

Recognition of Prior Learning Handbook

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Introduction

The University of the West of Scotland (UWS) recognises that learning takes place in a variety of contexts. Learning can happen in a formal setting through a structured programme of study and in an informal setting through work or other activities such as volunteering. Both formal and informal learning can be assessed either for entry to a programme of study or, where the learning is at the right level, for credit towards a specific programme. This process is called the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL).

This [Recognition of Prior Learning Handbook](#) provides guidelines for undertaking the RPL process at UWS. It is addressed to applicants but will also be of use to staff supporting applicants with RPL.

Types of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)

The RPL process recognises prior learning in two ways: Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) and Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL). Details of both follow below.

Limits of Recognition of Prior Learning

You will not be able to gain an award through RPL alone. You will be expected to build your prior learning through study at UWS. Therefore, credit for prior learning can only be transferred into a programme where that programme broadens or develops your learning. Please see the section on APL for information relating specifically to limitations on recognition of prior credit.

As a general rule of thumb, a student can be awarded credit through APEL/APL to a maximum of half the credit points at the level at which he or she wishes to exit with an award. For further details on maxima, see the Regulatory Framework. Specific credit transferred into a programme of study does not carry a grade or mark. Therefore, credit cannot be transferred into a programme at Honours level (level 10). In addition, where prior credit is transferred in at level 11, an award *with distinction* cannot be made.

APEL Guidelines

Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL)

APEL is the process through which informal learning can be recognised and awarded credit. Informal learning is that gained outside a formal learning setting, for example, through work experience, volunteering or leisure activities. It is important to stress that credit is not given for experience alone but rather for the *learning* gained through that experience.

Support

When making a claim you will be supported by several members of UWS staff, typically an Education Guidance Adviser and a supervisor with expertise in the subject area. They will help you in the preparation of the claim for credit and will be involved in the assessment of the claim.

The supervisor of an APEL claim will usually be the leader of the programme you wish to join or their nominee, another academic colleague from that programme.

You and your supervisor should discuss the claim that you might make, for instance the level and volume of credit.

Where APEL credit is required for admission (for instance, to an advanced stage of a degree) your supervisor should arrange for you to be made a **conditional** offer for the programme you would like to join. Your supervisor should support you throughout the APEL process and provide feedback on your claim at a draft stage; it would be useful to agree at the outset how often you will be in touch with one another and whether you will meet in person or discuss your claim by email or phone.

Proposal Form

The first step of making an APEL claim is to complete the RPL Proposal Form (Appendix 2). To do this you will need to identify your prior learning and suitable Learning Outcomes. You should also start to identify the types of evidence you might use.

Your supervisor should complete the section of the form that confirms the amount and level of credit you will be claiming.

Identifying Learning

Identifying your learning comes through systematic reflection on informal learning experiences. This has 3 stages:

- Look at your experience and select those where learning has occurred
- Write or select Learning Outcomes that reflect what was learned
- Collect and collate evidence in support of the claim to learning

Completing the Personal Chronology worksheet (Appendix 1) should help with this process.

The section on evidence below may also be helpful.

Learning Outcomes

Learning Outcomes state what a student should know, understand and be able to do. They should provide clear and measurable indicators of what has been learned linked to subject benchmark statements and/or level descriptors. They enable intellectual, practical and transferrable skills to be measured.

The chosen Learning Outcomes should capture and reflect your learning. They must be relevant to the programme you intend to work towards and be at the appropriate level. Credit can be awarded at SCQF levels 7, 8 and 9 at undergraduate level and at SCQF level 11 for postgraduate awards.

Learning Outcomes are key to the APEL process. You should choose them carefully through discussions with your supervisor. You will be required to reflect on learning experiences and focus on areas where significant learning has taken place and, crucially, for which you will be able to provide supporting evidence.

You can identify appropriate Learning Outcomes in different ways. They can be taken from the module(s) for which you wish to claim credit; you can choose some of the programme-level Learning Outcomes; or you can devise your own. There are potential benefits and drawbacks to each approach:

	Module Outcomes	Programme Outcomes	Devise your own
Potential benefit	Highly relevant and therefore appropriate for certain professional and/or accredited qualifications	A greater degree of flexibility than modular outcomes	Very flexible
Potential drawback	May be too prescriptive to capture a variety of experiential learning	Still may not capture all relevant learning	Can be challenging to write Learning Outcomes that reflect the appropriate academic level and are relevant to the programme

The SCQF level descriptors: (<http://scqf.org.uk/the-framework/scqf-levels/>) should help with the process of devising Learning Outcomes of the appropriate level. The decision on which approach to take should be made through discussion between you as the applicant, your supervisor and Education Guidance Adviser.

Portfolio

Once your supervisor has signed off on your RPL Proposal Form, the next step is for you to create your APEL claim, which will take the form of a portfolio. The portfolio contains three main elements:

- Learning Outcomes, as chosen for your proposal form
- A written account of 3000-5000 words, or equivalent alternative assessment (see **Assessment Handbook** for examples of valid equivalent assessment methods)
- A collection of appropriate and valid supporting evidence

There will usually also be a **presentation** for claims exceeding 60 credit points.

The aim is to prove that you have derived learning from your experience. Your claim should demonstrate a conceptual and a practical grasp of the appropriate subject area. Remember that your claim is for academic credit so your knowledge and understanding, as well as your skills, should be evident from the portfolio.

It is your current level of knowledge and skill that will be assessed rather than something you could do in the past. While this does not mean that learning achieved some time ago is not valid, it does mean that you need to be able to show recent application of the knowledge and skills for which the claim is being made. For example, a certificate showing that you completed a management course over five years ago should be supported by evidence that you are currently applying the skills you learned and that they have been kept up to date.

Portfolio preparation is an educational experience requiring you to relate your past learning experiences to your present educational goals. It will test your powers of self-evaluation and your ability to present evidence in a clear, concise manner. Remember, **credit is awarded for prior learning, not prior experience**. As you develop your portfolio, keep checking that you are describing what you learned not simply what you did.

The Portfolio must demonstrate the following:

- Authenticity - it must be your own work
- Standard - it should be at the appropriate academic level
- Breadth - it should demonstrate a balance between theoretical knowledge and practical application
- Relevance - it should relate to the programme you wish to join
- Currency - learning should be up to date

Written Account

You should use the written account to provide context for your evidence and explain the learning you have achieved. It should complement your evidence and pull it into an academic framework.

The account should typically be 3000-5000 words. It should be properly referenced (see below) and demonstrate clearly how your learning has progressed.

The written account should:

- Refer to your Learning Outcomes
- Provide a guide to the evidence, linking it to your Learning Outcomes
- Describe how your learning has developed over time
- Demonstrate your ability to reflect on learning
- Demonstrate clear knowledge and understanding of relevant academic theory

You might find it helpful to take each Learning Outcome in turn, using each as a section heading for your written account.

Referencing

Your written piece of work must be referenced in an acceptable fashion. It is standard academic practice to use a recognised referencing system with all written work.

Most subjects at UWS use the Harvard reference system (Law and Psychology use different referencing systems). Details of all three systems can be found on the UWS Library website: (<https://www.uws.ac.uk/library/using-the-library/referencing/>).

Evidence

Sometimes people worry that they will not be able to provide enough evidence. This is not usually a problem but remember that it is the quality rather than the quantity of evidence which is important. You must be selective, do not include everything you have done in your portfolio as too much evidence can make it confusing and difficult to assess.

Your portfolio may contain supporting evidence which can be direct or indirect. Direct evidence is something you have either produced yourself or for which you were mainly responsible. Examples of direct evidence are:

- Procedures
- Project or research reports
- Articles
- A training plan
- Budgets or financial forecasts

Indirect evidence is information gathered from others. It is about you but has not been produced by you. Examples of indirect evidence are:

- Statements from employers
- Certificates/syllabus details from non-credit rated courses
- Letters of support from managers

If you are including evidence produced within a team setting you must 'tease out' your work. For example, with joint reports and projects you need to clearly identify the role you played. This can be outlined within your written account.

Submission

In line with UWS assessment policy, your portfolio should be submitted electronically through the University's plagiarism software. The assignment settings should allow the opportunity for the applicant to submit, receive the originality report and then resubmit, as part of a formative phase. Where evidence is a physical artefact that cannot be uploaded, you can include a photograph or description as part of your evidence and, where necessary, make arrangements to show the original to your supervisor.

Assessment

In line with UWS Regulations, claims for APEL credit will be:

- Double marked
- Open to external examination
- Presented and noted at the appropriate subject panel
- Awarded a **pass or fail** only and will not be graded. Consequently a claim for APEL at SCQF level 10 will not be considered. Credit awarded at level 11 may not be considered for distinction
- Assessed for the level and volume of credit identified in the RPL Proposal Form (credit will not be awarded at a lesser or lower level for unsuccessful claims)
- Eligible for resubmission in accordance with UWS regulations on assessment (undergraduate or postgraduate as appropriate)
- Subject to UWS appeals procedures
- Recorded on your academic transcript if successful

Where an applicant has made a claim for more than 60 credits, he or she will be expected to make a short presentation on their claim. The supervisor should give consideration to how the presentation will be made available for review by External Examiners. For example, through video recording, or through the provision of students' slides/handouts.

APL Guidelines

Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL)

APL addresses certificated learning for which a **general credit** rating of SCQF level 7 or above has been agreed. General credit is arrived at through agreements between awarding bodies, Higher or Further Education institutions, the SQA, etc. Examples of certificated learning include Higher National Certificates and Diplomas, Higher Education awards, and some professional qualifications.

Credit may be transferred into a programme of study providing it is at the appropriate level and that the subject content 'fits' to create a coherent programme. Credit may also be given for parts of qualifications completed successfully. Credit that the University counts towards a programme of study is called **specific credit**. The amount of specific credit awarded will depend on how closely your prior learning ties in with the proposed programme of study. In other words, the University may recognise only part of the general credit gained previously as having a specific credit value that can be counted towards the programme.

Each person claiming APL is required to provide the University's Admissions team with relevant documentation, such as the originals of appropriate certificates, which may be accepted as evidence in support of the claim.

Applicants wishing to claim APL credit should discuss the suitability of their prior credit with the appropriate person. Depending on the School, this may be the Programme Leader, an Admissions Officer, or an Education Guidance Adviser. UWS's Admissions team will be able to offer advice on the correct person to contact. This person must be satisfied that the content, level and volume of credit gained previously are compatible with the intended programme of study. Applicants can also refer to the programme's entry requirements on the UWS website, as it may list some of the qualifications suitable for consideration for advanced entry (most commonly HNCs and HNDs in the relevant subject area).

Higher National Qualifications

Higher National qualifications have a general credit rating and may allow students to enter some related degree programmes at an advanced level.

The general credit rating for an HND is 120 points at SCQF level 7 plus 120 points at SCQF level 8. If you have an HND and aim to build directly upon this in the same subject area, or if there is an articulation agreement between UWS and the college at which you completed your HND, you may be able to enter your chosen degree programme at level 9. Admission to some degrees at level 9 will require you to meet certain additional criteria, while other degree programmes may only allow entry with an HND to level 8. UWS's Admissions team may be able to offer advice on this in the first instance, or direct applicants to a suitable contact in the relevant School.

The amount of general credit attached to an HNC depends on when you finished the qualification. HNCs completed before 2005 have a general credit rating of 120 points at SCQF level 7. From 2005, an HNC can have a credit rating of between 96 and 120 general credit points. If you have completed an HNC and have a certificate from the SQA, it will tell you the number of general SCQF credit points you have. An offer for direct entry to level 8 of a programme will usually be on condition that the applicant holds 120 credit points at Level 7. However, applicants holding an HNC of 96 credit points will also be considered for admission with advanced standing.

Credit Searches

You may have a qualification but not know if it has a general credit rating. Alternatively, you may have gained your qualification overseas and be unsure of its equivalence to credit-rated provision in Scotland. In this case, our Admissions team will conduct a credit search to try to find out for you. This will involve consulting our prior credit database, SCQF and Open University websites, professional bodies, and, for overseas qualifications, the NARIC website. Please note that some overseas applicants seeking APL credit will be referred to the relevant School's Education Guidance Adviser. If we are unable to establish a general credit rating and you wish to make a claim for credit this will be considered as APEL and the above procedure will apply.

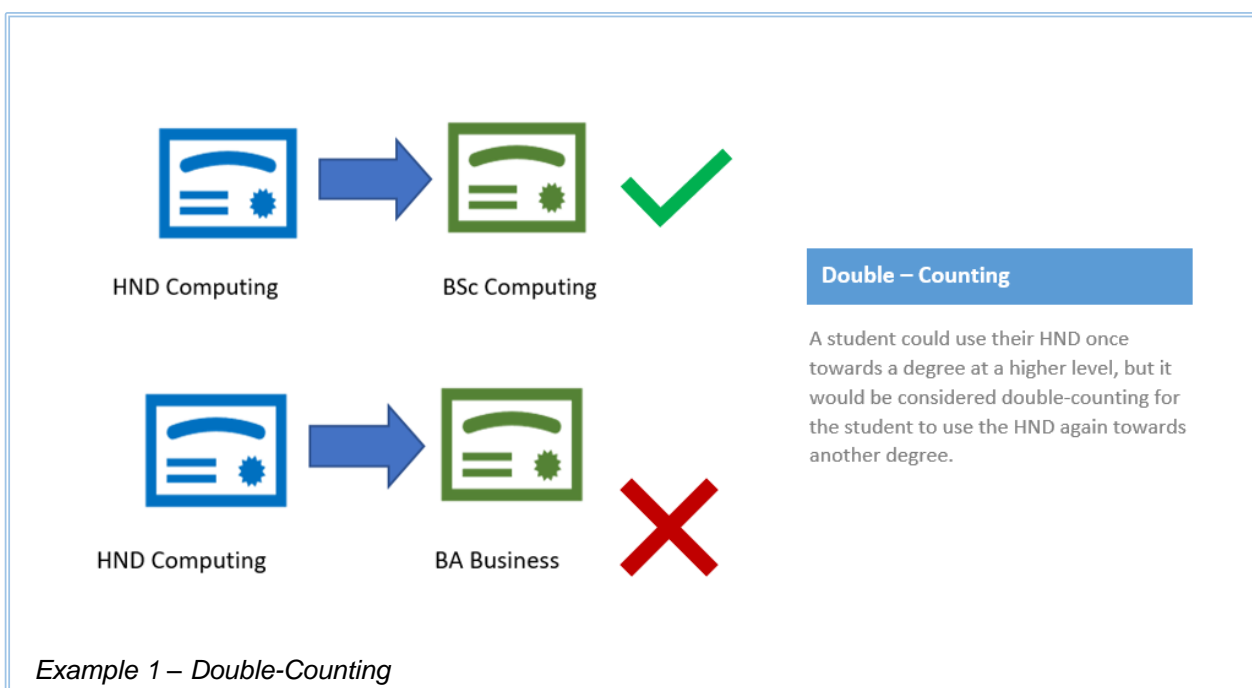
Recognition of Prior Credit – Appropriate Use

As previously noted, there are limitations to when and to what extent prior credit can be used towards a UWS qualification. The following information seeks to clarify appropriate use and should be read in conjunction with [Regulations 2.13 to 2.37](#).

Double-Counting

Once credit has been used towards a qualification and an award given then the credit cannot usually be used again towards another qualification unless the transfer would result in a student building on or broadening their learning.

For example, a student could use a Diploma of Higher Education towards an undergraduate degree, but then would not be permitted to use this same first degree towards a third further qualification.



Building on Learning


Building on learning is defined as a vertical move in gaining a higher-level qualification. This is most applicable to SCQF Level 7-10 qualifications, such as importing a HNC towards a degree.

Broadening of Learning


Broadening of learning is defined as the development of knowledge and skills at the same level which expands a students' understanding of an academic subject. For example, an individual importing their Postgraduate Certificate into a Postgraduate Diploma/Masters qualification.

At Undergraduate level, UWS Regulation 2.32 allows for credit from one degree to be used towards another, but un-related, degree at the same level, provided that there is evidence of "broadening of learning". In this case there would need to be justification that the degree completed and the degree being sought were substantially different. For example, it might not be possible to use credit from a degree in BA (Hons) Business & Human Resource Management towards a degree in BA (Hons) Business & Events Management as these areas are closely related and very likely would share considerable content. However, if sufficient broadening of learning could be evidenced with the input of a subject matter expert (e.g. Programme Leader), then this may be acceptable. Careful consideration is advised and the Programme Learning Outcomes play an important role in this determination.

Credit towards awards at the same level


BSc Computing


➔


BSc Marketing


✓

A student could use their BSc degree towards another unrelated degree at the same level provided that sufficient broadening of learning can be evidenced.

Careful consideration would have to be given in the second example as to whether sufficient broadening of learning would result from studying the BSc Information Technology.


BSc Computing

➔


BSc Information Technology

✗

Note as above: once a student has "banked" a qualification towards another award either of higher or the same level, they cannot then use it again towards another award. Therefore, if the student in this example chooses to use their BSc Computing towards Marketing, they could not then use it again towards Information Technology even if sufficient broadening of learning is apparent.

Example 2 – Reusing credit for same level qualifications

Reuse of Credit for Professional Programmes



There may be times when credit from a qualification may need to be used towards another qualification at the same level. For example, where obtaining a certain qualification acts as gateway to a specific career/job or registration with a professional body that the student could not access any other way. This is commonly found where there are shared modules across programmes.

In being cognisant that there is no benefit to the student redoing/retaking these modules, and in the interests of parity and preventing barriers to study, it is recommended that the practice of insisting that students "make up" the additional

credit be discontinued provided that the credit imported does not breach the maximum permitted or any professional body requirements.

Using Credit towards Lower Qualifications

Regulation 2.33 states that “It is not normally permitted to count credit from a first degree towards a lower level qualification, e.g. DipHE.”

Whilst generally this would not be allowed, there might be times when a request to import some credit towards a lower qualification may be acceptable provided that it is within the stated maximum. E.g., a student has completed Non-Medical Prescribing at Level 11 but then applies for a Level 9 Graduate Diploma that includes the Non-Medical Prescribing module at Level 9. For professional reasons, it would not be appropriate for the student to take the Level 9 module and therefore, credit could be imported. This is not limited to professional qualifications.

Early Exit

Where a student is admitted to a degree with RPL under Regulation 2.32, and exits before completion, they may not be eligible to exit with **any** award if they do not achieve the qualification they initially intended to pursue. Where this does occur during a student’s studies, it is further recommended that where possible the student is encouraged to complete a “Combined Studies” award to ensure that they do exit with an award of an equivalent level.

Double-Counting Once Enrolled

If you have used a HNC to gain entry on to a degree you cannot then use the learning from this HNC to gain further exemption from learning against specific modules within the degree. This would be considered double-counting as the HNC credit is already “banked” as entry credit¹.

Re-using of Submitted and Credited Work

Similarly, students who use a piece of written work for one module should not be able to use the same submission towards another module and receive credit again as this would also be classed as double-counting and also poor academic practice.

Currency of Credit



The currency of your learning will be taken into account when applying for RPL. For example, if your qualification is older than five years, it is possible that you may be required to evidence that your knowledge has been kept up to date through Continuing Professional Learning. Currency is very dependent on the subject and our academic staff will discuss with you whether your learning is considered to be within acceptable timeframes.

¹ If you have a **surplus** of credit that has not already been counted as part of your entry to the University, a portion of credit may be considered in support of your progression within the programme if deemed appropriate.

Appendix 1: Personal Chronology

Personal Chronology			
What did I do?	What did I learn?	How was learning achieved?	What evidence can I provide?

Appendix 2: RPL Proposal Form

Applicant name	
Email address	
Banner ID (if available)	
Potential Programme	

Learning Outcomes (see p. 4 of this Handbook)

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Supplementary Evidence

Give examples of the material to be contained within your portfolio

Accredited Prior Learning

Give details of any prior certified learning that you would like to be considered (e.g. HNC, Advanced Higher). Please note that proof of these qualifications will be required.

Section to be completed by Supervisor

Amount and level of Credit to be claimed:

Proposed point of entry to programme (e.g. level 8):

Proposed date of entry:

I agree that the applicant can be made a **conditional** offer for the above named programme and level. The place will be dependent on the completion of a successful RPL claim.

Name:

Signature:

Date: