

# **POLICY ON THE ACCREDITATION OF PRIOR CERTIFICATED AND EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING**

## **1. Definitions**

The term Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL) covers a range of prior learning experiences. For the purpose of this policy, the following definitions apply:

Accreditation of Certificated Learning (ACL): learning that has been recognised previously by an education provider, and which is demonstrated by formal certification

Accreditation of Experiential Learning (AEL): learning achieved by reflecting on experiences outside formal education and training systems.

## **2. Rationale**

As part of our remit to widening participation in higher education to those with non standard entry qualifications, and providing opportunities to those wishing to enhance learning previously achieved, we are committed to identifying, assessing and accrediting learning that is not an outcome of a formal programme of study. In the case of AEL, we will not accredit the experiences themselves, but the learning that has taken place, where it can be evidenced.

Our AEL policy has two aims:

1. To enable students to gain credit for learning that has taken place through life and work experiences and that can be evidenced as substantial, relevant and at a level in accordance with the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications
2. To ensure that our processes are transparent, fair and robust.

Our policy draws on the guidance contained in the QAA's *Guidelines on the Accreditation of Prior Learning (2004)* in order to comply with the *UK Quality Code for Higher Education - Chapter B6: Assessment of students and the recognition of prior learning (2013)*.

## **3. Principles**

The principles of our AEL Policy, which reflect due engagement with the QAA guidelines on the accreditation of prior learning, are:

1. The availability of AEL will be publicised to all prospective and current students on our website, in our prospectuses and in relevant programme documentation.
2. Each School will designate an AEL contact that prospective and current students can contact initially to explore a potential claim for AEL for their chosen programme of study.
3. Potential students will have access to the guidelines for our AEL procedures, and the details of the support that will be offered in supporting an AEL claim.
4. We will identify procedures to support students in making a claim for AEL, which may either be at the School level as a short course or via a designated member of staff, or via the website.
5. Credit may be awarded at levels 3,4,5,6 or 7.
6. General credit will be awarded against option modules. Award Boards consider recommendations for general credit.

7. Specific credit will be awarded against core or option modules, professional body requirements allowing. Subject Area Boards consider recommendations for specific credit.
8. Credit will only be awarded against authenticated documentary evidence of learning and not for specific experiences; it is the achievement or outcomes of learning that is being accredited.
9. All applications for AEL will be considered by the School AEL panel which will make recommendations to the appropriate School Assessment Board. Award of credit for ACL will be made by the appropriate School Assessment Board.
10. All AEL decisions will be governed by Assessment Board regulations.
11. Credit awarded for AEL and ACL will be recorded on a student's transcript.
12. The total amount of credit for which ACL and AEL can be claimed is defined in our Academic Regulations.
13. Training will be made available to staff associated with providing support and guidance to students and making judgements regarding AEL assessment.

#### **4. Information available**

Information will be made available to students in the following ways:

1. Publication on the website of:
  - This policy
  - The process for making a claim
  - The support available to students and prospective students on making a claim, including a named contact in each School
2. Inclusion in our prospectuses, in print or online, and in information relating to our programmes of study, of a general statement on our policy, process and support for making a claim with a link to the website indicating where more detailed information is available.
3. Inclusion in information relating to a programme of study any specific arrangements for making a claim for AEL that relates to that programme of study, e.g. short courses available to support AEL claims to the programme. Where a short course is offered, a student handbook for the short course will be made available to students.

Information will be made available to staff on the guidance available to support those involved in supporting students or assessing an AEL claim.

Information on this policy will be included in the External Examiners' Handbook.

#### **5. Collaborative partners**

Collaborative partners will be expected to have equivalent processes for the accreditation of learning in place. Award of credit will be made by the appropriate assessment board.

#### **6. Updating policy**

The AEL policy will be the responsibility of Quality and Standards Committee, which will review it on a periodic basis and make recommendations to Academic Board.

## **7. PROCESS – ACCREDITATION OF CERTIFICATED LEARNING**

Students may apply prior to entry to a programme, or post entry. Where the claim is against an entire stage of a programme, e.g. level 4 of an undergraduate degree, application must be made prior to entry. Students may also apply for credit against individual modules. The use of ACL for advanced standing should not be confused with the admissions regulations as set out in the programme specification for a named award that may allow entry with advanced standing to a particular stage of the award; or with articulation to a level of a programme, the detail of which is set out in the Quality Manual.

Double counting of credit should be avoided. Once credit has been granted for specific learning, the same learning cannot normally be used to gain credit towards any other programme, except for a higher level study.

The student will be required to provide certificated evidence (for example module specifications, transcripts, award descriptors) that demonstrate the ways in which the learning outcomes of specified modules, or the programme level, have been met. This will be mapped against the FHEQ level descriptor for general credit or module ILOs for specific credit. The decision is made by the relevant programme leader or programme admissions tutor.

## **8. PROCESS – ACCREDITATION OF EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING**

### **8.1 Timescales**

AEL may be considered prior to entry to a programme, or a student supported to submit an AEL claim to cover elements of the programme during their programme of study. Where AEL constitutes part of the entry requirements for a programme, students may not be enrolled onto that programme prior to a School AEL Panel approving their claim.

### **8.2 Process**

It is the responsibility of each School to ensure that information regarding processes for making claims for AEL is available to students or prospective students, and to ensure that mechanisms are available for supporting students making claims for AEL.

Each School will appoint an AEL Coordinator and an AEL Administrator who will manage claims within the School.

Students are responsible for providing documented, authenticated evidence of experiential learning, normally in the form of a portfolio. This will be mapped against the FHEQ level descriptor for general credit or module ILOs for specific credit. AEL may be claimed prior to entry to a programme, or a portfolio constructed after entry to claim accreditation against set modules on the programme. In making claims, students may be supported via

- AEL Short course to provide both group and individual support and guidance in compiling an AEL portfolio; an AEL Short Course proforma is available to support Schools in devising short courses, which need to be approved via School Quality Standing Committees;
- AEL website;
- Individual support provided by a named contact in the School

The award of credit for experiential learning is an academic judgement and while students may appeal on procedural matters they may not contest the academic judgement of assessment boards.

### **8.3 AEL Coordinator**

The AEL Coordinator will be an academic member of staff who is responsible for the academic arrangements for AEL. They will advise a student on the process, the levels of learning to be evidenced and in consultation with relevant programme and module leaders advise on the types of evidence that will be appropriate in the portfolio. Where an AEL Short Course is offered in support of the programme, the AEL Coordinator will be responsible for ensuring that the short course is run and will strongly encourage the student to participate in order to access the support available. They will advise students of deadlines for ensuring that their portfolio is considered by the AEL Panel.

### **8.4 AEL Administrator**

The AEL Administrator will provide students with information about support available for making AEL claims, and short courses available to them. The Administrator will convene the AEL Panel and ensure that appropriate levels of credit are entered onto the student's record.

### **8.5 AEL Assessor**

All portfolios will be reviewed by an academic member of staff who will determine whether the evidence presented is sufficient, at the right level and properly authenticated.

### **8.6 AEL Panel**

AEL panels are responsible for ensuring that the assessment of portfolios is made in a consistent manner, and that the evidence presented meets the learning outcomes.

The School AEL Panel will be responsible for considering the claim of each student via the report of the academic assessor. The panel will recommend whether the claim be accepted or rejected, and their recommendation will be considered by the appropriate assessment board. If the claim relates solely to admission, and no UEL credit is awarded, ratification by the assessment board is not required.

AEL panels will normally be convened prior to the start of each Semester in order to consider claims for entry to programmes. They may be convened electronically where the level of business and timeframe dictate that this will be the most efficient mechanism.

The membership of AEL Panels will be as follows:

- Dean of School or nominee (Chair)
- 1 programme leader
- 1 module leader
- School AEL Coordinator
- 1 admissions tutor
- School Office Manager
- Servicing Officer

The programme leader/module leader and or AEL assessor appropriate to each claim should be in attendance.

### **8.7 Record maintenance**

AEL portfolios should be viewed as items of assessment and records managed accordingly. Pre-entry applications should be treated in the same way as all applications.

### **8.8 External examiners**

All documents submitted to the AEL panel will be available for scrutiny of the External examiner. External examiners are asked to:

- Ensure that any AEL claim for credit has been assessed fairly according to our policy
- Confirm that the learning evidence in the claim is worthy of the credit recommended by the AEL panel

### **8.9 Staff development**

The QAE team, , will provide support and guidance to staff involved in managing AEL claims. They can highlight the information available and where further support or information may be found. Where Schools request it, staff development to support the work of the panel in relation to policy and process may be made available by the QAE team. Staff development to support academic staff in assessing portfolios can also be made available; this will focus on the student's ability to identify and evidence their learning as distinct from the experiences they have had and to map this against learning outcomes and level descriptors when making judgements.

### **8.10 Monitoring and Feedback**

Each School will collect feedback from students making AEL claims, using either the module feedback form or a short course feedback form. Review of the AEL process will be included in the relevant programme Review and Enhancement Process reports, or a short course REP report, with any consequent actions for improvement included in the action plan. School REP reports will include reference to major issues arising from AEL activities, and actions planned in consequence.

Schools will publish outcomes of feedback and actions taken via their feedback mechanisms, e.g. via UEL Plus, in short course handbooks.

Quality and Standards Committee, and Learning and Teaching Committee as appropriate, will note issues relating to AEL in School action plans and, as necessary, make recommendations for improvements to institutional AEL processes.

Updated August 2016 (updates to nomenclature)

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