Accreditation of Prior (Experiential) Learning

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1. **Background**

1.1 The term AP(E)L is used generically to include the accreditation of certificated, non-certificated, work-based and experiential learning.

1.2 The provision of AP(E)L, Accreditation of Prior (Experiential) Learning, aims to demonstrate TVU’s commitment within its mission to support mass participation in further and higher education. AP(E)L also supports TVU’s mission to develop and sustain partnerships with external organisations and other providers.

1.3 AP(E)L enables people to obtain credit (recognition) for learning taking place:
   * wherever, including in the workplace and in the community;
   * however, including in the classroom, in the workplace, via in-company courses and private independent study;
   * whenever, at prescribed and non-prescribed times and ages.

1.4 Previous learning, as well as current learning can also be recognised as long as the learning is up to date.

1.5 AP(E)L is a process whereby students can gain credit for prior and current learning; credit is an award in its own right as well as a contribution to a national and/or a University award.

1.6 AP(E)L is available to any individual and all students of the University at any level and will be clearly reflected in institutional documentation and programme information, including access and admission services.

1.7 All modules and programmes will include the possibility of gaining credit via AP(E)L. As AP(E)L involves judgement about relevant knowledge at an agreed level/standard, it should be subject to accepted assessment practices within the University. AP(E)L students must demonstrate that they have met the learning outcomes. However, this may be achieved by successfully completing equivalent, but not necessarily the same assignments. Credit is awarded for the evidence of learning not for experience alone.

1.8 Credit Accumulation and Transfer Scheme, CATS, promotes the mobility of students between institutions world-wide, allowing learning which has been achieved in one location, e.g. in one University, to be recognised in another. Thus students can join TVU bringing with them credits based upon learning undertaken elsewhere. Conversely, students who have studied with or at TVU can transfer to another institution taking their credits with them. It also enables the transfer of credits from one programme to another within the institution.

1.9 The University has mapped all its practices, procedures and regulations relating to AP(E)L towards the QAA *Guidelines on the accreditation of prior learning* (QAA September 2004) in 2005 and subscribes to the SEEC *Code of Practice for the Assessment of Prior (Experiential) Learning* (SEEC 2003).

1.10 There are two distinct areas of AP(E)L operations, for:
   * courses or programmes;
   * individuals.

1.11 **Definitions:**

   **AP(E)L:** Accreditation of Prior (Experiential) Learning is the generic term to include the accreditation of certificated, non-certificated, work-based and experiential learning.
**APL**: Accreditation of Prior Learning is the official recognition of courses / study days leading to certification where such learning has been formally assessed in order to qualify for the award of credits. Where students transfer academic credits gained from another University to Thames Valley University, the AP(E)L Committee may decide to recommend to the relevant Assessment Board that credits can be transferred with mark. This means that the mark is recorded and may count towards honours classification or towards the award of a distinction. The scope for transferring credits to TVU ranges from credits gained at similar credit-based UK HE institutions, to Universities in the European Community where ECTS (the European Credit and Transfer Accumulation Scheme) facilitates the mobility of students and transferability of academic credits to Universities world-wide which increasingly use credit frameworks to facilitate transparency and transferability. The applicant will submit relevant evidence for the claim for credit transfer.

**APEL**: Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning is the official recognition of learning, which has occurred through life / work experience and study, which has not been formally attested through any educational certificate. The applicant will produce a portfolio of evidence of learning when claiming general or specific credit, where ‘specific’ means credits towards a TVU module.

**Advanced Standing** is when the applicant enters a TVU validated programme later than the stage, level or year than that to which a student with a normal entry qualification may be admitted [This definition reflects that of Evans and Turner 1993 The Potential of Assessment of Experiential Learning in Universities Learning from Experience Trust, Department of Employment, London, HMSO]. Students can enter a programme with a previous qualification or other certified learning, where this learning is mapped towards the TVU programme and it has been established that the learning outcomes, content, currency, academic credit and level of award are appropriate and relevant. Advanced Standing can be awarded for a full level or part level and this denotes the point of entry to the programme.

### 2 Structures

There will be:

- A TVU AP(E)L Development Group
- Faculty AP(E)L Committees

#### 2.1 AP(E)L Development Group

The AP(E)L Development group will:

- advise the Academic Board on the strategic development of AP(E)L and credit rating within the University;
- be a forum for sharing best practice;
- advise the University on the marketing and development of AP(E)L;
- actively encourage the maintenance, monitoring and improvement of AP(E)L;
- advise on how national developments related to AP(E)L impact on the credit framework and associated regulations within the University

The membership will consist of

- Representation from each Faculty
- Representation from the Academic Quality and Standards Office

#### 2.2 Faculty AP(E)L Committees
Each Faculty will establish an AP(E)L Committee the terms of reference of which are

- To award credit to individual students based upon a portfolio of evidence of prior (experiential) learning;
- To confirm that the AP(E)L processes and procedures have been followed correctly;
- To make recommendations for ratification by the relevant Assessments Board(s);
- To consider applications for the award of credit (not validation) for courses and programmes of learning both within the University and from outside organisations;
- To ensure that courses and programmes of learning are accredited and monitored with the appropriate action taken, in accordance with TVU regulations.

The membership of the Faculty APEL Committee is as approved by the Faculty Board.

2.3 TVU AP(E)L assessors

These will be subject experts in the area of AP(E)L, credit rating and CATS who assess portfolios of evidence of AP(E)L and will agree a recommendation to go forward to the relevant Faculty AP(E)L Committee. The recommendations will be based upon the evidence presented by the student in a portfolio, which is judged, as far as possible, against the same criteria as those used for the accreditation of programmes. These will include:

- What has been learned
- How the learning was assessed
- How the assessors can be assured of the quality of the assessment

3. Frameworks

3.1 Credit frameworks

The AP(E)L assessors and AP(E)L Committee members will work to the relevant credit tariff viz:

- Further Education
- Higher Education and
- European Credit Transfer Scheme (ECTS)

3.2 Levels

Likewise the AP(E)L assessors and AP(E)L Committee members will observe the relevant levels descriptors.

- For further and higher education the University has adopted the SEEC Credit Level Descriptors (SEEC 2003) covering levels 1 to 8 (previously FE levels 1-3 and HE levels 1-3 and M). These credit levels apply to the levels of modules and their credits.
- The QAA Framework for Higher Education Qualifications descriptors (QAA 2008) apply to the levels of qualifications. They are level 4 (HNC, Cert HE), level 5 (foundation degrees, DipHE, HND), level 6 (BA/BSc Hons, Bachelor’s degrees, PGCE, Graduate diplomas, Graduate certificates), level 7 (Master’s degrees, PG Diplomas, PG Certificates, PGCE) and level 8 (Doctoral degrees).
- The European Credit and Transfer Scheme (ECTS) does not differentiate between levels but works on a year of study principle.
4. Accreditation of programmes of learning

4.1 Introduction

4.1.1 Applications for the credit rating (not validation) of programmes of learning are considered by the relevant Faculty AP(E)L Committee.

4.1.2 Programmes of learning include programmes delivered by, or on behalf of, TVU, in-company courses delivered by the organisation or a third party, e.g. independent trainers, and independent development programmes.

4.1.3 The programmes of learning may take place in the University, at the organisation’s own premises or off site.

4.1.4 The learning may or may not be certificated and can be classroom- or work-based, delivered face to face, by distance or open learning.

4.1.5 There is no limit upper or lower to the size of the programme, which may be considered.

4.2. Information required

When considering applications for credit rating of programmes, TVU requires information to be submitted on the following:

What is learned:
- A full statement of the intended learning outcomes using as far as possible the same terms as TVU does in describing levels;
- programme content and reading lists;
- learning support in terms of tutoring, mentoring and support materials, e.g. open-learning workbooks;
- programme duration, calendar time and a breakdown of the notional hours of learning, contact time, directed study etc.

How the learning is assessed:
Information is expected on the following:
- the assessment package showing in full what the student is required to do in terms of assignments and assessment methods;
- marking criteria and marking scheme;
- arrangements for ensuring that the assessment is reliable, valid and fair for all students, including the use of independent moderation or scrutiny to ensure a national reference point;
- the role of staff of the applicant organisation in assessment, including their training and, particularly in the case of employment-based contexts their working relationships with students.

How the quality and consistency of the learning and assessment is maintained:
Information is expected on the following:
- the operation of the admissions procedures, including any arrangements for exempting students via AP(E)L from aspects of the programme;
- the monitoring of progress during the programme;
- the review of the programme after each cohort of students;
- the process for revising the programme for future cohorts;
- the process for keeping TVU informed about progress.
Prime importance is attached to the question “How is learning assessed?” and the AP(E)L Committees should scrutinise the outcomes of programmes for appropriate evidence of the level of learning, e.g. assessment criteria, marking schemes and assessment assignments. The AP(E)L Committees will also determine the volume of credit, both general and specific. The latter will be achieved by “mapping” the learning outcomes and the levels against TVU module specification.

4.3. The Process

i. Enquiries are made to the relevant Faculty AP(E)L Co-ordinator/Manager.

ii. The enquirer receives details of the process, is given advice on the information required, and is assisted by an accreditation expert in the preparation of the required information.

iii. The applicant submits the application to the Faculty AP(E)L Co-ordinator/Manager.

iv. If the paperwork is in order, the AP(E)L Co-ordinator/Manager calls a meeting within 4 weeks of the Faculty AP(E)L Committee.

v. The AP(E)L Co-ordinator/Manager circulates the agenda and paperwork to members at least 5 working days before the meeting.

vi. The AP(E)L Committee meets and can make one of the following decisions:

• to recommend the award of SPECIFIC and/or GENERAL credits at a given level, without conditions or with conditions (which must be met by the applicant) and/or recommendations (which may be acted upon at the applicant’s discretion)
• defer the decision and ask the applicant to revise and re-submit their claim
• to reject the application.

4.3.1. The decision normally will hold for 3 years or until there is a significant change in the accredited course, whichever is the shorter.

4.3.2. As part of the monitoring process, the applicant will be required to provide an annual report to the Faculty AP(E)L Co-ordinator/Manager.

4.3.3. With a new client organisation, the University will insist on setting or at least agreeing, the assignments and at least second (if not first) marking the scripts. Later as the University gains confidence in the client organisation’s abilities, it may wish to delegate some of these processes to the client, but not the moderation of the scripts. The external examiner’s rights to have access to and agree assignments and marked scripts will remain at all times.

4.3.4. Upon the completion of a programme/cohort, the client organisation will approve the assessment outcomes according to approved University processes and will provide the Faculty AP(E)L Co-ordinator/Manager with a matrix of marks including the decisions reached on all candidates, not just those who have passed.

4.3.5. The Faculty AP(E)L Co-ordinator/Manager will present the information to the Faculty AP(E)L Committee for ratification of the credit to be awarded to the successful candidates.
5. **AP(E)L for Individuals**

Individual students, by presenting evidence of prior (experiential) learning will be able to make a claim for:
- general credit;
- access to TVU programmes;
- exemption from given TVU module(s);
- entry with advanced standing to a TVU programme.

5.1 **The Process for AP(E)L**

i. Individual enquiries are made to the relevant Faculty AP(E)L Co-ordinator/Manager or the relevant Programme Leader

ii. The enquirer receives details of the AP(E)L process.

iii. The Faculty AP(E)L Co-ordinator/Manager or the relevant Programme Leader gives initial advice on receipt of the required information and the candidate is notified of the appropriate process, i.e. either Advanced Standing or APEL.

iv. The candidate is notified of the cost of the selected process.

v. If the decision is made to proceed with a claim for prior experiential learning then the enquirer enrols on the APEL module, which can be taken via a multi-mode approach.

vi. The AP(E)L Co-ordinator/Manager or the relevant Programme Leader assigns an adviser, who supports the candidate in the preparation and completion of a portfolio of evidence. The advisor’s support may be provided using a group or/and an individual approach or supported distance learning.

vii. Normally the portfolio would be assessed by at least two assessors who agree on a recommendation. The advisor may be one of the assessors but not the sole assessor.

viii. The recommendation is sent to the Faculty AP(E)L Co-ordinator/Manager who submits to the next AP(E)L Committee.

ix. The recommendation is ratified by the Faculty AP(E)L Committee

x. The decision of the AP(E)L Committee is passed to the relevant Assessment Board

xi. The credit awarded is entered on the relevant University database.

xii. The candidate receives a transcript.

5.2 **The Process for Advanced Standing**

i. Advanced Standing by Certified Learning from a UK University or a TVU accredited programme is assessed by the relevant Programme Leader, in consultation with subject assessors where appropriate and approved by the Progression Board.

[N.B. International qualifications, ECTS and certified learning outside a UK credit framework are assessed by a subject assessor and programme leader and presented to the AP(E)L Committee for approval].
6. AP(E)L and Awards

6.1 Advanced Standing
Students can gain entry with advanced standing to any stage/level of a programme. Advanced Standing can be awarded for a full level or part level and this denotes the point of entry to the programme.

6.2 The maximum amount of AP(E)L credits
In order to receive a TVU award the maximum amount of credit, which can be awarded via AP(E)L, is up to 50% of the highest stage/level of studies. To complete an award via APL or Advanced Standing the minimum amount of credit, which has to be achieved with TVU is 50% at the highest level/stage of studies.

N.B. AP(E)L cannot exempt from the dissertation / project module of an undergraduate and postgraduate programme.

Where programmes are jointly validated between TVU and professional / vocational awarding bodies recognition is given to the regulations of all the awarding bodies involved in the validation regarding the proportion of credit that can be awarded via prior learning.

6.2.1. All applicants will be treated on the same basis, and a standard procedure will be followed. It is the responsibility of the applicant to check whether the academic credit gained as a result of AP(E)L will be acceptable to the relevant authorities, including professional bodies and national governments.

6.2.2. Credits, which have been awarded via AP(E)L, may be transferred with or without mark. The appropriate formulae for classifying honours degrees and awarding distinction on postgraduate degrees are applied. These formulae are detailed in a separate section of the regulations.

6.3. The Re-use of Credit
The re-use of credit is restricted to the transfer of credits from a lower to a higher award.