APEL PROCEDURES AND GUIDELINES FOR HE

1. Introduction

This document seeks to highlight the need for procedures and processes in addition to policies and regulations in order to maximise the use of the accreditation of prior learning as a tool to support the progression of learners.

The aim of this document is to:

- Remind institutions of the importance of procedures in developing the use of APEL for lifelong learning (see section 2)
- Offer sources of information (see sections 3, 7)
- Offer some examples of good practice by way of content of procedures from a survey of Linking London institutions (see appendix A)

2. APEL: the Importance of Procedure

At a Linking London seminar to discuss the use of the accreditation of prior experiential learning (APEL) to support the progression of vocational learners, a key theme which emerged was the distinction between policy, regulations and procedures (or guidelines).

The distinction can be explained thus: a policy is a plan of action. A regulation can be seen as a rule which governs procedure or behaviour. However a procedure explains how that will be achieved - a particular way of accomplishing an objective; the methods for implementing policy.

It was noted that whilst most HE institutions had APEL regulations, and many had a published policy, this was not always matched by a use of APEL ‘on the ground’. In the ensuing discussion it was felt that in some cases this was down to academic discretion, and in some the academic culture of the institution. However in some cases it was felt that even where the will was there, a lack of documented procedure would have made it difficult for a member of academic staff to know how to respond to a student request for APEL had they wished to.

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1 Collins Online Dictionary www.collinslanguage.com
As an example, a policy might include a statement that all academic departments should offer the opportunity for APEL to all students, or that decisions are made in a timely manner. Further, a regulation might indicate the maximum credit which can be awarded towards a course.

However, to whom should the student apply? How do they apply, and by when? Is there a form? What are the actual timescales? Although there may be a reference to quality processes in the policy, how exactly is the award of credit monitored? How is it reported via academic standards boards etc. etc. It is precisely these sorts of questions which are addressed via published APEL procedures.

As the diagram above shows, the content of regulations, policy and procedure may overlap and matters of regulation and policy will appear in procedures and possibly vice versa. However what is clear is the need for procedures to be in place and publicised in order for APEL to be successfully offered as a process.

In light of this, this document will concentrate on how institutions can support the process by addressing the how of APEL.

3. **Guides to Good Practice**

Indeed, all of the APEL procedure documents will have been written with close reference to these documents. Hence they are essential reading and much of the content referred to below flows from these publications.

4. **Survey of Good Practice**

Additionally to these key documents, Linking London has carried out a survey of good practice within its own network. Linking London reviewed the APEL procedure documents of a number of its member institutions. We then grouped the content of these documents into key themes.

These key themes led to a set of headings, and within each heading a set of questions which have been answered by the documents surveyed, and which could be used as a ‘checklist’. It needs to be stressed, however, that obviously it will not always be appropriate to address all of these questions at each institution. Neither is it intended to confuse by offering too much detail – it is hoped solely that in seeing what has been addressed at other institutions, it will be possible to see if any of it may be relevant at others.

5. **Further Support**

Linking London aims to support the development of APEL policy and procedure. If you require any assistance please contact David Saunders, Credit and Progression Coordinator (details below).

For Linking London partners development funding of up to £15,000 is available to support innovative project related to the use of APEL to support the progression of vocational learners.

We can also offer the expertise of relevant staff at our partner institutions, and of our Credit Operational Practitioners Group, which includes staff with a specialist interest in various aspects of credit including pedagogy, work based learning, quality assurance and admissions. If you would like to attend this group please also contact us (details above).

6. **About Linking London**

Linking London is a HEFCE funded project to support the progression of vocational learners into and through higher education. It is made up of 17 FE colleges and 15 HE institutions.

Our aim is to be achieved through work in the areas of curriculum development, progression agreements, IAG, credit and flexible learning. In working with credit we aim to address inconsistencies in recognition of the qualifications at levels 3 and above and to help developing processes for APL and APEL.

Policy and activity in this area is guided by the Linking London’s Credit Operational Practitioners Group which has 13 members from 9 of our partner institutions in both FE and HE.
7. References


Credit Operational Practitioners’ Group

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August 2008

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CHECKLIST BASED ON SURVEY OF APEL PROCEDURES

What follows is a list of key themes which emerge in institutions’ documents on APEL procedures. Sections 2 to 9 take the form of questions to use as a checklist.

It needs to be stressed, however, that obviously it will not always be appropriate to address all of these questions at each institution. Neither is it intended to confuse by offering too much detail – it is hoped solely that in seeing what has been addressed at other institutions, it will be possible to see if any of it has relevance to one’s own.

This ‘checklist’ of procedures does not include matters of regulation and policy but – as per the diagram in section 2 - it is worth noticing that in all cases the procedures did include a restatement of and/or some reference to regulations and policy.

It may also be worth noting that in some cases procedures were presented under two broad headings of a) APEL for applicants to courses and b) APEL for enrolled students.

1 Principles

Although not strictly procedural, it is worth noting that documents tended to begin with a background and a statement of principles of the award of APEL. This places the procedure within a context of one or more of the following:

- institutional policy
- institutional regulations
- institutional mission statement
- institutional strategic plan
- institutional teaching and learning strategy
- institutional access agreement etc.

2 Roles

- Have all necessary staff roles in relation to APEL procedures been identified and allocated?
- Do departments/schools/faculties need a central APEL co-ordinator?
- Are roles needed for both administrative processes and academic decisions?
- Are there different roles in relation to credit for prior experiential learning as opposed to prior certificated learning?
- In the APEL process, have the separate roles of mentor and academic assessor been clearly delineated?
- Are the responsibilities of staff and students made clear?
- Is there a need for a specific staff role(s) to deal with APEL in the admissions process?
- Is there an identified source of information/authority for policy/regulatory questions?
3 How to apply

- How should a student apply for APEL?
- When should students apply for APEL?
- Are there deadlines or processes which need to fit in with either admissions or assessment cycles?
- Can a student apply at any time during their course?
- Are timescales for all aspects of the APEL process available? Have they been publicised to staff and students?
- Where should a student go for initial advice on APEL?
- What support is available for APEL?
- Is there an ‘APEL module’?
- Is the chance to apply for APEL embedded in any course modules or other aspects of the curriculum?

4 Documentation

- What documentation is available?
- Is a handbook/notes/guidelines available?
- Is separate documentation available for students? Staff? Assessors? External Examiners?
- Are the regulations the only documentation available to students? Are these user friendly for students?
- Is information available on the web?
- Does documentation include the implications for the award of APEL – including fees, visa, withdrawing from modules?
- Is information available to students about any fees for APEL and how this fee is paid?
- Does the documentation distinguish between APEL for admissions purposes and APEL for enrolled students as appropriate?

5 Assessment/decisions

- Are assessment mechanisms clearly outlined?
- Where does responsibility for the decision lie?
- Does APEL assessment need second marking?
- Do APEL decisions need ratifying through a university board?
- Do APEL decisions need reporting through a university board?
- Is it clear where APEL sits re: reporting and ratifying by boards?
- Can the student records system report on the award of credit to inform the relevant boards?
- Are admissions decisions involving the award of APEL reported or ratified via a board?
- What is the role of the external examiner?
- If decisions are subject to ratification by a board is this made clear to the student?
- How are decisions recorded?
- Are there guidelines on timescales for making decisions?
- How is the decision reported to the student? Or to other relevant staff e.g. course or personal tutor?
- How should a student appeal? Via the usual appeals process?
6 Monitoring

- Is it clear where APEL sits re: monitoring?
- Is there an APEL board? What is its composition (e.g. external examiner) and role? Does it have any other remit e.g. developmental?
- Is the APEL process integrated into other institutional quality processes?
- Is student feedback on the APEL process sought in any way?
- Which board deals with monitoring and standards for APEL?
- Are the monitoring mechanisms clearly outlined?
- Can the student records system report on the award of credit for monitoring (if required)?
- Is there annual monitoring of APEL decisions in keeping with institutional quality processes?

7 Staff development

- Is there suitable staff development activity delivered to enable the APEL process?
- Are guidelines available to staff?
- Is particular guidance needed re: APEL Assessment methods?
- Is particular guidance needed for aspects of APEL practice e.g. valid APEL assessment methods, or using APEL for significant amounts of credit as opposed to individual modules?
- Have all possible stakeholders – academic, registry, marketing staff etc. – been included in the process and informed as relevant?

8 Administrative processes

- Are the administrative mechanisms clearly outlined?
- Who is responsible for tracking the overall process from application to recording on the student records system?
- What forms and stationery must be completed to allow the process to function smoothly?
- Are all forms available - for initial application by student, notification of outcome to student, notification within institution etc.
- To which staff and departments should APEL decisions should be sent (e.g. tutor, registry)?
- How does the decision reach the student record system?
- Can the student records system report on APEL to relevant boards?
- How is the decision recorded on the transcript?
- How are the administrative processes communicated to relevant staff?
- Are there different processes for the award of credit for applicants at the admissions stage and for enrolled students.

9 Validation/review

Is there a requirement for APEL processes to feature within course validation and review and associated documentation? (e.g. course definitive documents and course and module handbooks)
10 Foundation Degrees/Franchised Courses

Recent developments in Foundation Degrees require that full account is taken of the need to adapt or update an APEL procedures document to take account of an award or course being co-delivered or delivered by another institution under a franchise type arrangement.

The APEL arrangements on the course will be regulated by the validating and awarding institution. However, it may be that specific procedures - relating for example to where students seek advice - need to be developed for these arrangements to function within the delivering institution. This may need to be looked at in particular in relations to roles, how to apply, documentation and staff development.

11 Flowcharts

In general the use of flowcharts to illustrate processes and mechanisms was found to be particularly helpful.