



Institute of Counselling



Recognition of Prior Learning - Policy & Procedure

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	4
SCOPE OF POLICY	5
POLICY STATEMENT	6-7
PROCEDURE	8-10

INTRODUCTION

The Institute of Counselling (IoC) has a strong commitment to the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) which encompasses both Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL) and Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL).

IoC has a process embedded within the Quality Assurance framework of the Institute whereby learning which has taken place in a variety of contexts both formal, within a classroom or by following a structured course, and informal, through work or leisure activities, can be recognised either for entry to a programme of study or, where the learning is at the appropriate level for credit, towards a specific programme of study.

Recognising and/or awarding credit for prior learning is of increasing importance in Scotland with the development of the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF).

An increasing number of Scottish qualifications have been brought into the framework which defines qualifications and learning in terms of level and credit. The aim is to implement and embed this within Scotland's education and training provision to:

- Assist people of all ages and circumstances to access appropriate education and training over their lifetime to fulfil their personal, social and economic potential.
- Enable employers, learners and the public in general to understand the full range of Scottish qualifications, how they relate to each other and how different types of qualifications can contribute to improving the skills of the workforce.
- Support the development of routes to progress from qualification to qualification and maximise the opportunities to transfer credit between qualifications by making qualifications and relevant programmes of learning easier to understand.

SCOPE OF POLICY

The policy covers and defines Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) including Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL) and Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) as they are recognised, assessed and implemented within IoC regulations. It considers the use of prior learning as an entrance requirement including entry with advanced standing or as additional credit for the continuing IoC student. The policy aims to provide guidance and clarity to the student, IoC staff, employers and professional bodies who are involved in RPL. It complies with SCQF guidelines on RPL and is aligned to IoC Admissions regulations and policy.

RPL offers a wide range of benefits and opportunities to students, employers and universities. Students benefit as gaining credit and/or recognition for learning enhances confidence, motivation and self-esteem. Further learning is encouraged as there is no need to duplicate learning. Gaining a recognised qualification can increase employment opportunities.

Employers benefit as work based learning and training can contribute to a recognised qualification making more efficient use of training budgets, avoiding duplication of learning and identifying the best way to meet skills gaps. RPL can form an important element of a framework for skills development and Continuing Professional Development (CPD) enabling employers to show a commitment to workforce development and improve staff retention.

Learning provider benefit as participation on learning programmes is made more attractive with students coming into programmes with recognition for learning they already have. There is a distinct widening of access to those who otherwise would or could not consider further study due to time and/ or financial constraints. Furthermore, retention of learners may be enhanced as students will have given careful thought to their academic aspirations and goals and are strongly committed to meeting them.

POLICY STATEMENT

IoC requires a credit rating to be assigned to all learning imported into a programme of study through RPL. This must be recorded on the student's academic transcript. For credit to be transferred into a programme of study it must have been subject to reliable and valid methods of assessment.

An increasing number of qualifications offered through Further Education Institutions (FEIs), Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), by the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) Credit rating Bodies within the SCQF Partnership (CRBs) and by professional bodies are mapped onto the SCQF according to the level and volume of the outcomes of learning described in terms of the number of credits. Some professional qualifications and short courses have been rigorously assessed by approved credit rating bodies (FEIs/HEIs/SQA/CRBs/Professional Bodies approved through SCQF) and have been awarded a credit rating or credit recommendation. For the purposes of this policy this will be referred to as Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL).

Learning which is experiential in nature and has been achieved outwith a formal teaching setting, or is the result of completion of a non-credit rated course or training programme, requires to be assessed in accordance with IoC's approved procedure for the APEL (see 4. PROCEDURE)

Transfer of Credit

Credit may be transferred into a programme of study providing it is at the appropriate level and that the subject content 'fits' with study at the Institute to create a coherent programme. There are two distinct types of credit, General Credit and Specific Credit.

- General credit, for certificated learning, is arrived at through approval by credit rating bodies (as above). The amount of general credit is determined by the qualification held e.g. HNC, HND, RGN, RM, degree courses and some professional qualifications, not by the subject matter of the course of study to be pursued at IoC.
- Specific credit is credit which the Institute awards towards a specific programme of study. This time it is determined by subject choice. It follows that general credit cannot be applied on a blanket basis to individual study programmes. The amount of specific credit, which is what will actually count towards an award, depends on how closely prior learning ties in with the student's proposed programme of study and is an admissions/academic guidance decision made by the Principal Tutor.

For specific credit to be awarded the programme being entered must enhance or broaden the students learning. Therefore, an award cannot be gained through RPL alone nor can a student use prior credit towards a similar qualification at the same level to that already held. The maximum amount of specific prior credit (RPL) that can be transferred into a programme of study is 50% of the credit required at the exiting (award) level plus 100% of all preceding levels.

It is important to note that specific credit transferred into a programme of study does not carry a grade or mark, consequently an award with distinction cannot be made where prior credit is transferred in at level 9. This should be made clear to students as they may, as a result, choose not to transfer credit into a programme.

Students are expected to build on or broaden prior learning through study at IoC. Therefore, credit for prior learning (RPL), up to the maxima stated above, can only be transferred into a programme where that programme broadens or develops the learning that the student has already acquired. This includes prior learning gained through successful completion of IoC programmes and modules. Students may not use the same prior credit towards more than one qualification as this would constitute double counting of credit.

PROCEDURE

Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL)

APL refers to certificated learning for which a general credit rating has been agreed e.g. HNC, HND, RGN, RM, degree courses and some professional qualifications. Credit may also be awarded for successfully completed parts of qualifications. The student is required to provide IoC with relevant documentation. This will be accepted as evidence in support of a claim for credit. It is the student's responsibility to provide evidence of having successfully completed any certificated learning for which a claim is to be made. If the student is unable to provide documentation as evidence the claim will be regarded as APEL.

Credit may be transferred into a programme of study providing it is at the appropriate level and that the subject content 'fits' with study at the Institute to create a coherent programme. The Principal Tutor must be satisfied that the content and level of previously gained courses or parts of courses are compatible with the intended programme of study. Students wishing to claim such credit should discuss the appropriateness of potentially transferable credit with the Principal Tutor for the programme they wish to follow.

Where qualifications have a general credit rating students may be able to enter programmes at an advanced level if the programme applied for builds directly upon this qualification in the same subject area.

Where students present with a qualification but do not know if it has a general credit rating or if the qualification was gained overseas a credit search should be conducted to find out if an equivalence to credit rated provision in Scotland can be established. This will involve consulting the SCQF database, Open University Websites, professional bodies, and for overseas qualifications, the NARIC website. If it is not possible to establish a general credit rating and the student wishes to make a claim for credit this will be considered as APEL and the following procedures will apply.

Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL)

APEL is learning which has its source in experience e.g. Work-based, community based learning. It is important to stress that credit is not given for experience. Experience is only valuable, in this context, as a source of learning. It is what has been learned that is important not what the individual has actually done.

As indicated above APEL procedures for gaining credit will also apply where a student is unable to provide evidence of successful completion of a credit rated qualification or where IoC is unable to establish a general credit rating or equivalent for a qualification through a credit search.

The student makes the claim to have prior learning recognised. Although the student will need help and support in constructing their claim, the primary responsibility of supporting the claim with evidence rests with the student.

Making a claim for APEL relies on the ability to identify significant learning which has its source in experience. The first step is to draw up a personal chronology linked to academic goals or the areas against which a claim for credit is to be made. This differs from a typical CV which describes what has been done rather than what has been learned. Identification of learning comes through systematic reflection on experience. This has 3 stages.

- Experiences are looked at and those where learning has occurred are selected.
- Clear statements are written in the form of learning outcomes reflecting what was actually learned.

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- Evidence in support of the claim that learning has occurred is collected and collated and must demonstrate the following:

Authenticity - It must be the student's own work.

Quality - It should be at the appropriate academic level

Breadth - A balance between the acquisition of theoretical knowledge and skills in practical application should be evident.

Directness - It should focus on areas taught within IoC. This is to ensure that claims can be assessed by staff with specialist knowledge of the subject matter contained in the claim.

Currency - Learning should have been kept up to date.

Advice and guidance on the procedure for APEL is available to students and staff through the IoC Admission Office. APEL proposals will initially be approved by the Principal Tutor and the Programme Leader. Individuals making a claim will be allocated a supervisor with expertise in the subject area who will offer guidance in the preparation of the claim for credit.

Where a group of students are being considered for APEL claims workshops will be held to explain and discuss the procedure for making a claim. Workshops will be facilitated by IoC staff. Alternatively, for individual claims, students will be invited to attend an information session which may be facilitated by IoC staff.

Learning for which an APEL claim is to be made should be written in terms of learning outcomes which must be relevant to the programme of study the student intends to work towards and should be at the appropriate level. Credit can be awarded at SCQF levels 7, 8 and 9. Students will be allocated a supervisor with expertise in the subject area of the claim for credit who will provide advice and support on writing statements of learning and on gathering evidence for the portfolio.

Learning outcomes should clearly specify how prior learning may contribute to the current programme of study and should reflect SCQF level descriptors and learning outcomes for the appropriate modules within a programme specification where appropriate.

Learning outcomes should specify the cognitive skills that have been achieved, the complexity of the situation in which the learning has taken place and whether the learning has been achieved independently or under supervision.

Assessment will be based on a portfolio which should have three main elements:

- Learning outcomes
- A written account
- A collection of appropriate and valid supporting evidence.

Portfolio preparation is an educational experience requiring the student to reflect and relate past learning experiences to present educational goals. It tests powers of self-evaluation and the ability to present evidence in a clear, concise manner.

The written account should be of approximately 3,000-5,000 words. The minimum amount of credit which can be claimed is 10 points and the maximum amount is 60 points for IoC programmes of 120 SCQF Points

The written account complements the portfolio of evidence. It should be a focused piece of writing placing the learning into context. It should draw all the supporting evidence produced into an academic framework that is properly referenced and clearly demonstrates how learning has progressed. The written account should provide a clear guide through the supplementary evidence contained within the portfolio.

All claims will be double marked and if the claim is for credit at SCQF level 9 or above the assessment should be approved by an external examiner. The following will apply to all claims for prior experiential learning:

- Assessed claims will be presented to the appropriate subject and programme panels.
- Claims will be awarded a pass or fail only and will not be graded.
- Claims will be assessed for the approved level and volume of credit. Credit will not be awarded at a lesser or lower level for unsuccessful claims.
- If a fail decision is arrived at students will be allowed to resubmit in accordance with IoC regulations on assessment.
- The IoC appeals procedures will apply.
- Credit awarded should be recorded on the student's academic transcript.

Students whose APEL or APL claim is not current – ie. within the last 5 years may opt to undergo a 'challenge assessment' to gain RPL. See below for more detail.

For further information please contact the Principal Tutor or Admissions staff on 0141 204 2230 or e-mail admin@instituteofcounselling.org.uk

As an example of how the Policy would work in practice we will use the Foundation Counselling Skills module within the Diploma in Clinical and Pastoral Counselling Skills - this contributes 30 level 9 SCQF points to the overall total of 120.

1. APEL/Portfolio claim.

Students will receive the module descriptor and all module materials. Students will create a portfolio of evidence designed to map onto the module higher level outcomes and the unit level learning outcomes. Evidence will consist of:

- a) short non-credit rated courses that are specific to counselling and may have been delivered on the job
- b) practical experience gained within job role that is in a counselling setting linked to work-based learning that identifies how students embed counselling skills within their practice
- c) evidence of continuous professional development within their role that ensures the currency of their knowledge and skills
- d) any other relevant information that the student thinks identifies that the outcomes of the module have been met

2. APL claim:

Students will be required to submit formal transcripts of training from a credit rated course that has similar learning outcomes. These transcripts must also ensure parity with the credit

level and pointage of the module claimed against. In this scenario, students will also be sent all module materials to enable them to become familiar with the IoC's unique integrative model of counselling which is essential to studying the other 3 modules.

3. Challenge Assessment:

Students who have formal qualifications that are outwith the last 5 years or who have a belief that their experience would enable them to pass the summative assessments of the module may opt to undertake a 'challenge assessment' which will consist of them submitting the Essay and Case Study for the module. Once again, all students who opt for this will receive the full pack of learning materials for the course.

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