



ACCREDITATION OF PRIOR AND EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

A Student Guide

Prepared by John Wilcox and Richard Brown of Bradford College

CONTENTS

1. What? - a definition of terms	page 2
2. Why? - the purpose of AP(E)L	page 2
3. Who? - will you benefit from AP(E)L?	page 2
4. How? - an overview of the APL process	page 3
5. Steps in the AP(E)L process	page 3
6. Technical requirements in AP(E)L	page 6
7. Where to begin	page 6
8. Benefits of AP(E)L	page 7
9. Recording the evidence	page 7
Appendix: forms to assist you through the AP(E)L process	page 8

DISCLAIMER:

This guide is based upon current best practise in the accreditation of prior and experiential learning. Some institutions may not have established procedures for AP(E)L; others may have procedures and protocols which differ from those described here. Please check with the Institution to which you are applying that this guide is applicable before beginning the AP(E)L process.

1. What is AP(E)L? – a definition of terms [\(Back\)](#)

‘APL/APEL is a process that enables people of all ages, backgrounds and attitudes to receive formal recognition for skills and knowledge they already possess’ (Simosko, 1991). A person’s learning and experience can be formally recognised and taken into account to:

- gain entry to further or higher education courses
- give exemption from certain parts of a new course of study
- qualify for an award in an appropriate subject in further or higher education

The terms APL (Accreditation of Prior Learning) and APEL (Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning) generally describe the same process, but there is a difference in the nature of the evidence provided to support a candidate’s claim for recognition of previous qualifications or experience.

APL generally refers to the situation when the candidate has attended relevant organised prior-learning which has been assessed by the learning provider, and for which certificates are awarded on completion.

APEL generally refers to incidental prior learning which is un-assessed. Such learning may be gained through unstructured experiences, arising from leisure pursuits, family experiences and work. It also includes un-assessed formal training courses. Certificates may or may not be available as evidence that the learning has taken place.

2. Why? – explaining the purpose of AP(E)L [\(Back\)](#)

APL and APEL improve access to education and training and the awarding of academic, vocational and professional qualifications by recognising that learning is continuous, taking place at work, home and at leisure, as well as in the classroom. The process provides a route for recognising your achievements and allows those achievements to contribute towards a qualification, a single module of study or a whole programme of study.

One thing AP(E)L is not: it is not credit for life experiences. You will not receive recognition for what you have experienced in life. Although all that you have learned in life may be of value to you, the AP(E)L process focuses on and gives credit for your attainments, skills and knowledge – in other words, your ‘competences’.

3. Who? – will you benefit from AP(E)L? [\(Back\)](#)

APL and APEL are of particular value to:

- Mature students returning to education who lack the formal qualifications required for entry to a course of study. APEL can be used to gain access to a course of further or higher education.
- Students of all ages who wish to study overseas, and whose domestic qualifications are not automatically accepted for entry to the overseas course of study. Here, APL can be used to gain access to the course of study.
- Past students who have previous further and higher educational qualifications but who now seek to add to those qualifications in order to broaden their expertise or change careers. APL can be used to avoid repeating specific modules of learning by providing evidence that prior learning has already taken place.
- Students who wish to return to courses of study that have been interrupted by work or family commitments. Again, APL can provide evidence that prior learning has occurred.

- Those who are seeking the award of professional qualifications and need to provide evidence of specific training and practical work experience. APL and APEL provide the framework for collecting and presenting the evidence that is required.
- Students on full or part-time courses who wish to gain recognition (using APEL) for informal learning that has taken place through work or leisure –related activities.

4. How? – an overview of the AP(E)L process [*\(Back\)*](#)

Although the AP(E)L process can be used to gain exceptional entry to or exemption from a programme of study, this is not its primary purpose. The AP(E)L process focuses on assessment and certification of the prior learning and experience. At the end of the process, a successful candidate could be awarded:

- Entry to an academic course of study
- Exemption from elements of the proposed course of study
- Credit points towards an academic qualification
- Units/modules recognised by a Certificate of Achievement
- Units/modules accumulated towards a full qualification
- A full qualification.

These outcomes are based on an examination of the principal objectives and competences of the courses prescribed by the institution to which you are applying. Your prior qualifications and experience are compared against those objectives and competences. For the prior learning and experience to be deemed to be of value, you must demonstrate a good match between your prior learning and experience and the specified learning objectives and competences. This is the essence of the AP(E)L process.

5. Steps in the AP(E)L process [*\(Back\)*](#)

The AP(E)L process is essentially about three processes:

- identifying what a person can do
- equating those skills and knowledge with specific standards or requirements and
- crediting the learner in an appropriate manner

These processes take five steps to complete. These are:

- i. Candidate profiling
- ii. Gathering the evidence
- iii. Assessing the evidence
- iv. Accreditation
- v. Review of progress

These are discussed in more detail below.

However, before embarking on the AP(E)L process, it is worthwhile having an introductory discussion with the institution to see if the process is likely to be valuable and useful to you.

Step one: Candidate profiling

Should the preliminary discussions reveal that you will benefit from the AP(E)L process, you will be invited to begin the AP(E)L process. The first step will normally be to attend a profiling interview so that the institution can assess your needs and requirements; and can identify the potential match between your prior learning and experience to the programme on offer. This interview will also outline the AP(E)L process and make clear the contribution that you will need to make to this process.

It would be helpful if, when attending this initial interview, you take with you information about yourself and your background. For example:

- A current curriculum vitae
- Academic certificates
- Details of other certificates and awards, including certificates of attendance at short courses and professional qualifications

After the interview, the institution will recommend what action you will need to take if the AP(E)L process is to be taken to a successful conclusion.

Step two: Gathering the evidence

You must gather evidence about your previous qualifications and experience to support your claim for credit towards the new qualification you are seeking. The sort of evidence that you will need to compile is as follows:

- i. Details of previous courses you have studied, supported by certificates showing that you successfully completed them
 - ii. A personal report of your accomplishments and skills relevant to the criteria or learning outcomes for which you wish to receive recognition. This should be supported by a statement from an independent referee.
 - iii. Copies of reports, and documents you may have written, supported by witness statements that the documents are your own work
 - iv. Copies of presentations you have made (again, supported by witness statements)
 - v. Copies of work instructions you carry out (plus witness statements confirming your capability to undertake them successfully)
- Etc, etc

You have the evidence and only you can provide it: the institution cannot gather this evidence for you. However, the institution will assist you in this task by:

- providing self-assessment checklists for you to complete
- supplying written guidelines & videos
- appointing an AP(E)L tutor who will organise group work-shops and regular one-to-one discussions with AP(E)L students throughout this stage.

This evidence of your skills, expertise, knowledge and understanding needs to be matched against the learning outcomes and performance criteria being sought by the institution. This is often best carried out by the student and the AP(E)L tutor working together in partnership. However, you may be asked to undertake this matching process yourself, or the institution may carry out this process for you.

The evidence should be compiled and presented in a portfolio. This ensures that all the evidence is collected into a single document. The portfolio should be suitably organised and indexed to show the link between your prior education, training, work and life experiences

and the skills, expertise, knowledge and understanding required by the institution. It must demonstrate that your prior education, training, work and life experiences have provided you with skills, expertise, knowledge and understanding required by the institution.

To complete this step successfully, you will need to work in an organised and timely fashion. Regular contact with your AP(E)L tutor can help in establishing (and achieving) deadlines and milestones, and in bringing planning and discipline to the whole process.

For the student this second step is crucial, not only in its affect on the final outcome of the AP(E)L process but also in its impact on the wider benefits that the process can bring ([see section 8 below](#)).

Step three: Assessing the evidence

This step is undertaken by an assessor on the receipt of your portfolio. It includes the following stages:

Reviewing your portfolio for completeness: a check is made that the evidence provided relates to the standards or learning outcomes being claimed and that there are no gaps in the evidence. Some learning outcomes / performance criteria may be deemed to be essential by the awarding institution, and evidenced must be provided that you have achieved these. Others may be desired but not essential. Your AP(E)L tutor should be able to give you guidance as to what is required.

Assessing and verifying the evidence: if the evidence is sufficient, the assessor records the outcome and recommends credit or recognition. If the evidence is not sufficient, the assessor will advise you of what is missing, and give you the opportunity to collect and submit additional evidence that does meet the criteria.

At the end of this step, you and your assessor should reach agreement on what has been achieved and / or what is outstanding.

Step four: Accreditation

This step involves the final verification or endorsement by the establishment or the national awarding body responsible for awarding the credit or recognising the positive outcomes of the assessment. You will formally be notified of the result.

If the AP(E)L process results in you getting exemption from part of a course of study or credit towards a final qualification, the institution may charge a fee to cover each module or batch of credit that is awarded to you. Although the costs may vary between institutions, you should expect to pay about half the cost of achieving the same learning outcomes by traditional taught class. However, where the AP(E)L process is used to gain admission to a course of study, there may be no charge.

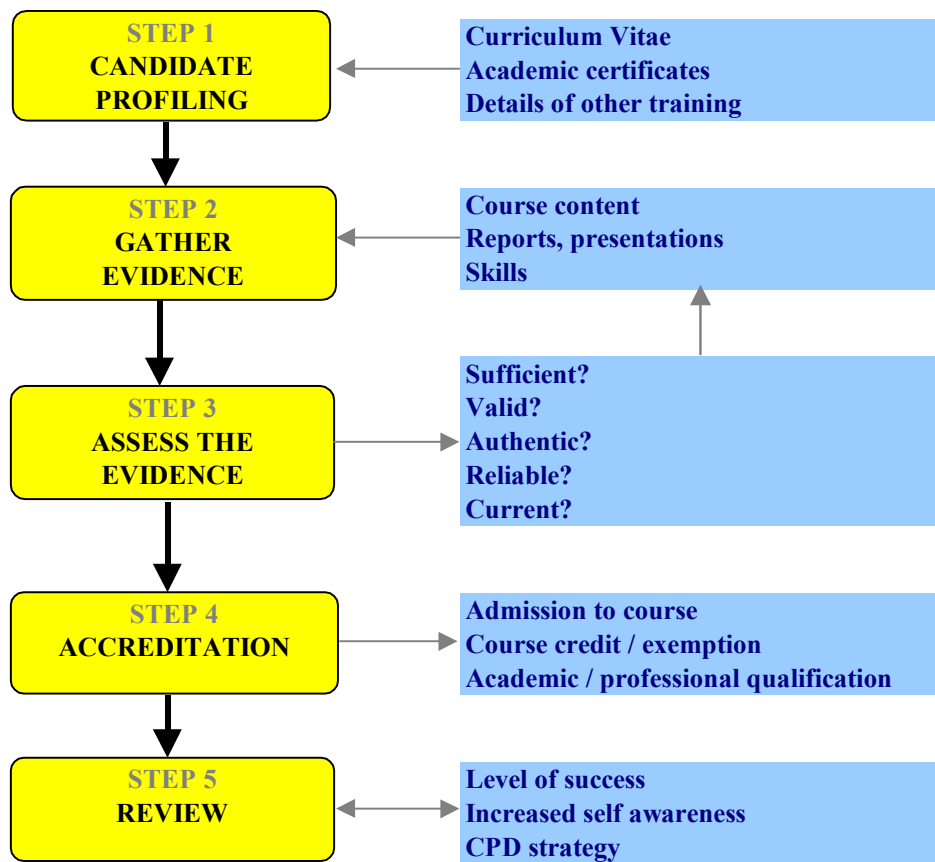
[The institution may also charge a fee to cover the cost of the AP(E)L process itself. Again, charges vary. However, where a student holds non-standard academic qualifications and AP(E)L is used to gain entry to an academic course, there is usually no charge.]

Step five: Review of progress

Once the AP(E)L process is completed, you should review the experience, reflect on your achievement and relate it to your initial expectations and goals. You should also think about what you have learned about the competences you possess, and consider what future action you might take to build upon your achievements to date.

This step is important. It will assist in developing your self-confidence and motivation to seek new learning and continuing professional development.

THE AP(E)L PROCESS



6. Technical requirements in AP(E)L. [\(Back\)](#)

The evidence you provide about your prior learning and experience is checked assessed by the institution (step 3 above) against the following key criteria:

Validity: Does the evidence match the competences being looked for by the institution? Are the skills, knowledge and expertise being demonstrated by the candidate at the level required by the institution?

Sufficiency: Is the amount of evidence sufficient? Does it cover all the aspects being looked for?

Authenticity: This refers to the ownership of the evidence. Assessors need to be confident that the work submitted really is the result of your own effort and expertise.

Reliability: Will different assessors place a similar value on the evidence you have provided and make similar judgements when confronted with the same evidence?

Currency: This refers to the date of the evidence. Assessors must be sure that the evidence submitted by candidate is recent enough (a) to be considered a measure of your current levels of competence and (b) to be appropriate to the assessment given the changes that have taken place in technology and thinking over the years.

Your AP(E)L tutor should be able to provide you with guidance on the 'shelf life' of the competences you possess. The currency of your skills, knowledge and expertise will vary with the pace of change in particular subject areas. As a general rule, for each of the competences you claim, you should be able to demonstrate that you have been a practitioner within the last 3-5 years.

7. Where to begin [\(Back\)](#)

Before embarking on the AP(E)L process, you should have some introductory discussions with the AP(E)L tutor or co-ordinator in the institution from which you are seeking qualifications. This discussion will focus on your background experience and qualifications. In order to prepare your self for this discussion, we recommend that you update your *curriculum vitae* or CV.

Your CV should list in chronological order the various phases of your education, working life and family life. For each of the phases you identify, you should provide the following information:

- The dates when the activities took place
- The role you fulfilled
- The activities and responsibilities you carried out
- Any training you received
- What you learned in doing these activities

Do not forget to include hobbies and voluntary work, especially when you can demonstrate that they have resulted in additional 'competences'.

The CV you produce will assist the institution assess the potential for a successful outcome from the AP(E)L process and recommend the first steps that should be taken as you embark on the AP(E)L process. It will also, of course, have wider uses for you in your continuing career and professional development.

8. The benefits of AP(E)L [\(Back\)](#)

Since the outcome of the AP(E)L process is credit towards a professional or academic qualification, the process is understandably demanding and rigorous. There can be no gain without pain! Clearly, the benefit of AP(E)L is that it enables you to build upon your experiences so that you do not have to revisit what you already know and can do. It also:

- recognises the value of your accomplishments
- shortens the time required to complete formal qualifications
- save significant sums of money by giving exemption from course elements or providing credit points and awards towards a qualification
- assists career development
- focuses on your own development and training needs.

However, the benefits of AP(E)L are more wide-ranging and fundamental than the awarding of credit for achievement. There is evidence that those who complete the AP(E)L process become more self confident, are willing to take greater responsibility for their own development and have a more positive approach to education and training.

9. Recording the evidence [\(Back\)](#)

You should submit the written and illustrative evidence of your skills, knowledge and expertise in a portfolio to the institution for verification and assessment. It must be matched against the competences required by the institution. This will require suitable indexing and cross-referencing.

In the Appendix to this guide, you will find some forms to help you. [The Checklist of Achievement](#) will help you identify, select and match your evidence against the particular learning outcomes and performance criteria demanded by the institution. The [Portfolio Index of Evidence](#) provides a list of the documents you have enclosed in your portfolio, and allows you to allocate a unique reference number to each item of evidence. The [Unit Index of Evidence](#) allows you to match the evidence you have listed against particular learning outcomes and performance criteria demanded by the institution.

Your AP(E)L tutor may be able to provide you with other forms to help you.

Acknowledgements

The preparation of this guide was funded by a Teaching Development Grant provided by the Centre for Materials Education at the University of Liverpool. Thanks are due to students at Bradford College and to colleagues at Bradford College, the University of North London and Salford University for advice and comment.

Bibliography

S Simosko, 'APL-Accreditation of Prior Learning- A Practical Guide for Professionals', London, Kogan Page (1991).

M Challis 'Introducing APEL', London, Routledge (1993).

L Nyatanga, D Forman and J Fox, 'Good Practice In the Accreditation of Prior Learning', London, Cassell (1998).

Appendix (back)

Unit Checklist of Achievement

Educational Establishment: (name)		
Look at the statements in the left-hand column. Tick the box if you think you are able to satisfy the statement and note down how you might prove it. Ask the Tutor if you are unsure about the meaning of any of the statements.		
Candidate Name: (your name)		
Unit Name: (name of unit you are seeking credit against)		
Level: (Level of unit)		
<i>Unit Competences</i>	<i>I am able to do this: (✓ or ✗)</i>	<i>I have the following evidence to prove this is:</i>
Principal Objective 1		
Principal Objective 2		
Principal Objective 3		
Principal Objective 4		

Unit Index of Evidence

Candidate's name: (your name)

Tutor: (your APL tutor)

Course title: (qualification you are seeking)

Unit: (unit or module you are seeking credit for)

Item ref	Description of evidence	Performance criteria or learning objective met				
		A	B	C	D	E