Accreditation of prior learning policy

INTRODUCTION
The following guidelines reflect definitions and procedures for the management of APL for the Common Awards as taught by the Cambridge Theological Federation. The principles are in line with those of the Common Awards validating body, Durham University, and with the further guidelines set out for all TEIs on the Common Awards website. More information may be found here:

- https://www.dur.ac.uk/learningandteaching.handbook/1/6/1/
- https://www.dur.ac.uk/common.awards/policies/apl/.

The Quality Code sets out the following expectation about the assessment of students and the recognition of prior learning, which Higher Education providers are required to meet:

Higher education providers operate equitable, valid and reliable processes of assessment, including for the recognition of prior learning, which enable every student to demonstrate the extent to which they have achieved the intended learning outcomes for the credit or qualification being sought. (Chapter B6)

DEFINITIONS AND BACKGROUND
As the awarding body, Durham University is accountable for admissions decisions relating to the Common Awards programmes. Consequently, the University needs to ensure that students are appropriately prepared for the programmes to which they are admitted. The University recognises, however, that TEIs have their own tried and tested admissions processes, and extensive experience operating those processes. In light of this, the University’s expectation is that TEIs will develop their own approaches for making decisions about APL in line with the University’s Principles for the Award of APL at Durham and this additional guidance. Where claims fall outside those parameters, the TEI will be expected to refer those claims to the University for consideration. The present guidance is designed to facilitate this approach.

1. APL (Accreditation of Prior Learning) can take either of two forms:
   a. APEL: Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning, which is learning acquired through life experiences including work and uncertificated training, for which no formal qualification has been gained;
   b. APCL: Accreditation of Prior Certificated Learning, which is any learning for which an award has been achieved.

2. Since APL is now current within the sector in increasingly diverse ways, it is important that the Cambridge Theological Federation should:
   a. have a clearly articulated position on APL consistent with its mission;
   b. be able to explain this position to students;
   c. have procedures in place to ensure that any APL policy is equitable and consistent.

DURHAM’S EXPECTATIONS OF THE CAMBRIDGE THEOLOGICAL FEDERATION
Durham’s expectations for the Cambridge Theological Federation’s consideration of APL claims are as follows:

(a) The CTF should operate in line with the ‘Principles for the Award of APL at Durham’.
(b) The CTF should use the APL Checklist to determine who has responsibility for approving each APL claim.
(c) All APL claims should be considered and assessed in light of a clear mapping of learning outcomes that takes into account the volume and level of prior learning. The Mapping Document template is designed to facilitate this.
(d) Should the CTF choose to support an application that does not demonstrate unequivocally that all the relevant learning outcomes have been achieved, the CTF will highlight the gaps clearly and comment on this explicitly within the Mapping Document. The final decision regarding approval of such claims will rest with the Common Awards Management Board.
(e) The CTF will establish the authenticity of evidence submitted in support of APL claims.
(f) The CTF will be responsible for all direct communications with individuals who wish to claim APL, including: making students aware of the opportunities for APL claims; providing support and advice in relation to the application process; ensuring that applicants are fully aware of how APL will be considered during classification, and how it will be recorded on their transcript; formally communicating to applicants the outcomes of all APL claims; providing feedback on rejected applications (if applicable). In non-standard cases where University approval is required, the Common Awards Team will report the outcome to the CTF with the expectation that the CTF will communicate the outcome to the applicant.

(g) Any APL claims for consideration by the University should be submitted – along with supporting documentation – to the Common Awards Team in good time.

(h) For the purposes of reporting and review, the CTF should create and retain clear records of all APL claims, the CTF’s decisions and the rationale for those decisions, and the evidence that the CTF has received and consulted as part of the decision-making process. The CTF will therefore use and retain the APL Checklist and the APL Mapping Document issued by the Common Awards Team, and all supporting evidence. These documents will: be used to support and evidence the APL credit on student records and transcripts; form part of the evidence-base for periodic external reviews; inform the monitoring and review of APL processes across the Common Awards Scheme.

**PRINCIPLES**

1. **Demonstrable achievement of learning outcomes.** Durham University’s approach to APL is dependent on the demonstrable prior achievement of learning outcomes. In order to be approved, APL claims must clearly demonstrate that the applicant has already achieved the learning outcomes for the module(s) or Level from which they are claiming exemption. It is paramount, therefore, that APL decisions are made on the basis of students’ prior achievement of the Common Awards learning outcomes.

However, in circumstances where the applicant may have achieved some – but not all – of the learning outcomes for a given module or Level, the CTF may consider it appropriate to approve the APL claim on the condition that, once registered on the Common Awards programme, the student study and complete specific modules that will enable him or her to achieve the outstanding learning outcomes (and therefore, ultimately, meet all of the programme learning outcomes relating to the award for which he or she will be registered). There are some instances, therefore, when the CTF may support the approval of an APL claim from an applicant who has not already achieved all the relevant learning outcomes but with the proviso that, as a condition of approval, the student complete the outstanding learning outcomes as part of the Common Awards programme. As such cases
would be outside the parameters of the ‘Principles for the Award of APL at Durham’, the Undergraduate or Postgraduate Programme Manager shall forward the APL claim, together with its recommendations, for consideration by the Common Awards Management Board.

2. Maximum credit limits. The University’s maximum credit limit for APL is normally one-third of the standard programme:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Award</th>
<th>Programme credits</th>
<th>Maximum APL claim</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Certificate (HE)</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>Normally ⅓ (i.e. 40 credits)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certificate (HE)</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>Normally ⅓ (i.e. 60 credits)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diploma (HE)</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>Normally ⅔ (i.e. 80 credits)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate Diploma</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>Normally ⅓ (i.e. 40 credits)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BA</td>
<td>360</td>
<td>Normally ⅓ (i.e. 120 credits)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>Normally ⅓ (i.e. 60 credits)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The standard maximum credit limit of one-third applies to the Common Awards programmes.

**EXCEPTION: TRANSITIONAL PHASE (2014-2016)**

During the transitional phase for the introduction of the Common Awards programmes, the University has approved a higher maximum credit value for APL. This has been approved on an exceptional and time-limited basis, and for continuing students only.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student type</th>
<th>Maximum APL claim</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2014/15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full-time continuing students</td>
<td>Normally ⅓ (exceptionally ⅔)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part-time continuing students</td>
<td>Normally ⅓ (exceptionally ⅔)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All new applicants</td>
<td>Normally ⅓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
It should be noted that the exceptional APL credit limits apply for the transitional phase only (i.e. 2014/15 full-time entrants; 2014/15 or 2015/16 part-time entrants), and to continuing students only (i.e. students who are already registered on programmes delivered by the CTF, but who wish to transfer from an existing validated programme to a Common Awards programme). The higher APL credit limit does not apply to new applicants; the University's standard credit limit of one-third will apply to APL claims from new applicants.

During the transitional phase, any claims for APL above the standard limit of one-third must be forwarded to the University for consideration by the Common Awards Management Board.

It should be noted that there is no provision for applying for APL for the Graduate Certificate.

The Common Awards Scheme permits prospective students to undertake one ‘taster module’ before registering on the programmes. The APL process should not be used as a route to permit students to undertake a greater number of taster modules.

3. **Scope of credit.** Credit under APL may be given for any element of the programme at any stage, but normally within the exception of a major project or dissertation.

4. **Taught modules only.** APL can only be given for a taught module.

5. **Full modules only.** APL can only be given for a full module – not for parts of it.

6. **Final or exit award.** APL can be awarded irrespective of whether the credits gained previously contributed to a final award or an exit award.

7. **Currency of credit.** The University specifies that normally APL-related learning should have been completed no longer than five years before the student’s proposed start date on the Common Awards programmes. When calculating the currency of previous learning, Directors of Studies and the Programme Managers should calculate this period from the date when the previous qualification was awarded.

While the maximum currency length is five years, the CTF will exercise discretion when considering whether APL requests of up to five years; in some circumstances (for example, if the prior learning was completed over an extended period of time, or if the prior learning is unusually specialist and/or tangential to the proposed Common Awards programme), the CTF staff members involved in the request may wish to take additional steps to assure themselves of the currency of the prior learning.

8. **APL is not a right.** As specified in the ‘Principles for the Award of APL at Durham’, APL is not a right. Initially, in standard cases, APL decisions are delegated to the CTF and will be determined at the CTF’s discretion in line with the University’s ‘Principles’ and this additional guidance. The CTF will report to the Common Awards Management Board on its use of APL. The Management Board will consider the reports alongside the CTF APL policies and related statistics.

The Common Awards Management Board will be responsible for the approval of all non-standard cases (i.e. claims that are outside the parameters of the ‘Principles’) to ensure that such decisions are made consistently across the Common Awards programmes.

9. The CTF has the right to decide, as a matter of principle, whether APL requests will be considered for any of its programmes.
10. **Student’s responsibility.** Responsibility rests with the student for demonstrating that he/she has achieved the learning outcomes of the Common Awards module(s) from which he/she wants exemption.

11. **Admissions.** The use of APL has no implications for admissions criteria.

12. **The granting of APL shall not affect degree classifications.** The Banner system will record the number of credits and the level of study for which APL has been given as a threshold pass without a numerical mark. Modules for which APL has been given should not raise or lower degree classifications. They should therefore be excluded from any calculation such as averaging to determine the level of the final award.

The only exception to this principle shall be where a student has undertaken a Durham module as a credit bearing short course, and has successfully applied to be granted APL in respect of the same module in a Durham programme. In this situation the mark(s) gained from the credit bearing short course(s) shall be carried forward to the student’s full programme.

**DETAILS AND PROCEDURE**

1. The Cambridge Theological Federation will consider applications for APL, following the principles set out by Durham University in its [Learning and Teaching Handbook (Section 1.6.1)](#) and in the [Common Awards TEI Handbook](#).

2. All APL requests should be made first by the student to his or her Director of Studies by the end of the August prior to the (re)commencement of studies in October. The student should ensure that all supporting documentation is provided to his or her Director of Studies. Upon review and approval the Director of Studies will then submit the application to the Undergraduate or Postgraduate Programme Manager. Applications will be collected by the Programme Managers and submitted to the Director of Taught Programmes for approval and then brought to the Common Awards Management Committee (Reserved Business standing agenda item) for ratification by the middle of September. All non-standard requests will be forwarded promptly by the Director of Taught Programmes to the Common Awards Management Board with accompanying recommendations.

The outcome of all APL requests will be communicated by the Programme Manager to the relevant Director of Studies, who will in turn inform the student.

3. Information on APL will be made available for prospective and incoming students on the Federation internal server, FedNet. Students interested in applying for APL are encouraged to contact their Directors of Studies.

**SCENARIOS**

There are three possible scenarios to consider. The documents in the Appendices address each one.

- **Scenario 1:** New students claiming APL (including direct entry) (Appendix Three)
- **Scenario 2:** Students of the TEI who wish to transfer to the Common Awards programmes (Appendices Four and Five)

**APPENDICES**

1. Common Awards APL Guidance: Definitions
2. Common Awards APL Guidance: Scenarios
5. Common Awards APL Guidance: Scenario 2 (Continuing Students) Programme Map
APPENDIX ONE: DEFINITIONS

Advanced standing
(See ‘Direct entry’ [below])

Accreditation of Prior Learning
Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL) can take either of two forms:
(i) APEL: Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning, which is learning acquired through life experiences including work and uncertificated training, for which no formal qualification has been gained;
(ii) APCL: Accreditation of Prior Certificated Learning, which is any learning for which an award has been achieved.

This general advice relates to APCL only. The Federation does not currently consider APEL requests.

Credit
Credit is awarded to recognise a student’s achievement of learning outcomes at a specified Level of study. Durham University’s APL process relates to what is sometimes referred to as specific credit: i.e. where the outcomes of prior learning within a relevant subject area are directly equivalent to the Common Awards module or Level learning outcomes.

Direct entry
Students may claim for direct entry into Level 5 of a programme. This is a form of APL that relates to exemption from an entire Level of study; any claims should be considered and granted according to the APL principles. Students may apply for direct entry if they can demonstrate that they have achieved all the learning outcomes for the Level from which they apply to be exempt. It is not necessary to establish equivalence module by module, but the student must have covered all the Level learning outcomes. Direct entry claims should normally be made and considered on a case-by-case basis.

Direct entry should not be confused with the more formal arrangements for articulation agreements, which are outside the scope of the Common Awards Scheme. The APL process should not be used to provide an automatic or ongoing entry route into the Common Awards programmes for groups or cohorts of students. This would represent a serial sub-contracting arrangement, which is prohibited by the standard validation contract, and therefore not permitted within the Common Awards Scheme.

Learning outcomes
The subject-specific knowledge, subject-specific skills, and key skills that a student must demonstrate in order to complete a module or programme successfully. Learning outcomes are defined at modular level (in each of the module outlines) and at programme level (in the relevant programme specifications). Durham University’s approach to APL centres on the demonstration of the applicant’s prior achievement of module or programme learning outcomes at the relevant Level of study.

Level
A ‘Level’ refers to the stage of study within a programme, and so to the order in which particular modules would typically be studied. Levels, therefore, indicate the intellectual challenge of a
module within a programme of study. The University’s Level Descriptors provide a common framework for this. Undergraduate levels in the Common Awards Scheme reflect the level numbering and descriptors of the *Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (England, Wales and Northern Ireland)*:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FHEQ LEVEL</th>
<th>FULL-TIME EQUIVALENT</th>
<th>TYPICAL QUALIFICATION EQUIVALENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level 4</td>
<td>FT UG Year 1</td>
<td>Certificate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 5</td>
<td>FT UG Year 2</td>
<td>Diploma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 6</td>
<td>FT UG Year 3</td>
<td>Honours Degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 7</td>
<td>FT PGT Year 1</td>
<td>PG Certificate / PG Diploma / MA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Module**
A module is a defined course of study which is self-contained and which receives a specified number of credits. Credits are gained when a student has passed the module by satisfying the Board of Examiners in respect of the assessment requirements for the module concerned. Each module is set at a given Level of study appropriate to its learning outcomes and is assessed against appropriate criteria.

The minimum unit of credit that can be granted to a student as APL is a full module; APL cannot be granted for part of a module.

**Programme specifications**
In some programmes, APL is not accepted. The programme specifications for the Common Awards programmes outline key information about the programmes, and indicate whether students are able to apply for APL for any given programme.

**Year**
A year is a 12 month period of study, normally beginning from the start of the academic year (for the purposes of the contractual relationship, the academic year begins on 1st September). The defined Level of study remains fixed irrespective of the actual year of study of a particular student. So, for example, a part-time student undertaking a Certificate in Higher Education over the course of two years will progress from Year 1 to Year 2, while remaining at Level 4 throughout.
## APPENDIX TWO: SCENARIOS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>APL / AP(E)L PROCESSES FOR DIFFERENT SCENARIOS SCENARIO</th>
<th>DEFINITION</th>
<th>EXAMPLES</th>
<th>ACTION FOR TEI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Scenario 1: New students requesting APL | APL requests received from individuals who are applying to the Common Awards programmes but are not currently students at the TEI | • An applicant who has already completed a similar module in a previous academic programme, and so wishes to request APL for 20 credits  
• An applicant who has completed academic study equivalent to Level 4, and is requesting direct entry to Level 5 | Complete:  
• APL Checklist for new students  
• APL Request & Mapping Document for new students  

Gather and file:  
• Supporting evidence (e.g. transcripts)  

Seek approval of the request in line with the outcomes of the APL Checklist. |
| Scenario 2: Students of the TEI who wish to transfer to the Common Awards programmes | Individuals who are currently students at the TEI but who wish to transfer to the Common Awards programmes in the academic year 2014/15 AND who could not be included in a cohort-level request for APL. | • A current student at the TEI who could not be included in a cohort-level APL request because they have completed one or more different modules to the rest of the cohort  
• A current student at the TEI who – for personal circumstances – has been unable to complete all the same modules as other students in the cohort | TEs may choose to complete:  
EITHER:  
• APL Checklist for new students  
• APL Request & Mapping Document for new students  

OR:  
(If there are several individual student requests that make reference to the same modules on an existing programme, TEs might find it easier to complete the following:)  
• Programme Mapping Document for transferring |
| Scenario 3: New students requesting AP(E)L | AP(E)L requests received from individuals who are applying to the Common Awards programmes but are not currently students at the TEI | • An applicant who is requesting AP(E)L for a preaching module on account of having many years of preaching experience, and who feels that their experience has enabled them to achieve the module learning outcomes | Complete:  
• AP(E)L Checklist  
• AP(E)L Request & Mapping Document  
Gather and file:  
• All supporting documentation submitted by the student as evidence of their claim.  
Seek approval of the request in line with the outcomes of the APEL Checklist. |