

ACCREDITATION OF PRIOR LEARNING

A LEARNER'S GUIDE

Education Development Unit

Access Development

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Introduction

The Accreditation of Prior Learning [APL] is designed to encourage you to recognise your skills, reflect on your learning from paid and voluntary work , review whether your learning matches the entry criteria or requirements of modules within specific courses , and prepare a claim for entry or credit .

APL: A Learner's Guide will encourage you to reflect on your experience of education, training, paid and unpaid work and think about what you have learnt from those experiences. We can help you to make your experience count if you want to get a place on a course, but don't have formal qualifications. Equally, if you want to claim credit towards part of an award, by showing the value of your previous qualifications or experience, we can work with you to support your claim.

The Guide will help you to prepare and plan your claim and produce evidence that may include

- A contents page
- Your learner's plan for an APL claim :
Criteria for entry or learning outcomes for specific credit
- Your reflective commentary
- Your supporting evidence

Your Reflective Commentary

The reflective commentary is a basis for demonstrating how your learning from experience can match the learning outcomes defined by each Course Team. It will allow you to describe, and then critically examine, significant learning events. The process of preparing a reflective commentary is an essential element in managing your own learning and development.

When you are preparing your reflective commentary, you need to think about not just previous and current experiences, but what you have learnt from them. The process of reviewing and reflecting upon the significance of experiences needs to be shaped and framed so that you can put these experiences into a form that can be recognised and assessed.

Questions that you will need to ask

- Why am I applying for entry or credit?
- What aspects of my practice and experience can I apply to the criteria for entry or the learning outcomes for credit towards an award?
- What evidence could I use that would support my claim?

Appropriate sources of experiential learning

Each of the following may be a useful source for reflection. You must decide the relevance of

- Your work experience
- Short courses which were not accredited
- Voluntary work
- Other significant experiences

and how these sources could help you to demonstrate your learning from the experience.

Appropriate sources of certificated learning

Consider the qualifications you may already have and whether they are relevant given

- The programme you are applying for
- The specific credits you are claiming towards part of an award

Step 1: Preparing Your Claim

This is the first step in preparing your plan and reflective commentary and the suggestions listed below are designed to stimulate your thinking. The list is only there to give you some idea of the kind of information we are looking for - please do not think you have to cover everything. If you have different ideas - feel free to use them.

Jot down on your own and then in discussion with family, friends and colleagues your experiences and then reflect on what you have learnt and how that affected you subsequently. You may find it easier to start from the present and work backwards.

What Types of Experience Can you Learn From?

You can learn from any experience you have had which was significant to you in some way.

It may be significant because:

- it was enjoyable
- it affected you deeply
- it changed your outlook on life
- you feel it taught you a great deal
- it had successful outcomes
- it was an experience you never want to repeat
- it gave you a sense of achievement
- it earned you respect and recognition from others
- it involved a major investment of time, energy or effort
- it changed the way you did things

(Making Experience Count – EC:Socrates – Grundvig Project)

Note as much detail as is relevant about these experiences; their duration, frequency and the exact nature of your activity.

Experiential Learning: Skills and Experience

Example of specific questions you might like to consider when you are reflecting on your learning from experience:

- What is the significance of your paid work experience?
- How can those experiences support your claim?
- What unpaid employment experiences have you had?
- Have you done any voluntary work?
- What are your interest/leisure activities?
- What activities have you taken responsibility for and organised?
- Why you decided to apply for this course?

In general

- What have you learnt about yourself, and others, from these experiences?
- Why have you applied for entry or credit?

Certificated Learning

When you are identifying appropriate prior certificated learning consider:

- Have you completed any courses to do with your employment?
- Have you attended any courses associated with any of your interests?

Step 1: Preparing Your Claim continued

The following guidelines are designed to help you . You should always check the specific details with the Course or Module Leader. Questions you may want to ask

- What does the Course or Module Leader need to know?
- What information do I need to gather?
- How do I present the information?

What do you need to know

The Course Leader or the Module Leader will need to know how your

- Current learning or recent prior learning
- Paid or significant voluntary / unpaid work

match the criteria for entry or the learning outcomes of specific modules.

Sorry if that is a lot of educational jargon . Here is an explanation.

Let's start with the criteria for entry or the outcomes of a module. If you want to apply for entry to a programme via APL you should be provided with a Learners' Plan for an APL Claim that details the criteria that you need to provide evidence of.

On entry you will all be provided with a Course Guide that provides you with details of each module. The University has a standard format that they are presented in.

Step 1: Review the criteria for entry or the documentation on the module that details the learning outcomes that you have to meet if you want to seek specific credit

Step 2: Review your experience

You will need to specify how other learning matches against the outcomes of the module. Remember you have to show how it is at an appropriate level

Step 3: Gather the evidence

Step 4: Present the evidence

The next section gives you further details on how to review your experience

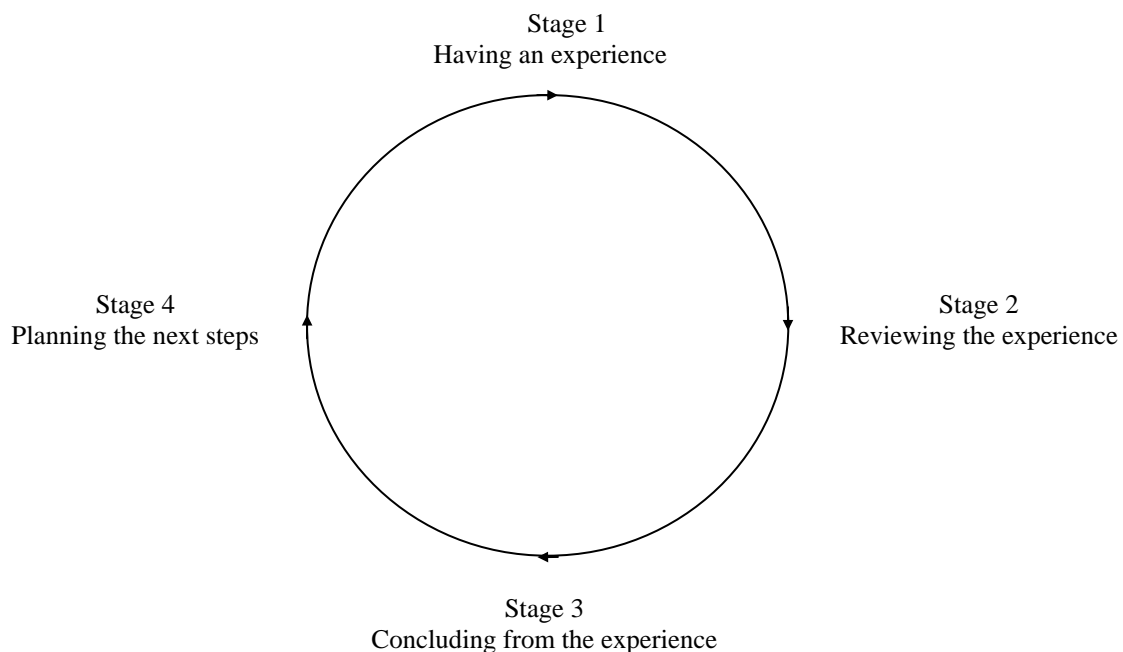
Step 2 : Planning Your Claim : Experience and Evidence

If you are required to produce a portfolio of practice at work, as part of your professional updating, that will provide a valuable resource that you can use to support your preparation and planning. Remember to be selective in the examples you use and choose examples that are relevant and significant given the learning outcomes you have to meet for entry or credit. The key task for you is to show how your learning from current or prior experience matches the outcomes of the specific module. It is not enough to say “ I am a manager “, “ I am a tenant representative or “ I am a member of the Community Committee”.

Your task is to show your learning from that experience.

Kolb’s Learning Cycle (Boud,Keogh and Walker 1985)

The stages involved in learning from experience:



Gibbs’ phases of learning (1998)

If it is appropriate you may want to review specific critical incidents and ask yourself the following questions

- Describe what happened
- What were your thoughts and feelings? What was ‘ good’ and ‘bad’ about it ? What else could have been done?
- If you analyse the experience what sense can be made of it ?
- What have you learnt from that experience and how could that learning be used in the future?

Step 2: Planning Your Claim : Experience and Evidence

Introduction

Now that you have reviewed and reflected on your prior learning, by identifying significant events and any appropriate certificated learning, you now need to plan your claim.

Your reflective commentary should clearly demonstrate:

1. A description of the relevant experience
2. Why an experience was significant and how it relates to the learning outcomes you have to meet for entry or credit
3. Action you will take as a result of the experience.

Learning Outcomes and Your Learner's Plan for APL

Using these outcomes complete your Plan for APL Claim by identifying the appropriate sources of your experience and the evidence you would include in support of your claim.

What Is The Purpose Of The Evidence?

It is vital that the assessor examining your claim for entry or credit can identify how you are supporting your claim

How Will The Evidence Be Assessed?

You should review your plan and analyse your evidence by checking whether it is:

- *Valid* - Does the evidence meet all or part of the outcomes or assessment criteria?
- *Sufficient* - Is the evidence sufficient proof of the outcomes or assessment criteria?
- *Current* - Is the evidence recent given that normally we would expect that your experience or qualifications had been gained within the last three years ?
- *Authentic* - Is the evidence your own work and have you included proof of this in your claim e.g. a witness statement from your line manager?

What Evidence Could You Gather?

Examples of direct evidence may include

- Reports
- Photographs
- Drawings
- Essays
- Spreadsheets
- Video

Examples of Indirect evidence could include

- References or testimonial from employers or someone who has worked on a project with you
- Certificates

Most claims will include a mixture of direct and indirect evidence

Step 3: Producing Your Claim

Presenting the evidence

Your evidence may be based on certificated and/ or experiential / work based learning . You do that by matching that experience against each of the outcomes of the module .

Summary of what to include

All claims should have a cover sheet and contents page.

Certificated learning

All students applying for specific credit should provide a CV

You will need to provide the following detailed information

1. The full module descriptor from the other course and or Institution
2. Official confirmation of the credit you obtained from them
3. A brief statement from you of approximately 250 words that confirms the match between the specific modules and addresses the criteria that will be used to assess your claim

Experiential learning

What you will need to provide is a reflective commentary that includes your learning from experience against each of the outcomes. Each of the outcomes should be numbered and presented as a separate heading. You will support your commentary with reference to supporting evidence. The evidence should be cross referenced and presented in an appendix at the end of your commentary.

Reviewing the APL Process

Introduction

When you have selected the experience and evidence for your plan you can then produce your APL claim that includes:

- Contents page
- Reflective commentary based on criteria for entry or the learning outcomes of the module
- Your direct and indirect evidence

Key Questions

Check your plan, reflective commentary and evidence and consider whether your claim is

- Valid

Have you met all of the learning outcomes for entry or credit?

- Sufficient

Is the evidence sufficient proof for entry or the modules you are claiming?

- Current

Is the evidence recent?

- Authentic

Is the direct evidence your own work?

Reviewing the APL Process: Your Checklist

When you have reviewed your draft and considered the advice and guidance you have received, you can produce the final version of your portfolio that will be submitted for assessment.

Your Individual Learning Plan

1. Have you summarised essential details about?
 - You and your needs?
 - How you can meet the learning outcomes for entry or credit?

2. Have you specified your
 - Existing experience, knowledge and skills?

3. Have you prepared a plan that has selected and identified?
 - Your appropriate sources of experience?
 - Evidence in support of your claim?

4. Have you
 - Produced a draft portfolio?
 - Reviewed your draft?
 - Had your draft approved?

5. Have you
 - Received confirmation of assessment decision?

6. Have you
 - Received summary of your claim?
 - Had confirmation of any additional learning needed?

Preparing , Planning , and Producing Your Claim : References

Boud, D et al (1985) 'What is Reflection in Learning' in D Boud, R Keogh and D Walker (eds) *Reflection : Turning Experience Into Learning* , London : Kogan Page

Gibbs,G (1988) *Learning by Doing: A Guide To Teaching and Learning Methods* , Oxford: EMU Oxford Brookes University

Preparing , Planning , and Producing Your Claim : Your Notes