



**Policy on Accreditation of Prior Learning:  
Certificated Learning**

**POLICY DOCUMENT**

*Approved by Academic Council 13 April 2006*

*Amendments to Policy Approved by Academic Council Executive 11 June 2008*

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**1. Purpose of Policy**

This policy will define a framework for accreditation of certificated prior learning in University College Dublin (UCD). It will apply to prospective and current UCD students in undergraduate and graduate programmes who have gained prior learning through study which has been formally assessed and certificated in a recognised institution other than UCD. Students transferring between UCD programmes should refer to the Policy for Transfer Applicants.

**2. Purpose of Paper**

This document sets out policy principles and procedures for the accreditation of prior learning within UCD modularised programmes at undergraduate and graduate levels. It provides a set of principles which can be applied to consideration of individual students' cases or the accreditation of particular qualifications for entry at later stages of a UCD programme. The purpose of this document is to articulate:

- A definition of accreditation of prior learning and the award of credit;
- A set of policy principles to support the development of practices for the accreditation of prior learning
- A framework to support individual applications for accreditation of prior learning;
- A framework to support structured arrangements for the recognition of qualifications for accreditation of prior learning;

This document aims to support and facilitate the development of APL activities within a coherent University-wide framework which takes account of the different circumstances where APL processes may be applied.

**3. Accreditation of APL**

Accreditation refers to the process of identification, assessment and formal acknowledgement of learning. Accreditation of prior learning (APL) is normally used to indicate the range of approaches adopted to acknowledge formally that learning has taken place. It can incorporate the accreditation of both certificated learning and experiential learning. Certificated learning is that which has been assessed and achieved through a formal programme of study typically further or higher education programmes or professional programmes. Accreditation of prior certificated learning normally applies to learning which has been recognised prior to a student enrolling on a programme. Experiential learning is learning achieved through experience in work, community or related settings which is judged and recognised by the University.

The Accreditation of Prior Certificated Learning (APCL) is the focus of this policy document. For UCD's Policy on Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL), please go to:

[http://www.ucd.ie/registry/academicsecretariat/pol\\_apel.pdf](http://www.ucd.ie/registry/academicsecretariat/pol_apel.pdf)

## 4. Policy Principles and Policy Implementation

4.1 The focus of accreditation is on the achievement of learning, that is, on the outcomes of learning and its certification rather than the experience of learning. Responsibility for making claims for accreditation of prior learning rests with individual students. Each application for accreditation of prior learning will be considered on its merits.

4.2 Accreditation decisions are a matter of academic judgment and will be based on an evaluation of the academic evidence provided to determine whether the prior learning undertaken is equivalent to that of learning which would have been achieved by following the UCD programme. This is equally applicable to making judgments about the recognition of programmes for transfer purposes and to the consideration of individual student cases.

4.3 In some contexts, it may be appropriate to consider professional qualifications awarded by professional bodies for APL. These should be considered with reference to the learning outcomes associated with the professional qualification and the learning outcomes of the UCD programme and its constituent modules as defined in the programme specification.

4.4 Credit gained for prior learning outside of UCD should not be used exclusively to exempt students from their elective requirements in UCD undergraduate programmes. Students should only be permitted to use prior learning to exempt them from elective credits when that prior learning also exempts them from a significant volume of core and/or option credits associated with the UCD programme, normally a minimum of 10 credits of core and/or option modules for every 5 credits of electives.

4.5 Credits may be awarded for prior learning and will be used for the following purposes:

- Credit transfer: students may be awarded credit allocations which count towards a university award on the basis of advanced entry to a programme. At undergraduate level for example, this would include students admitted from another third level institution with a relevant Ordinary Degree (Diploma) or Higher Certificate qualification to continue study on a degree programme. At graduate level, this would include students admitted to masters or doctoral level study with a relevant graduate level qualification such as a Graduate Diploma or relevant Masters;
- Access: where a student has completed a recognised access qualification which is mapped to the UCD level descriptions and NQAI Qualifications Framework. Recognition of this certificated learning can be considered by the Programme Board;
- Exemption: Credit transferred will exempt students from undertaking learning that has already been successfully completed at a similar level and an equivalent standard on another programme of study in a non-UCD institution where the work is substantially the same in content and outcome.

4.6 **Specific Credit** is granted where the learning outcomes achieved are equivalent to the learning outcomes of a current UCD module(s). This credit can substitute for core, option or, in some cases, elective modules on a proposed UCD programme. Wherever possible, specific credit should be allocated. The grades associated with specific credit may, at the discretion of the Programme Board/Graduate School Board, be transferred directly or, with appropriate equivalencies, mapped into the UCD academic record and recorded in the transcript. Such grades will not normally be included in GPA, and will only be included with the approval of the Programme Board/Graduate School Board and where there are agreed and published equivalences, or mechanisms to establish such equivalences, between the grades awarded by the other institution and the UCD grading scheme.

4.7 **General Credit** is granted when the prior learning is relevant but not equivalent directly to modules in the proposed UCD programme. Relevant but not directly equivalent credit can substitute for a limited number of programme modules and is generally given as a block of credit to be applied to general credit requirements of a programme. General credit does not carry a grade and may not be included in GPA calculations (See Sections 2.8, 4.5).

4.8 Students who use all of their credit from a prior qualification towards a second qualification from UCD at the same level should not normally represent themselves as having both qualifications. The University may adopt appropriate and reasonable procedures to ensure that any prior qualifications are rescinded in accordance with prevailing agreements.

4.9 The accreditation of prior certificated learning for cohorts of students and individual students is the responsibility of the Programme Board/Graduate School Board. Each will be responsible for determining the amount and kind of credit which may be awarded and will be guided and advised by the relevant School or Schools as appropriate so as to formulate decisions based on the University's policy framework for APCL.

4.10 Each Programme Board/Graduate School Board should define the limits of accreditation for prior learning for its programmes in terms of the smallest amount of credit, normally a module, and the largest amount of credit that may be applied towards the programme into which the student have been or may be admitted. For Bachelor level programmes, the maximum amount of credit will normally be 50% of the whole programme of study. For Masters level programmes, the maximum will normally be 60 credits (with a corresponding 30 credits minimum to be acquired at UCD); and for Doctoral level programmes, the maximum will normally be 90 credits (with a corresponding 180 credits minimum to be acquired at UCD). Where for good educational reasons or in accordance with arrangements for inter-institutional collaborative programmes, or in the case of established transfer routes for programmes using certificated provision offered by other higher education providers, a Programme Board/Graduate School Board wishes to accredit student learning for more than this amount, it will require the approval of either the University Undergraduate Programmes Board or University Graduate Programmes Board.

4.11 Award of credit is subject to evaluation of the following: student's academic record; course/programme of study; syllabus, course description, learning outcomes, number of contact hours, form of assessment(s); NQAI level of qualification awarded and awarding institution. The time elapsed since prior learning was achieved and advances in the relevant field(s) of study should also be considered. In respect of establishing transfer arrangements, Programme/Graduate Boards will evaluate the relevance of the programme of study based on its programme specification, learning outcomes and credit value to reach an academic decision about the comparability of the programme with existing UCD programmes, the point of entry to the UCD programme and the volume of credit to be awarded to any transfer students.

4.12 The volume of credit awarded for prior certificated learning should be reflected in the academic transcript (Diploma Supplement) of the student to indicate those elements of the qualification which are based on external study and those which have been gained through study on a UCD degree programme.

4.13 For applications for entry with advanced standing or transfer between programmes of study, Programme Boards/Graduate School Boards will allocate specific and/or general credit in the first instance. Once credit has been awarded, it will then decide the appropriate stage of admission for the applicant, subject to offer of a place on the proposed programme of study.

## **5. Dealing with applications for Accreditation of Prior Learning**

5.1 A summary of the University's application deadlines, decision timetables and notification routes can be found at Appendix A of this document.

5.2 Applications for accreditation should include an official transcript of results, a formal syllabus which includes topics covered, texts and references, learning outcomes and assessment and grading criteria.

5.3 Application for accreditation of prior learning for prospective students, including prospective transfer students, should be submitted to the Admissions Office for entry to undergraduate programmes or the relevant School Office for entry to graduate programmes. Students seeking to transfer into UCD on the basis on accreditation of prior learning should submit their application for accreditation at the same time as their application to transfer.

5.4 Application for accreditation of prior learning for students who have been admitted to UCD must be made on an individual basis to the relevant Programme Office/Graduate School Office.

5.5 Eligibility for accreditation of prior learning on a programme of study in UCD does not guarantee admission. A separate application for entry into a programme of study must be made through the CAO (deadline 01 February) or to the Admissions Office for application with advanced standing (early July) for entry to undergraduate programmes or the relevant School Office for entry to graduate programmes.

5.6 An offer of a place on a programme is at the discretion of the Programme Board/Graduate School Board, subject to the University Admissions Policy and the availability of places on the programme.

5.7 Current UCD students who are seeking exemption from any module(s) based on an application for accreditation of prior learning should register for, attend and participate in the module(s) until they have received notice of the Programme Board's/Graduate School Board's decision. Students who do not receive exemption will be responsible for all assessments associated with their modules.

5.8 Applicants for accreditation of prior learning should be informed of the decision of the Programme Board. Current UCD students who apply for accreditation of prior learning will be informed of the decision of the Programme Board/Graduate School Board by the Programme Office/Graduate School Office. In the case of prospective applicants, Programme Offices/Graduate School Offices are responsible for the communication of the decision of their Programme Boards/Graduate School Boards to the Admissions Office and/or relevant School Office who will in turn inform the applicant.

## **6. Ongoing Audit and Maintenance**

6.1 Programme Offices/Graduate School Offices will maintain a register of decisions by Programme Boards/Graduate School Boards on accreditation of prior learning.

6.2 In the case of UCD's international programme provision, the register of recognised qualifications should be informed by comparative qualifications information such as that provided by NARIC or other recognised national qualifications frameworks.

6.3 Where accreditation of prior certificated learning, other than the normal entry requirements of an honours bachelors degree, is used to evaluate students' eligibility for entry to postgraduate programmes, Programme Boards/Graduate School Boards should establish a register of recognised qualifications which are at least equivalent in the level of their outcomes to an honours bachelors degree.

6.4 The University's requirements for the presentation of information, both in content and format, for accreditation of prior learning claims will be published and available to staff and students through its prospectus and any other official student recruitment information.

6.5 Programme Boards/Graduate School Boards will review on a periodic basis the continued appropriateness of any transfer programmes to the UCD programme in order to take account of developments in the discipline and/or developments in teaching, learning and assessment activities.

6.6 Each Programme Board should report its overall APCL decisions on an annual basis to the College Teaching & Learning Committee to confirm that procedures are operating effectively, are being fairly and consistently applied and are not growing unintentionally more or less restrictive over time. The decisions of Programme Boards will be subject to review in accordance with any audit arrangements established by the University, for instance through a Programme Audit Committee.

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**Timescales and Deadlines for Application**

Application for accreditation of prior learning for prospective students should be submitted to the relevant offices as follows:

<b>Type of Application</b>	<b>Submit to</b>	<b>Application Deadline</b>	<b>Expected Decision Date</b>	<b>Student Notification Route</b>
Prospective CAO (undergraduate) applicants	Admissions Office	1st Tuesday in November	10 weeks from application deadline	Programme Office notifies Admissions Office. Admissions Office notifies student
Prospective undergraduate applicants seeking entry with advanced standing	Admissions Office (can be submitted as part of application procedure)	1st Tuesday in July	6 weeks from application deadline	Programme Office notifies Admissions Office. Admissions Office notifies student
Prospective graduate students	Relevant School Office	See relevant Graduate School Office	See relevant Graduate School Office	Graduate School Office notifies student.

Application for accreditation of prior learning for students who have been admitted to UCD must be made on an individual basis to the relevant Programme Board/Graduate School Board as follows:

<b>Type of Application</b>	<b>Submit to</b>	<b>Application Deadline</b>	<b>Expected Decision Date</b>	<b>Student Notification Route</b>
Exemptions from semester1+2 modules*	Relevant Programme Office/ Graduate School Office	Last Tuesday in September	6 weeks from application deadline	Programme Office/Graduate School Office notifies student

\*NB: Students seeking exemption from any semester 1 modules should register for, attend and participate in the modules until they have received notice of the Programme Board's decision. Students who do not receive exemption based will be responsible for all assessments associated with their semester 1 modules.

## Personnel

Role	Name	e-mail	tel
Academic Sponsor	Dr Danielle Clarke	danielle.clarke@ucd.ie	8694
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Policy Officer	Sóna Breathnach Kym McCourt	kym.mccourt@ucd.ie	1483

## Version History

Version	Date	Summary of Changes	Changed by
1.0	06 Dec 05	First draft	Sóna Breathnach
1.1	21 Dec 05	Revision incorporating comments from Registrar and Policy Officer	Sóna Breathnach
1.2	10 Feb 06	Revision incorporating input and comments from APL Advisory Committee	Sóna Breathnach & Elizabeth Noonan
1.3	22 March Mar 06	Revision incorporating comments from Vice-Principals for Teaching & Learning	Elizabeth Noonan
1.4	30 Mar 06	Finalise incorporating comments of Teaching and Learning Board	Elizabeth Noonan
1.6	13 Apr 06	Amendment concerning double-counting rule	Elizabeth Noonan
1.7	05 Mar 08	Revision incorporating comments from Registrar, UUPB and Vice Principals for Teaching and Learning (re UCD transfers and exemption for elective credits)	Kym McCourt
1.8	06 May 08	Revision incorporating comments from UUPB and UGPB	Kym McCourt
1.9	26 May 08	Revision incorporating comments from Director of Registry	Kevin Griffin / Kym McCourt

## Consultation and Approvals Plan

Committee/Group	Date		Version	Action	Decision
	Meeting	Circulation			
APL Advisory Committee	19 Jan 06	12 Jan 06	1.1	Comment and Discussion	Changes recommended
Teaching and Learning Board	30 Mar 06	23 March	1.2	Discussion	Changes recommended
Vice-Principals for Teaching and Learning	22 Mar 06	16 Mar 05	1.3	Discussion	Changes recommended
Admissions Office, Access Office, Adult Education Centre, Programme Offices, Graduate Schools and Students Union	-	Mar06	1.4	Comment by 7 April	
Academic Council Executive	05 Apr 06	30 Mar 06	1.4	Approval	Changes recommended
Academic Council	13 Apr 06	30 March 07 Apr 06	1.4 1.5	Comment Approval	Comment Changes recommend <b>Approved</b>
UUPB	16 Jan 08	11 Jan 08	1.7	Comment and Discussion	Changes recommended
UUPB, UGPB	30 Apr 08 2 May 08	24 April 08 25 April 08	1.8	Comment and Discussion	Changes recommended
UUPB, UGPB	28 May 08 30 May 08	27 May 08 27 May 08	1.9	Comment	Recommended
Academic Council Executive	11 Jun 08	09 Jun 08	1.9	Approval	<b>Approved</b>

## Dissemination Plan

<b>Output</b>	<b>Deadline</b>	<b>Dissemination</b>	<b>Responsible</b>
200 words for Horizons update- Under review policy section	May 05	To UCD Communications Office	Academic Policy
Publication of approved Policy Document	18 Apr 06	Posted on the web with a circulation by email to stakeholders confirming that approved policy is now available and in Horizons circulation as a decision of Academic Council	Academic Policy
Publication of amended Policy Document	13 Jun 08	Posted on the web to be included in the next Policy & Regulatory Update	Academic Policy