



ACCREDITATION OF PRIOR LEARNING: EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

ACADEMIC POLICY

Approved by Academic Council on 9 May 2007

Version: 1.4

1. Introduction

This policy aims to provide a framework for accreditation of prior experiential learning in University College Dublin. It will apply to students who have gained the relevant and necessary experience to demonstrate their entitlement and appropriateness for entry to a programme and / or to exemption from specific sections of their programme.

UCD has a strong track record of widening participation with programmes such as Adult Education, New ERA and the Disability Support Service, developing specific strategies and supports to include students who have traditionally experienced impediments to participation in higher education. In order to build on this commitment, UCD must open new entry pathways that are suited to all potential students. This policy will contribute towards meeting that goal.

What is Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL)?

Accreditation refers to the process of identification, assessment and formal acknowledgement of learning. The term accreditation of prior learning (APL) is normally used to indicate the range of approaches adopted to formally acknowledge 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. Experiential learning is learning achieved through experience in work, the community or a related setting which is judged and recognised by the University to be worthy of credit contributing to an award of the University.

APEL requires a judgement to be made about the level of knowledge and skills acquired through life, work experience (paid or unpaid) and study, their appropriateness for entry to a programme and the level at which the applicant may enter.

The Objectives of Introducing APEL are:

- To recognise the importance and relevance of all types and formats of learning
- To ensure that the University's programmes are tailored, where possible, to the student's educational needs (in terms of variety offered and length of study)
- To make the University more accessible to prospective students who, for a wide variety of reasons, may not have considered studying at UCD in the past
- To make all UCD programmes, both undergraduate and graduate, accessible to students with appropriate qualifications and / or experience.

APEL is of particular value to:

- Students returning to education who lack the formal qualifications required for entry to a course of study.
- Students who are seeking the award of professional qualifications on the basis of evidence of specific training and practical work experience.
- Students on full or part-time courses who wish to gain recognition for informal learning that has taken place through work or relevant and appropriate leisure-related activities.

Candidates may wish to have their prior learning accredited to

- (i) demonstrate that they have the prior learning required to gain admission to a programme;
- (ii) demonstrate that their prior learning should bear credit towards the award and should exempt them from elements of the programme.

2. Policy Principles

The following principles underpin the University's broad approach to APEL.

- 2.1. The University seeks to recognise learning wherever and however it has occurred.
- 2.2. The accreditation of prior experiential learning applies to all UCD programmes. The APEL policy provides a framework only; programmes will be required to put in place a specific procedure and documentation to deal with APEL in their respective areas. Credits awarded may only pertain to taught programmes or modules.



- 2.3. The focus of accreditation is on the achievement of learning; that is, on the outcomes of learning and its applicability rather than the experience of learning.
- 2.4. Accreditation decisions are a matter of academic judgment and will be based on an evaluation of the evidence provided to determine whether the prior learning demonstrated is equivalent to the learning that would have been achieved by fulfilling all requirements of the UCD programme.
- 2.5. Flexibility and sensitivity to programme needs is required. The application and accreditation processes aim to be conducted within transparent and achievable timeframes. All documentation prepared by programmes for the purposes of APEL will be subject to possible audit by the University or, where applicable, by professional accrediting bodies.
- 2.6. The accreditation awarded for prior experiential learning should be reflected in the academic transcript of the student to indicate those elements of the qualification which are based on external learning and training and those which have been gained through study on a UCD degree programme. A fundamental principle of credit accumulation is that credit cannot be awarded twice for the same achievement.
- 2.7. UCD personnel assessing the evidence submitted for APEL are required to make a judgment on whether the evidence merits credit which can contribute to a particular programme or adds to previous certificated learning to gain access to a particular programme. It is expected that staff dealing with APEL applications will build up sufficient knowledge and expertise in this area.
- 2.8. Credit gained for experiential learning completed externally to the University will not normally be included in GPA calculations unless by the prior agreement of the Programme Board; if a mark and credit towards a programme is to be awarded, a form of examination must be agreed so that the applicant / student can be assessed and graded.
- 2.9. Responsibility rests with the applicant making a claim with appropriate evidence, although guidance may be given. The academic function of assisting the applicant to prepare evidence of learning should be separated from that of assessing that learning.
- 2.10. The University will normally levy a charge for the assessment of prior experiential learning to cover the costs of conducting the assessment. This amount will be specified in advance of the assessment taking place and cannot be construed in any way as payment for exemption or admission to a course. The fees charged may vary from programme to programme, particularly where additional resources are expected to be able to comprehensively and fairly assess the application.

3. Assessment of Prior Experiential Learning

- 3.1. Applicants for credit using prior experiential learning are required to submit relevant evidence in accordance with appropriate guidelines. These may be module-specific or programme-specific and will be the general University guidelines.
- 3.2. There are a variety of ways of assisting applicants with the compilation of their portfolio of evidence that have been suggested and developed:
- Personal interview;
 - Class or group work, which could be a time-tabled course;
 - Tutorials or seminars;
 - Specially designed online or hard copy manual.
- 3.3. The University does not generally offer personal advice / counselling in portfolio compilation except as agreed within individual courses or within specified modules operated by the University. Written guidance notes will be made available from the appropriate programme office.
- 3.4. The approach chosen by the module or programme staff will be governed by the nature of the course and the type of prospective applicants for whom APEL is appropriate.
- 3.5. Assessment will be undertaken using the agreed procedures detailed in programme and / or University documents. In order for the applicant to satisfy the assessment, it may be necessary to complete any or a mixture of the following:



- a portfolio of evidence;
- attendance at an interview;
- a simulation / practical exercise;
- a diagnostic test(s);
- a piece of work or special assignment;
- an artefact.

3.6. Each programme should define the limits of accreditation for prior learning in terms of the smallest possible the largest possible amount of credit. The smallest amount possible is normally a module, while students normally will not receive accreditation for more than 50% of the whole programme of study, including other transfer credits, certificated learning credits, etc. Where for good educational reasons, or in accordance with arrangements for institutional collaboration programmes, a Programme Board wishes to accredit student learning for entry beyond this point, it will require the approval of the Academic Council Executive Committee.

3.7. Assessment of the evidence will take place by a suitably appointed panel of academic staff from UCD, taking into account the following key criteria:

- a) Validity
- b) Sufficiency
- c) Authenticity
- d) Reliability
- e) Currency

An applicant that accepts a place with credit in UCD who is found to have submitted false or misleading evidence is in breach of the University regulations and will be subject to disciplinary action.

3.8. Applicants for credit using prior experiential learning will be given feedback on the assessment process and may be permitted to resubmit on one subsequent occasion or as agreed within specified programme documents.

3.9. Where it is proposed to allow entry with specific credit, the methods of assessment must be made in such a way that the judgment made can be considered and reviewed by external examiners and any interested party. The Programme Board approving APEL credit must satisfy itself as to the integrity of the evidence submitted.

3.10. Where specific programmes intend to recruit applicants bringing forward prior experiential learning for the purposes of admission with credit, programme documents should detail the procedures to be followed in the application and assessment process which will ensure the academic integrity of the final award. For applicants using APEL to gain admission, the Programme Board must make recommendations as to any modules the student must take in order to successfully guide the student through the initial stages of the programme.

4. Award of Credit

4.1. Types of Credit

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 modules and wherever possible, specific credit should be allocated.

General Credit: is granted when credit is allocated for prior learning but is not directly equivalent to modules in the proposed programme of study. Relevant but not directly equivalent credit can substitute for a limited number of programme modules.

4.2. Award of Credit

The accreditation of prior certificated learning for cohorts of students and individual students is the responsibility of the Programme Board at undergraduate level and, in the case of postgraduate programmes; it is the responsibility of the entity charged with governing the programme. Each entity will be responsible for determining the amount and kind of credit that may be awarded and will be guided and advised by the relevant undergraduate or graduate school or schools as appropriate so as to formulate decisions based on the University's policy framework for APEL.

5. Accreditation and the Student Record

5.1. Amendment to the student record in respect of APEL is undertaken within UCD Registry.



- 5.2. Information on students admitted with credit for prior experiential learning is held in the relevant Programme Office as is information concerning individual applications received by the University relating to programmes contained therein.
- 5.3. Development of the BANNER student information system must take into account the need for a variety of data input requirements in relation to APEL in order to facilitate amendment of the student record and to better inform assessment boards.

6. Review Provisions for Policy

This policy will be reviewed in light of any relevant legal, governmental or public policy recommendations or recommendations from staff or student of UCD.

- 6.1. Otherwise, this policy will be reviewed in 2009.



Tracking Information

Personnel

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Academic Sponsor(s)	Prof. Danielle Clarke	Danielle.clarke@ucd.ie	8694
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Version History

Version	Date	Summary of Changes	Changed by
1.0	Dec-06	First draft incorporating comments from the Administrative Sponsor and Academic Sponsor	Mary Gallagher
1.1	Feb-07	Revision incorporating comments from the Advisory Group	Mary Gallagher
1.2	March-07	Revision incorporating further comments from the Advisory Group	Mary Gallagher
1.3	March-07	Revision incorporating comments of Vice-Principals and the Registrar	Mary Gallagher
1.4	March-07	Revision incorporating feedback from Admissions Unit and final comments from Advisory Group	Mary Gallagher

Consultation and Approvals Plan

Committee/Group	Date		Version	Action	Decision
	Meeting	Circulation			
Sponsors Meeting	10/01/07	10/01/07	1.0	Discussion	
Advisory Group	19/02/07	12/02/07	1.0	Discussion	
Advisory Group	07/03/07	06/03/07	1.1	Discussion	
Vice-Principals Meeting	29/03/07	16/03/07	1.2	Discussion	Amendments
Advisory Group	05/04/07	30/03/07	1.3	Finalise	Sign-off from Group
UUPB	25/04/07	18/04/07	1.4	Approval	Approved, with discussion points for implementation
UGPB	26/04/07	19/04/07	1.4	Approval	Approved
Academic Council Executive	09/05/07	02/05/07	1.4	Approval	Approved with recommendations regarding implementation
Academic Council	04/10/07	N/A	1.4	Formal Approval	Approved

