provided within the context of a credit transfer system. Alternatively, the learning may have taken place as a result of reflection upon experience gained outside the formal education and training system. In such cases, the term *Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning* (APEL) is adopted. In the case of accreditation for prior experiential learning, it must be emphasised that accreditation is given for evidence of learning gained

through experience and not for the experience alone.

5. Accredited prior learning may be used to gain exemption from specified elements of a programme of study at the University. Typically, applications will be made prior to enrolment on a programme of study. In such cases, if the application is successful, the student may not be required to complete the initial stage of the programme and will enter with advanced standing or may be exempted from a specific module or modules. Under certain circumstances, most commonly in the case of part-time students, the learning to be accredited may, by prior agreement, take place concurrently with other parts of the programme. It should be noted in this context that the term *Accreditation of Prior Learning* does not include the assessment of learning in the workplace or on placements which is an intended or planned element of the programme on which the student is enrolled.

Policy

Evidence requirements

6. Accreditation of Prior Learning involves the recognition of credit towards an award; it therefore falls within the University's quality assurance and enhancement procedures and the process must in all cases be undertaken with rigour and integrity. In particular, the University must be assured that there is robust evidence of the learning which has resulted from prior certificated study or reflection on experience and must be satisfied that it is equivalent to the learning that would otherwise have been gained by following the elements of the programme at the University from which exemption is sought.
7. The staff responsible for making this academic judgement will establish that the evidence shows that the learning is comparable in terms of level and the learning outcomes achieved, and that the knowledge, understanding and skills that have been gained are relevant to the programme which the applicant intends to join and, more particularly, to those parts of the programme from which exemption is sought. Learning outcomes will normally be at module level for undergraduate programmes, but are likely to be more generic at programme-level for postgraduate programmes. These judgements will be facilitated in the case of the Accreditation of Prior Certificated Learning where the applicant has undertaken a programme of study which is part of a credit transfer scheme. Where this is not the case, and in all cases of applications for the Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning, the evidence should be measured against the credit framework in operation at the University. Evidence provided by applicants needs to be relevant, sufficient, authentic and current.
8. Applications for entry to programmes which carry professional accreditation will be assessed in the light of the applicant's ability to meet all requirements of that accreditation.

Volume and level of credit for which applications may be entertained

9. There are limits as to the maximum and minimum volume of credit which can be awarded through Accreditation of Prior Learning. Applications must relate to exemption from complete modules.

10. For students entering an undergraduate programme with advanced standing the maximum volume of credit which can be recognised through Accreditation of Prior Learning is 240 credits at Levels 4 and 5. (For the avoidance of doubt, students who have completed a foundation degree of the University and who wish to follow a progression route which is formally linked to it are not required to apply through the APL procedures). For students entering courses at Master's level, the maximum volume of credit which can be recognised through Accreditation of Prior Learning is 120 credits at Level 7. Exemption may not be granted for the dissertation stage of a Master's programme. In the case of students who are registered for a postgraduate certificate or postgraduate diploma, applications will be limited to a maximum of 30 credits and 60 credits respectively (that is one half of the total credits for the award).

Timing of applications

11. Prospective students applying for admission with advanced standing (entry to a programme after the completion of the first level) must have their application approved before entry. Entry with AS is not used for PG programmes. An application for exemption from a module may not be made retrospectively or after its delivery has commenced.

Claims relating to credit which has already contributed to an award

12. Learning that has previously been accredited in the award of another qualification cannot be accepted for the purposes of the Accreditation of Prior Certificated Learning unless the award is a recognised stage in the progression to a higher award-e.g. certificate and diploma of HE or postgraduate certificates and diplomas at Level 7. Credits awarded for a Foundation Degree may be accepted for entry to a Level 6 programme leading to an honours award. See paragraph 10 above.

Use of marks or grades awarded by other institutions

13. Marks or grades awarded by another provider will not be accepted when a claim for recognition of prior certificated learning has been successful. The student's transcript will show all modules which form part of the programme for which the student has been accepted but, in the case of those from which exemption has been granted, will indicate that the credit has been awarded without a mark or grade through APL. In cases where a mark or grade is material to the classification of a final award, a grade or mark average for that level will be used for modules which have been accredited. Where a student enters at Level 6 with advanced standing the degree classification will be based upon the average mark for all modules at that level. Academic Coordinators should be particularly careful to bring this regulation to the attention of prospective applicants.

Currency of prior learning

14. Applications for APL are subject to the currency of that learning. The student must normally have undertaken the learning for which accreditation is sought, whether certificated or experiential, no more than five years before commencing the programme which they will be entering with advanced standing or in which exemption from specified modules is to be granted.

Charges

15. The University will make a charge to cover the costs of processing an application for APL. Applicants will be advised of the current charges before the application is processed.

Review

16. The Quality Assurance Committee will monitor the effectiveness of the arrangements for the Accreditation of Prior Learning and propose changes to AEC and, as necessary, on to Senate when appropriate. Boards of Examiners will receive information regarding Accreditation of Prior Learning and will monitor the progress of such students. The Academic Quality Manager will monitor applications and outcomes under the Diversity and Equality Policy.
17. Any module assessed through the Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL) must be included as part of the sample submitted to the appropriate External Examiner.

Process

18. Initial enquiries regarding entry with advanced standing through the APL procedures should be made to the Academic Quality team using the appropriate form stating clearly the programme for which the application will be made and, if possible, giving an indication of those elements of the programme for which exemption is to be claimed. Such applicants will in other respects be subject to normal entry requirements and procedures (as detailed in the Code of Practice for Admissions).
19. If the applicant is studying a previously mapped programme (see section 28 below) then the application will be recorded, approved and passed to the Admissions Manager. If the applicant is studying on a programme outside of the approved list of standard accreditations then the Academic Quality Manager will pass the application and supporting evidence to the Academic Coordinator for approval and possible standard accreditation through the procedure in sections 29–30.
20. In the case of Accreditation of Prior Certificated Learning, the Academic Coordinator will confirm with the applicant the modules for which exemption is sought and the elements of the applicant's previous programme on which the claim is based. The applicant will need to supply the following:
 - the original formal certification showing their achievement on the previous programme; and
 - information about the programme, typically including the programme specification (or, if not available, a statement of the aims and learning outcomes; for instance a comprehensive diploma supplement) and the relevant module descriptors. If the applicant has not yet completed their previous programme then their approval will be conditional on their achievement of the award.
21. The applicant will complete form APL1 and submit, with the required evidence and fee, to the Academic Quality Manager. The form will be logged and then be sent to the appropriate Academic Coordinator, who will then consider the evidence and decide whether the

application should be:

- (a) supported,
- (b) supported with modifications or,
- (c) rejected.

Where the applicant's previous programme has not operated under a credit transfer system, the Academic Coordinator will assess the credit volume of the prior learning (normally taking a complete stage as 120 credits in the case of an undergraduate programme) and its level by reference to the *Framework for Higher Education Qualifications* (FHEQ) and current level descriptors. The Academic Coordinator's decision will be recorded and the form returned to the Academic Quality Manager. Where the Academic Coordinator does not support the application, or supports it with modifications, the reasons for that decision and the nature of any modifications should be clearly stated.

22. In the case of an application for Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning, a meeting will normally be arranged between the Academic Coordinator and applicant at which the nature of the applicant's experience and an outline of the evidence of learning that would be required to support the claim will be discussed. The applicant should not be asked to complete further work as evidence at this stage.
23. The Academic Coordinator and applicant will complete form APL2 indicating briefly the nature of the applicant's relevant prior experience and the module(s) for which exemption is claimed. The Academic Coordinator will then consider the proposal and decide whether the application should be:
 - (a) given initial approval,
 - (b) given initial approval with modifications or,
 - (c) rejected.

The Academic Coordinator's decision will be recorded, and the form, together with a specification of the evidence of learning that the student will be expected to provide, should be returned to the Academic Quality Manager. Where the Academic Coordinator does not support the application, or supports it with modifications, the reasons for that decision and the nature of any modifications should be clearly stated.

24. Where the Academic Coordinator does not support an application for either Accreditation of Prior Certificated Learning or Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning, the Academic Quality Manager, or in their absence another senior member of Quality Assurance and Student Administration, will advise the applicant of the outcome and the reasons for that decision.
25. Applications which have the support of the Academic Coordinator, with or without modifications, will be considered by an APL Panel, which will normally hold three scheduled meetings in each semester. The membership of the Panel will normally comprise the Registrar and Secretary who shall normally act as Chair, one Heads of School or nominee, Head of Quality Enhancement and Student Experience and a representative from the Students' Union. The Panel may decide to accept or reject the Academic Coordinator's recommendation or to make acceptance subject to further modifications. The Panel may also refer the application to

the Academic Coordinator for further information or evidence before making a decision. The Academic Quality Manager or in their absence another member of the Registry will be in attendance and will inform the applicant and Academic Coordinator of the Panel's decision.

26. In the case of an application for AP(E)L, the Academic Coordinator will draw up an assignment brief setting out the nature of the assessed work that will be required.
27. The applicant will be offered advice on how to approach the assignment, especially with regard to the collection of appropriate evidence of achieved learning outcomes and the style in which such an analytical account should be presented. An appropriate tutor will be nominated by the Academic Coordinator for this purpose but they will not normally be involved in the assessment of the claim. It may also be appropriate to refer the applicant to Student Support for further guidance.
28. In the case of successful applications for both APL and AP(E)L, the student will be provided with a full statement of the elements of the programme for which accreditation has been granted and confirmation of their programme of study, i.e. those modules which must be undertaken in order to complete the programme. The module(s) will be recorded on the final transcript as AP(E)L. Where the application is rejected, students will be advised that they may appeal on the grounds of procedural irregularity but may not challenge an academic judgement. The web address for the Code of Practice on Academic Appeals should be included with the letter.

Standard Accreditation

29. The standard accreditation procedure may be followed where it is expected that students who have completed a specified award or stage of a specified award offered by the University or another institution (which already has relevant Memoranda and/or other required contractual agreements in place with BGU) will be applying to progress with advanced standing to a programme at this University. It is intended to avoid the need for individual APL applications where it is expected that a significant number of students from the feeder course will be applying for admission to the BG programme and where the arrangement is likely to remain in place for a sustained period. In this case, students completing the specified award or stage successfully will be eligible to enter a specified programme at this institution with advanced standing (subject to the availability of places and meeting other admission requirements). A charge is not normally made for processing a claim for standard accreditation.
30. An application for standard accreditation should normally be prepared by the Academic Coordinator proposing such an accreditation in conjunction with an articulation agreement with the institution offering the programme for which accreditation is sought. It is important that the agreement should include an explicit undertaking to inform the University in writing of any change to the learning outcomes or syllabus of the programme. Where the University is notified of a change, the standard accreditation arrangement must either be renewed or terminated. In any event, the standard accreditation will not automatically extend beyond the point at which the programme is subject to periodic review. There may be exceptions to the need for an articulation agreement and these will be considered on a case by case basis. For example, standard accreditation of generic PGCE M-level credits should not require an articulation agreement.



31. The Academic Coordinator seeking to initiate a standard accreditation should complete form SA1. The completed form should be passed to the Head of School for approval. Provided the proposal has the support of the School, it should be forwarded to the Academic Quality Manager who will arrange for it to be considered by the APL Panel. The form should be accompanied by the programme specification and relevant module specifications of the programme for which accreditation is sought and the equivalent documentation for the BG programme; a suitable mapping proposal will be expected. It is noted that where the conditions set out in paragraphs 28 and 29 do not apply, individual applications for the Accreditation of Prior Learning should be made using the form for the Accreditation of Prior (Certificated) Learning or Accreditation of Prior (Experiential) Learning.