Annex R: Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL)

Introduction
This section of the Code of Practice provides guidance on the practice and operation of APL.

1. General Statement
The University will operate a demonstrably transparent and rigorous APL process that will recognise relevant learning obtained prior to the commencement of study at the University. Claims for APL are assessment decisions, therefore Schools/Centres/Partners recommending approval of a claim for APL should be confident that the prior learning involved is comparable to assessment/learning undertaken at the University. Decisions regarding the awarding of APL will be a matter of academic judgement.

1.1 The University also operates admissions procedures relating to:
- Claims for mid-year transfer from a programme of study at another institution;
- Claims for admission without the threshold entry qualifications.
The Accreditation of Prior Learning will accommodate claims for exemption from certain modules or stages of a programme of study and should follow the guidelines below.

1.2 Definitions

APL  Accreditation of Prior Learning – is the umbrella term used at the University of Kent to describe the assessment and recognition of prior learning for use towards a Kent award, through one of the mechanisms defined below.¹

APEL  Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning - This is the process through which learning achieved outside education or training systems is assessed and, as appropriate, recognised for academic purposes.

APCL  Accreditation of Prior Certificated Learning – At Kent APCL relates to learning at higher education level, which has been formally achieved, but which has not been awarded credits or a qualification by a UK HEI. For example, qualifications awarded by a non-UK higher education degree awarding body.

Credit Transfer - relates to learning at higher education level, which has been formally achieved, and awarded credits or a qualification by a UK HEI.

Articulation Arrangements – In an articulation arrangement, an assessment is made of the equivalence of the learning undertaken at another institution with that required by a stage or stages of an appropriate programme at Kent. This is with the aim of securing direct entry for a cohort or cohorts of students from the partner institution to the Kent programme.

¹ The QAA defines APL as: “The identification, assessment and formal acknowledgement of learning and achievement that occurred at some time in the past (perhaps as the result of a previous course, self-directed study, or active experience), which is taken into account when admitting a student to a course of study.” See http://www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us/glossary?Category=A#10 (last accessed 31.10.17).
1.3 Parameters for APL claims

1.3.1. The maximum limits on the amount of APL that can be claimed per academic stage and per programme of study will be the same limits as permitted for Credit Transfer as detailed in Annex 3 of the University of Kent Credit Framework:

1.3.2. The minimum volume of credit that may be awarded for any APL claim is five credits;

1.3.3. The awarding of APL will not carry any numerical mark and will not contribute to the overall stage average of degree classification.

1.3.4. APL will be awarded in a volume appropriate to the granularity of the programme in accordance with the limits detailed in 1.3.1-1.3.2 above;

1.3.5. APL assessors should consider the full range of assessment methods so that the most appropriate is utilised for the student to demonstrate their skills and knowledge against the required learning outcomes. The following QAA identified criteria should be considered:

- **Acceptability** – is there any appropriate match between the evidence presented and the learning being demonstrated? Is the evidence valid and reliable?

- **Sufficiency** – is there sufficient evidence to demonstrate fully the achievement of the learning claimed?

- **Authenticity** – is the evidence clearly related to the applicants’ own efforts and achievements?

- **Currency** – does the evidence relate to current learning? Where professional bodies and/or Schools have specific requirements and/or time limits for the currency of evidence, certification or demonstration of learning, these should be made clear and transparent.

1.3.6 Where the evidence relating to an applicant’s prior learning is submitted in a language other than English, the APL assessor must either possess sufficient competence in the language in question in order to make an effective assessment or must direct the applicant to provide a translation into English of any prior assessed work submitted in support of the application.

1.3.7 Any work submitted by an applicant in support of an APL submission that is found to contain elements of plagiarised work will be discounted. Where plagiarism is suspected in a submission from a University-registered student, the work in question will be referred to the School Disciplinary Committee for consideration under the Academic Discipline procedures.

1.3.8 Use of APL as a means of transferring credit between two University awards is subject to the restrictions on ‘spent’ credit set out in the Credit Framework (see, in particular, clause 10.4.1.3 at http://www.kent.ac.uk/teaching/qa/credit-framework/creditinfo.html#credittransfer).

1.3.9 Prior learning will normally be considered ‘current’ where it has been achieved within the last five years.

2 General Credit

2.1 General Credit may be defined as follows:
“All assessed learning can be awarded credit. The credit gained is a general recognition of assessed learning at specified levels – i.e. general credit. When the credit is recognised through the admissions procedure of an HEI as directly contributing to a programme, it becomes specific. The change in designation from general to specific relates directly to the relevance of the learning to the proposed programme and/or modules.”

General Credit therefore represents the whole of the learning achieved on an accredited course. An honours degree would have a General Credit value of 360 credits. Specific Credit is the volume and level of credit which can be used from the General Credit value for APL into another course/programme.

2.1.1 For example: a student gains a qualification in History, worth 120 credits at level 4 from a UK Higher Education Institution.

The General Credit value of this qualification is 120 credits at level 4. If the applicant requests APCL on the basis of this to a similar Kent degree programme in History, it is probable that all of the General Credit value could be recognised. However if the applicant requests APCL with the same level 4 qualification to a Kent degree programme in History and Politics, only a limited amount of the credit might be recognised. This would be determined by the academic staff mapping between the external and Kent programme/module learning outcomes to identify how much credit could be used for APCL. It may be that 60 credits of the History qualification could be used for the History part of the first year of the History and Politics programme. These 60 credits would be the Specific Credit value.

If the application for APCL were to a completely unrelated programme, e.g. Forensic Science, then it is less likely that any of the General Credit could be recognised as Specific Credit, since it may not be possible to map the learning outcomes from the external History course to the Forensic Science learning outcomes. There may be exceptions to this if a programme has modules covering more generic skills, such as research skills.

2.2 For APEL a General Credit value can be awarded to the APEL portfolio submitted. If appropriate, the General Credit value can then be used in its entirety if it can be mapped to the learning outcomes of the module(s) or stages for which credit is being claimed. Again it may be that only a specific amount of the General Credit can be mapped to the learning outcomes of the module(s) for which credit is sought.

2.3 For all APL claims it should be noted that the Kent Credit Framework and programme rules may limit the amount of credit than can be applied for.

2.4 Kent recognise the validity of studies undertaken at other UK Higher Education Institutions, therefore, it will normally recognise the General Credit value of qualifications obtained from these institutions. Note, however, that it cannot be assumed that the General Credit value can automatically be fully recognised as credit into a Kent award. An assessment must first be carried out to determine what level and volume of credit can be used for an APL claim. In addition the Kent Credit Framework and programme rules may limit the amount of credit that can be used for APL.

The Specific Credit value can never exceed the General Credit value of the qualification being used to apply for APL.

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2 See https://www.seec.org.uk/for-learners/ (last accessed 31.10.17)
3. **Advice and Guidance**

3.1 The University will provide clear and accessible information on the full procedures for the application, consideration and awarding of APL. The University will also provide generic advice and guidance to applicants and academic staff on individual cases and to other stakeholders including external examiners regarding APL in general.

3.2 The information and guidance provided by the University will state clearly the terminology, processes and procedures relating to the operation of APL at Kent.

3.3 The University will make clear in its advice and guidance full details of the assessment process and requirements, including timescales, opportunities for resubmission, key School contacts and the process of notification of outcome.

3.4 The University will provide clear generic advice and guidance to both potential applicants and Schools.

3.5 In conjunction with the School, the University will ensure that accurate and timely feedback on the outcome of APL claims is communicated to applicants.

3.6 The University may designate a specific department or section to carry out the functions set out at 3.1-3.5.

4 **Responsibility of Schools**

4.1 It is the responsibility of Schools to clarify and state in programme specifications which elements of the programme, if any, may not be subject to APL. This is particularly pertinent for professionally accredited programmes.

4.2 The School should consider the suitability of APL assessment methods when deciding on the most appropriate form, on a case by case basis, in order that the student may demonstrate knowledge of the required learning outcomes. The nature and range of assessment required should be communicated clearly to the student.

4.3 The School should provide feedback to students on the outcome of the APL assessment.

5 **APL in Collaborative Provision**

5.1 **Partner Colleges and Validated Institutions**

Applications for APL made by students studying for a University award at a Partner College or Validated Institution will have their application assessed and a decision made by the relevant Programme Leader/Admissions Officer for the programme in question.

Recommendations will then be considered for approval by the relevant Faculty Committee (i.e. FEC or FGSC). All decisions will be reported to the APL Board.

5.2 **Programmes Leading to Dual Awards or Joint Awards**

Recommendations by partner institutions for the award of credit awarded via APL will be considered in line with the relevant requirements below.
6. Procedure for the Accreditation of Prior Certificated Learning

6.1 Application for APCL

6.1.1 A new applicant will notify Admissions of their intention to claim APCL. The claim will be passed by EMS to the relevant Admissions Officer in the new applicant’s School or Centre.

6.1.2 An existing student will notify their School/Centre of their intention to claim APCL. The claim will be passed to the relevant Programme Leader. The Programme Leader will carry out the role of the Admissions Officer, as set out below.

6.1.3 Early application is recommended for all APCL claims. Applicants must be aware of the admission deadlines for the programmes for which credit is being sought.

6.2 Assessment of the Claim

6.2.1 The Admissions Officer will assess the claim for APCL and, if considered appropriate, will make a recommendation for the award of credit based on the available evidence using the APCL Recommendation Form (form 1).

6.2.2 In assessing the claim, the Admissions Officer can ask for advice if he/she feels it is a complex or unusual claim. Advice can be sought from the School Director of Education or the Programme Leader in the first instance. In cases of Postgraduate APCL the School Director of Graduate Studies can be consulted. If required, further advice can be sought from the APL Board.

6.2.3 For each claim the rules regarding ‘spent’ credit must be considered. These can be found in the Credit Framework, section 10.4.

6.2.4 The recommendation of the Admissions Officer for the award of credit should be forwarded to the Faculties Support Office (fso@kent.ac.uk) who will pass the claim for APCL to the appropriate Faculty Committee. Once a decision on the claim has been reached, the School and EMS will be informed by the FSO. Decisions will be taken by Chair’s action, as appropriate.

6.2.5 Claims submitted by existing students should be forwarded by the Programme Leader to the FSO in line with 6.2.4. The FSO will inform the School of the outcome of the submission.

6.3 Completion of a Recommendation Form

6.3.1 The APCL Recommendation Form (form 1) should be completed by the Admissions Officer to indicate how the applicant’s prior learning meets the learning outcomes of the University module(s) or stages concerned.

6.3.2 Admissions Officers should only submit to the FSO completed forms where they support approval of the APCL being claimed.

6.3.3 The Faculty Committee will report APL decisions, and inform the APL Board, the School and EMS where relevant. The FSO will keep a log of all decisions made in order to enable data on the decision to be added to the APL List overseen by the APL Board. This list acts as a monitoring mechanism for APL at the University.

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3 Whether a claim is complex is for the person assessing the claim to determine.
6.4 Informing the Applicant

6.4.1 Once a decision is finalised the applicant should be informed via an Admissions Offer letter. If a claim is rejected the applicant should be informed in writing as to why and what the next action should be.

6.4.2 Where the applicant is an existing student, the Programme Leader should inform the applicant in writing, detailing the level/volume of credit to be awarded. If a claim is rejected the applicant should be informed in writing as to why and what the next action should be.

6.4.3 If a claim has been rejected then any resubmission of the APCL claim must be made before commencement of the module(s) for which credit is sought.

6.4.4 If approved, the APCL will be recorded on the Student Data System through the appropriate mechanism.

6.4.5 Credit awarded for APL will be recorded as such on the student transcript.

6.5 Feedback

Feedback on the decision of the Faculty Committee should be provided to the applicant on request if their claim is rejected. An opportunity to resubmit the claim should be offered and supported.

6.6 Reporting Decision to APL Board

6.6.1 The decision will be recorded by the FSO. Decisions will be reported to the APL Board, to identify trends and to help target advice and guidance. A sample of claims considered by each Faculty will be provided to the APL Board (i.e. no more than 10% of the total claims considered).

6.6.2 The APL Board will not reverse decisions, but can make recommendations on future decisions.

7 Procedure for the Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning

7.1 Application for APEL

7.1.1 Early application is recommended for all APEL claims. Applicants must be aware of the admission deadlines for the programmes for which credit is being sought.

7.1.2 Both new applicants and existing students should allow a minimum of six weeks and preferably one term to complete their APEL portfolio, and should consider the recommended timescales for APEL to ensure that there is sufficient time to have an APEL claim approved before the module(s) they are claiming credit towards commence. Exact timing of an APEL claim varies depending on the nature of the claim and length of time required to collate the APEL portfolio.

7.1.3 If at any stage those considering a claim feel it is a complex or unusual application, advice can be sought from the School Director of Education or Programme Leader. If it is a postgraduate APEL claim advice can be sought from the Director of Graduate Studies. If required, advice can be sought from the APL Board.4

4 Whether a claim is complex is for the person assessing the claim to determine.
7.1.4 The following procedure assumes that the assessment method used for the APEL claim will be a portfolio.

7.2 Initial Consultation

7.2.1 An initial consultation should be carried out between a suitable member of staff and the potential applicant. (This could be a Programme Leader or Admissions Officer).

7.2.2 For each claim the rules regarding 'spent' credit must be considered. These can be viewed on the University of Kent Credit Framework, subsection 10.3.

7.3 Portfolio Supervisor

7.3.1 The key roles of the portfolio supervisor will be i) to guide the applicant in developing their APEL portfolio against the learning outcomes; and ii) to assess the portfolio, ensuring it is complete and suitable.

7.3.2 The Admissions Officer for the School/Centre relating to the programme for which APEL is sought should identify a suitable APEL Portfolio Supervisor. This could be the Admissions Officer or a relevant subject specialist from the School/Centre.

7.4 Portfolio Development

7.4.1 The applicant will develop their portfolio over an agreed period of time. The Programme Leader of the programme for which credit is being sought should be contacted at development stage to ensure the APEL portfolio is suitable for submission, both in terms of academic requirements and subject area.

7.4.2 When the portfolio is complete the Portfolio Supervisor will complete the APEL Portfolio Supervisor Form (form 3) and will recommend whether the APEL portfolio has met the learning outcomes for the credit applied for.

7.5 Submission of Portfolio

7.5.1 Portfolios should, where possible, be submitted in an electronic format. If this is not possible then a hard copy should be submitted.

7.5.2 The Portfolio Supervisor should arrange for the portfolio to be submitted to the appropriate Faculty Committee via the Faculties Support Office (fso@kent.ac.uk). Once a decision on the claim has been reached, the School and EMS will be informed by the FSO. Decisions may will be taken by Chair’s action, where as appropriate.

7.5.3 The Portfolio Supervisor should submit the completed Portfolio Supervisor Form to the Faculties Support Office along with the portfolio.

7.5.4 The applicant should retain their own copy of the APEL portfolio.

7.6 Verification of APEL by the Faculty Committee and the APL Board

7.6.1 The recommendation of the APEL Portfolio Supervisor must be verified by the appropriate Faculty Committee. Decisions will be reported to the APL Board.

7.6.2 The Faculty Committee, will reach a decision on the recommendation for the award of credit for the portfolio submission. The Portfolio Supervisor and EMS will be informed of the decision. For existing students the Faculty/School are informed.

7.6.3 If a large number of applicants seek entry with APEL onto the same Kent programme (i.e. from the same professional background), the Faculty Committee may stage a special approval meeting to consider them. This meeting would include members of the
Faculty Committee and a subject specialist to view and consider portfolios and approve decisions.

7.7 **Informing the Applicant**

7.7.1 Once a decision is finalised the applicant should be informed via an Admissions Offer letter. If a claim is rejected the applicant should be informed in writing as to why and what the next action should be.

7.7.2 Where the applicant is an existing student, the Programme Leader should inform the student in writing, detailing the level/volume of credit to be awarded. If a claim is rejected the student should be informed in writing as to why and what the next action should be.

7.7.3 If a claim has been rejected then any resubmission of the APEL claim must be made before commencement of the module(s) for which credit is sought.

7.7.4 If approved, the APEL will be recorded on the Student Data System through the appropriate mechanism.

7.8 **Feedback**

Feedback on the decision of the Faculty Committee should be provided to the applicant on request if their claim is rejected. An opportunity to resubmit the portfolio should be offered and supported.

7.9 **Reporting Decision to APL Board**

7.9.1 The decision will be recorded by the FSO. Decisions will be reported to the APL Board, to identify trends and to help target advice and guidance. A sample of the portfolio submissions considered by each Faculty will be provided to the APL Board (i.e. no more than 10% of the total claims considered).

7.9.2 The APL Board will not reverse decisions, but can make recommendations on future decisions.

8. **Procedure for Credit Transfer**

8.1 **Application for Credit Transfer**

8.1.1 Where formal prior learning has taken place at a UK HEI it will be regarded as Credit Transfer and may be processed as below.

8.1.2 Admissions Officers, in consultation with appropriate Directors of Studies, are authorised to approve requests for Credit Transfer within the limits specified in Annex 3 of the Credit Framework which are supported by official transcripts or equivalent provided that they are satisfied that the applicant has achieved learning outcomes equivalent to those of the stage(s) or module(s) from which exemption is to be granted.

8.1.3 For an existing student making a Credit Transfer claim the Programme Leader will carry out the role of the Admissions Officer.

8.1.4 In line with other forms of APL the level and volume of credits from which the applicant is granted exemption may be less than those on which the application is based.

8.1.5 A record of all such Credit Transfer decisions and a copy of the evidence on which they were based should be kept by the Admissions Officer concerned. These records will be reported annually in the Autumn Term by the Admissions Officer to the relevant Faculty Committee for sampling and monitoring purposes.
8.1.6 In assessing a claim for Credit Transfer, the Admissions Officer can ask for advice if he/she feels it is a complex or unusual claim. Advice can be sought from the School Director of Education or the Programme Leader in the first instance. In cases of Postgraduate Credit Transfer claims the School Director of Graduate Studies can be consulted. If required, further advice can be sought from the APL Board.

8.1.7 For each claim the rules regarding ‘spent’ credit must be considered. These can be found in the Credit Framework, section 10.4.

8.2 Informing the Applicant

8.2.1 Once a decision is finalised the applicant should be informed via an Admissions Offer letter. If a claim is rejected the applicant should be informed in writing as to why and what the next action should be.

8.2.2 Where the applicant is an existing student, the Programme Leader should inform the applicant in writing, detailing the level/volume of credit to be awarded. If a claim is rejected the applicant should be informed in writing as to why and what the next action should be.

8.2.3 If a claim has been rejected then any resubmission of the Credit Transfer claim must be made before commencement of the module(s) for which credit is sought.

8.2.4 The Credit Transfer should be recorded on the Student Data System through the appropriate mechanism.

8.2.5 Credit awarded for APL will be recorded as such on the student transcript.

8.3 Feedback

Feedback on the decision of the Admissions Officer should be provided to the applicant on request if their claim is rejected. An opportunity to resubmit the claim should be offered and supported.

8.4 Credit Transfer – Validated Institutions and Partner Colleges

Credit Transfer claims originating from students studying for Kent awards at Partner Institutions (Validated Institutions and Partner Colleges) must be submitted to the appropriate Faculty Committee for consideration.

8.5 Completion of a Recommendation Form

8.5.1 The Recommendation Form: Credit Transfer – Partner Institutions (form 2) should be completed by the relevant Programme Leader/Admissions Officer for the programme in question, to indicate how the applicant’s prior learning meets the learning outcomes of the University module(s) or stages concerned.

8.5.2 Completed forms should be submitted as follows:
   - Partner Colleges – via the PDO.
   - Validated Institutions – via the Quality Assurance Office (QAO) (qa@kent.ac.uk).

8.5.3 Forms should only be submitted where the Partner Institution supports approval of the Credit Transfer being claimed.

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5 Whether a claim is complex is for the person assessing the claim to determine.
8.5.4 Forms will be forwarded to the FSO for consideration of the appropriate Faculty Committee. Once a decision on the claim has been reached, the Partner Institution will be informed by the FSO/QAO as applicable. Decisions will be taken by Chair’s action, as appropriate.

9. Procedure for Establishing Articulation Agreements

9.1 The University will consider entering into articulation agreements with institutions that have satisfied the requirements for pre-collaborative institutional approval as set out in Collaborative Provision: Policies and Procedures: Part 1 - Development of New Collaborative Provision.

9.2 In an articulation arrangement, an assessment is made of the equivalence of the learning undertaken at another institution or with that required by a stage or stages of an appropriate programme of study at Kent, with the aim of securing direct entry via a suitable APL protocol for an agreed cohort or cohorts of students from the partner institution to a specified Kent programme.

9.2.1 Such APL protocols should be based on a mapping of the equivalence, in terms of level, volume and relevance, of learning outcomes arising from modules considered cognate between appropriate programmes at each party. The APL assessment must be undertaken by an appropriate member of academic staff in the subject area at Kent. Such assessments must comply with the limits on the amount of credit that might be awarded via APL as set out in Annex 3 of Kent’s Credit Framework for Taught Programmes of Study.

9.3 Quality Assurance

9.3.1 Articulation arrangements must conform to the requirements of this Annex.

9.3.2 The School undertaking the APL protocol will be responsible for ensuring that it conforms to the requirements of Annex R. The Quality Assurance Office will advise on this process.

9.3.3 Any APL protocol must be ratified by the appropriate Faculty Committee of the University prior to the admission of any cohort of student to a Kent programme by this means.

9.3.4 Following the approval of the APL protocol, any amendments to the learning outcomes of any of the modules upon which the initial assessment of the equivalence of learning must be reported by the parties. Any such amendment will require reassessment of the APL Protocol and its reconfirmation by the appropriate Faculty Committee prior to the admission of further cohorts of students by this means.

10. Further Guidance

The following guidance documents are available to support the submission of APL claims:

- Guidance for Applicants/Students;
- Guidance for Staff;
- Example Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) Portfolio.