

# APL guidance notes

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University  
for the  
Creative Arts



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# Accreditation of Prior Learning

## Guidance Notes

### What is Accreditation of Prior Learning?

Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL) is the generic term for recognising and awarding students with Higher Education credit points from demonstrated previous learning. There are two ways in which you can be awarded credit for APL. The process you should use depends whether your previous learning is a direct result of a formal Higher Education qualification (or part of) or has been indirectly gained from work, interests/hobbies and life skills. If your application is successful you will not have to repeat learning and will have a reduced number of courses to complete in order to obtain a BA Hons Degree. This will save you time and money.

The two forms of APL are:

- Accreditation of Prior Certified Learning (APCL)
- Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL)

### Higher Education credit levels

A traditional university honours degree takes 3 years. Each year equates to a specific level. This is reflected in the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF). A copy of the QCF is enclosed at the back of this guide.

To obtain an HE qualification credits must be obtained from the study and successful assessment of courses which are accredited at Level 4, Level 5 and Level 6 on the QCF. In APL whether accredited or experiential, your prior learning must be at these same levels to be recognised.

OCA courses are named by progression order rather than academic level on the QCF. OCA Level 1 courses eg Painting 1, Writing 1 are actually accredited at HE4. OCA Level 2 courses are accredited at HE5 and OCA Level 3 courses are accredited at HE6.

All official transcripts from our accrediting university credits will be referred to at their HE level. Throughout the rest of these guidance notes HE Levels rather than OCA Levels will be referred to.

### Exit awards maximum APL allowance

For APL applications, the APL committee will only grant the most complete lower level exemption possible eg you can only ask for Level 5 exemption if you are also applying for full 120 credit Level 4 exemption.

For an Honours degree the maximum credit that may be recognised under APCL will not be more than two-thirds of the credit required for the award i.e. 240 credits. APL is not awarded at Level 6.

For an Honours degree the maximum credit that may be recognised under APEL will not be more than half of the credits required for the award i.e. 180 credits. APL is not awarded at Level 6.

Please note the above are exit awards only and students cannot be selectively enrolled onto CertHEs, DipHEs or Ordinary Degree.

### Enrolment after exemption

Students awarded APCL / APEL credit must enrol on the relevant OCA course within 3 months of being notified of the APCL / APEL credit exemption.

# Accreditation of Prior Certified Learning (APCL)

Your previous study will already have been assessed and certified as either a full or partly completed Higher Education qualification.

**APCL is the process which allows you to transfer Higher Education credit points you have previously gained elsewhere to OCA providing it is at the correct academic level and in the correct academic field for the OCA course or courses you wish to study.**

Some national qualifications are not transferable (GCSEs, A-Levels, BTEC, City & Guilds or OCN qualifications) as these are not at the correct academic level. Only study at Higher Education Level 4 (HE4) or above is transferable. We cannot transfer non-art related subjects, so a Higher National Diploma (HND) in Science for example would not be eligible.

All previous certified learning must have been undertaken in the last five years. The only exception to this is study in art history/art theory courses.

Your previous study will be mapped across to the equivalent OCA course with the exception of HE6 (OCA Level 3) study as this must be undertaken with OCA. Only credits and not grades from previous study will be transferred. This is because the final degree classification is determined by an average of your HE6 (OCA Level 3) study.

Although you may have studied at the correct academic level and in the correct academic field, credits are not always transferred on a point for point basis. OCA reserves the right to ask for images of recent work (approximately 12 images) via email for consideration along with a brief statement relating to the images.

Please be advised some of the degree pathways require core units to be completed ahead of elective units. You cannot apply/ be awarded exemption from elective units unless you have successfully been exempted from (or studied) the core units.

**There are four factors which may reduce the level of credit you are awarded.**

**Factor one: Course mapping**

Your prior learning must map to equivalent OCA courses. If it is not clear from the title of your prior learning, what the content studied was, you will be contacted for further information.

**Factor two: Future study path**

Your intended future study path is the other deciding factor which could reduce the amount of credit awarded. Someone with a HND in Fine Arts could receive the maximum 240 credit transfer if they intended to complete in painting. However if they wished to pursue future study in photography for example, then they would only receive the minimum credit transfer and in some cases may not be eligible at all. This is because normal pre-requisite conditions still apply and if an applicant does not wish to study in the same discipline they cannot start at a higher level where they do not have eligible credits for the lower level course. Any new discipline must start at Level HE4.

**Factor three:**

APCL candidates for visual arts subjects must email approximately 12 recent visual images for review alongside their certificates. This should be accompanied by a short statement explaining the context of the images. If this work is not of a sufficiently high standard, even if there are supporting certificates at the required level, exemption from OCA courses may not be granted.

**Factor four: Average level mark of previous study**

Applicants must provide a transcript of the marks obtained from previous study. If the average level mark is below 50% then we may require additional evidence from you.

## Benefit of Level 5 study

For most students who submit an APCL application who have HNDs, DipHEs, they have not undertaken distance learning study before. Therefore we do emphasise the benefit of undertaking at least one course unit with us at Level 5 before you progress to Level 6.

This will ensure you are fully prepared to study the final undergraduate level and are not disadvantaged against other Level 6 students who have the benefits of skills gained by distance learning study.

We appreciate that some students wishing to top-up to BA(Hons) Level will not wish to undertake further Level 5 study. In such cases we will allow your Level 4 and Level 5 credit exemption (if your application supports this) but will note on your record you are not following our recommendation regarding complete of Level 5 unit first.

## What level of study do OCA courses equate to?

All Level 1 OCA courses carry 40 HE4 credit points each

All Level 2 OCA courses carry 60 HE5 credit points each

All Level 3 OCA courses carry 40 HE6 credit points each (Creative writing units carry 60 credits each).

120 credits at HE4 is the equivalent of a Certificate of Higher Education (CertHE) or a Higher National Certificate (HNC).

120 credits at HE4 + 120 credits at HE5 is the equivalent of a BTEC Higher National Diploma (HND), Diploma of Higher Education (DipHE), and certain foundation degrees.

For further guidance on national qualifications please visit the website of the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education [www.qaa.ac.uk](http://www.qaa.ac.uk).

## Charges

There is a standard £250 fee regardless of whether your application is successful or not. You will pay the same price regardless of the level of credit you are awarded.

## The Application and Decision Process

### If you are applying from exemption from Level 1 (HE4) only

You must submit:

- Up to 12 digital images from your previous study with explanatory statement for each image.
- Original certificate and transcripts. Please note no decision can be made without the evidence to show previous credits, levels and marks.
- APCL Application form and payment form.

Your transcript and images will be reviewed together at OCA Head Office. You may be contacted to have a discussion with one of our Course Support Advisors if it is unclear how your previous study fits in with our degree programmes.

### If you are applying from exemption from Level 1 (HE4) and Level 2 (HE5)

You must submit:

- A portfolio of 10 to 12 pieces of work plus written material.
- Your written work must demonstrate contextual understanding including academic writing. This could be in the form of an essay / critical review.
- Original certificate and transcripts. Please note no decision can be made without the evidence to show previous credits, levels and marks.
- APCL Application form and payment form.

Your transcript and images, plus written work will be reviewed by the relevant Programme Leader for the degree programme you are applying for exemption from. The Programme Leader will contact you by telephone and/or email for a formal interview. You will only be eligible to be awarded the exemption directly recommended by the Programme Leader.



## When to apply

You can send your APCL application in at any time of the month. The OCA Curriculum and Quality Committee meet every month to hold an APCL Board.

## What happens next?

The OCA Curriculum and Quality Committee, who meet on a monthly basis, will make the final decision on what level of credit exemption you will be awarded. OCA will then send you a detailed breakdown letter advising which OCA courses you have been given exemption from and which OCA courses you must then study to obtain your degree. We will enrol you with our accrediting university for this credit exemption.

Please note that no challenges of academic judgement can be made on APL decisions.

# Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) (non photography units)

If you are submitting an APEL application for exemption from photography units, please email the registrar at [stephgillott@oca.ac.uk](mailto:stephgillott@oca.ac.uk) to request the forms you will need to complete.

APEL is the process to provide formal academic recognition of learning you already hold.

**This is learning that has not been formally assessed but rather has been learned through experience either through work, interests / hobbies or life skills.**

You may be able to gain exemption from some courses by submitting an APEL application. If your application is successful APEL will be awarded as credit which will exempt you from studying a course or courses. You cannot apply for exemption for Level 6 courses. Please note that if you submit an exemption application for Levels 4 and half level 5 and full Level 4 exemption is not awarded, the assessors will not review the application for Level 5. No Level 5 exemption can be given unless full 120 Level 4 exemption is awarded.

Please be advised some of the degree pathways require core units to be completed ahead of elective units. You cannot apply/ be awarded exemption from elective units unless you have successfully been exempted from (or studied) the core units.

## Writing a successful APEL application

There are several things you must do if your APEL application is to be successful.

1. You must show that you meet the learning outcomes for the course that you are seeking exemption from very clearly.
2. You must submit a portfolio of work that covers similar things that the course has covered, section by section.
3. You must write a short personal statement that explains your interest in your creative practice and learning and your learning experience.
4. You must write and submit an essay that supports your application. For level one APEL the essay is 1000 words. For level 2 APEL an essay of 1500 – 2000 words is required.
5. You must complete and submit an APEL Application form and payment form.

## Your APEL essay

Your essay should demonstrate creative involvement between your visual work and the work of other creative practitioners, and the artistic and cultural context. You should refer to images that are included on your email, providing the rationale for including them. The essay must also demonstrate your ability to articulate opinions, and link with the assessment criteria for the courses you seek exemption from. To ensure your APEL application meets the learning outcomes of the course you are seeking exemption from, go to the OCA website ([oca.ac.uk](http://oca.ac.uk)) and look at the degree handbook for your subject. There you will find all the relevant outcomes listed. Then ensure your essay explains how you meet these outcomes and show and refer to images or other work that back this up. This evidence is vital in determining whether you will be successful in your application or not. Make sure you always refer back to the course learning outcomes and assessment criteria.

## Show examples of work that are similar to those covered in the course

Take a look at the breakdown of the sections of the course that are available on the OCA website. If, for example, you are applying for exemption from the Level one Drawing course: Drawing Skills, you will need to show examples of portrait drawing, figure drawing, drawings of animals, landscape and townscapes.

## A cautionary note

Please remember that you will be applying for exemption from degree level courses and the reviewers must be convinced you reach HE standard and specifically the outcomes of the course you are applying for exemption from. Putting together successful APEL applications should be taken seriously and effort put into compiling them. Please also present them clearly, and label them so that it is easy to navigate round them.

Please note that you cannot challenge the academic judgement of APL decisions.

## Charge for APEL applications

There is a standard £200 fee for each unit for which credit exemption is sought regardless of whether your application is successful or not.

## When to apply

There are 3 APEL Boards a year in March, July and November. The deadline to receive applications is:

**March Board** – Applications to be received by 31 January of the same year

**July Board** – Applications to be received by 31 May of the same year

**November Board** – Application to be received by 30 September of the same year

## What happens next?

Once you have submitted a full APEL application we will acknowledge receipt and then process your application.

Your application will be presented to an OCA Assessor who will make their course exemption recommendation for the APL Committee.

The APEL Committee (meets March, July and November) consists of members of OCA Directorate, OCA Registrar and assessors who are experts in your field. They will judge your application and make a final decision of what level of credit you will be awarded.

Once the decision has been made we will send you a detailed breakdown letter advising you which OCA courses you have been given exemption from and which OCA courses you must then study to obtain your degree. Your awarded credits exemption will be registered with our accrediting university. Your disc will be retained/destroyed by OCA.

Please note that appeals which question the academic judgement of APL decisions cannot be made.

Please also note by submitting an APEL application, OCA reserves the right to use any or all of your application as an example for future potential applicants.

## Advice for applicants of APEL in the visual arts

You should submit a maximum of 10 images per course (supplied as JPG, TIFF, PNG, or PDF files) you are seeking credits for. You should supply an index of the images, via email, and a short sentence alongside each image to contextualise it. You must be selective about the images you choose to send. A random collection of images may not gain credits.

APEL assessors will look for work that demonstrates visual curiosity, excellent observation, technical skill, original thinking, experimentation, awareness of other artists' or photographers' work and work that is reflective and self critical. Assessors will note your ability to choose the best of the range of your work to demonstrate these characteristics. For art applicants please note that assessors will not generally favour work that simply shows an ability to copy from photographs or art, without invention. Still lives, figure drawing from life, and landscape sketches are welcome additions, as well as paintings, original prints and sculptures.

# Creative Writing - Advice on Writing your Self Critique

## Advice for applicants of APEL in creative writing

You should write a paragraph on why you feel you justify exemption. You should submit a maximum of 10,000 words per course you are seeking credits for, or a synopsis only if the work you wish to gain credits for is lengthy. You should supply a self critique of the work you have submitted for consideration. You must be selective about what you choose to send. A random collection of writing may not gain credits. APEL assessors will look for work that demonstrates curiosity, excellent observation, technical skill, original thinking, experimentation, awareness of other writers' work and work that is reflective and self critical. Assessors will note your ability to choose the best of the range of your work to demonstrate these characteristics.

# Frequently Asked Questions

## My previous study is from several years ago, can I still apply to transfer this?

Yes as long as you can provide your original transcript / certificate or a letter from the institution on headed paper. Please note, the APL Committee must be satisfied that your certified prior learning is not older than 5 years.

## How long will my application take?

Once we receive your APCL application we will acknowledge receipt. If any further supporting evidence is required, you will be notified.

We will advise you when the next APCL Committee will be held.

APEL applications are looked at 3 times a year – July, November and March. These applications are rather more complex and depending on the nature of the application may take longer for a final decision to be concluded. The Committee Meeting cannot be arranged in advance as an expert in the field of your application needs to be available and this can only be determined upon receipt of your application. We advise this may take several weeks but this is to ensure the best result for you.

## Why do I have to pay a fee?

APL is a lengthy process which involves many people both with the processing and final decision of your application. Each Higher Education institution which offers APL sets its own fee.

### Can I submit an APCL and an APEL application?

Yes you can but as both processes involve mapping across to the equivalent OCA course if both applications are in the same discipline and at the same level you would not receive a higher level of credit transfer. If you have 2 different disciplines and you wish to complete in both of these areas to obtain a BA Hons Degree in Creative Arts you would need to make 2 applications. You would need to complete both forms in full and pay.

### Why can I not be given an answer over the telephone before making an application?

We need to have your transcript for verification of the courses you have studied. Sometimes we have to contact the institution where you obtained your previous study from for further course specification. The outcome of your application can be influenced by your future study path.

### What if my application is unsuccessful?

If your APCL application is unsuccessful your submission will be returned to you fairly quickly by the Academic Registrar. If your APEL application is unsuccessful after being judged you may be asked to re-submit.

### Can I appeal?

No, if your APCL application is unsuccessful you do not have eligible credit to transfer. If your APEL application is unsuccessful the panel has made the decision your experiential learning has not been demonstrated to be at university level.



### What if I want to enrol before the outcome of my application?

Once the Academic Registrar has made her recommendations we can offer you guidance as to which course you should enrol. For APEL applications we would advise you to wait until after the outcome of your application.

### Does the APL committee always accept the Academic Registrar's recommendations?

They do not have to, but rarely would the final decision be different to that of the recommendation.

### What if my previous study was obtained outside the UK?

If your previous study is from overseas you will need to obtain a report from the UK National Advice and Recognitions Information Centre (NARIC). They will provide a detailed report advising how your overseas qualifications equate to UK qualifications. There is a charge for you to do this. Please contact NARIC at:

Qualifications & Skills Division, UK NARIC, Oriel House, Oriel Road, Cheltenham, Gloucestershire, GL50 1XP

Telephone: +44 (0)871 330 7033

Website: [www.ecctis.co.uk/naric](http://www.ecctis.co.uk/naric)

We cannot process any APCL application without this report if you have overseas qualifications.





# Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL)

## Application Payment Form

Name: .....

Address: .....

..... Postcode .....

Telephone No: ..... E-mail: .....

### Application Costs

The charge for an APCL application is £250

The charge for an APEL application is £200 per unit for which credit is sought

The application charges can be paid by cheque or debit/credit card. Please note this charge is payable even if your application is unsuccessful. We advise that you look at the criteria that must be met for APL before sending your application and payment. This is found in the guidance notes sent with this form.

### Payment Details (please tick the appropriate boxes)

I am applying for:

APCL (£250)	<input type="checkbox"/>
APEL (£200 per unit)	<input type="checkbox"/>

### Please select the method of payment

<input type="checkbox"/> By credit or debit card (Amex not accepted)	<input type="checkbox"/> By cheque or postal order payable to Open College of the Arts
<input type="checkbox"/> If you selected credit or debit card please let us know how you wish to make the payment.	<input type="checkbox"/> By bank transfer - please call the office on 0800 731 2116

Secure link - this will be emailed to you

Request a call back from the Finance Team - please provide a preferred contact number in the box below

I agree that the above payment is payable to Open College of the Arts as part of my APL application.

**Signature:** ..... **Date:** .....

Please return with your application form and supporting evidence to:  
Open College of the Arts, Redbrook Business Park, Wilthorpe Road, Barnsley, S75 1JN



# Application for Accreditation of Prior Certified Learning (APCL)

Please ensure you have read the guidance notes on APCL before completing this form.

**All personal details must be completed or the application cannot be processed.**

## Personal Details

Title: ..... Date of Birth: .....

Name: .....

Address: .....

.....

..... Postcode .....

Telephone No: ..... E-mail: .....

OCA Student No: (If currently or previously studied with us) .....

Course(s) (If currently or previously studied with us) .....

## OCA Courses seeking exemption from

OCA Level 1 (HE4) course titles (up to 3 required).....

.....

OCA Level 2 (HE5) course titles (up to 2 required).....

.....

*The maximum credit that may be recognised under APCL will not be more than two-thirds of the credit required for the award.*

## Intended future study pathway

Which degree are you applying for credit exemption from BA(Hons):.....

Your future study choices with OCA must be consistent with the degree your APL is enrolled to.

OCA Level 1 (HE4) course titles (up to 2 required) .....

.....

OCA Level 2 (HE5) course titles (up to 2 required) .....

.....



**Details of credit you wish to transfer**

Title of course.....

Name of place of study.....

Address of place of study.....

.....Postcode.....

Telephone No: ..... Website.....

Number of credits awarded.....

(If uncertain check with your place of study)

Awarding Institution.....

(if different to place of study)

Brief description of courses.....

.....

.....

Please attach your original certificates / transcripts to support your application



**Details of credit you wish to transfer**

Title of course.....

Name of place of study.....

Address of place of study.....

.....Postcode.....

Telephone No: ..... Website.....

Number of credits awarded.....

(If uncertain check with your place of study)

Awarding Institution.....

(if different to place of study)

Brief description of courses.....

.....

.....

Please attach your original certificates / transcripts to support your application



# Application for Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL)

Please ensure you have read the guidance notes on APEL before completing this form.

**All personal details must be completed or the application cannot be processed.**

## Personal Details

Title: ..... Date of Birth: .....

Name: .....

Address: .....

.....

..... Postcode .....

Telephone No: ..... E-mail: .....

OCA Student No: (If currently or previously studied with us) .....

Course(s) (If currently or previously studied with us) .....

## OCA Courses seeking exemption from

OCA Level 1 (HE4) course titles (up to 3 required).....

.....

OCA Level 2 (HE5) course titles (up to 1 required).....

.....

*The maximum credit that may be recognised under APCL will not be more than half of the credits required for the award*

## Intended future study pathway

Which degree are you applying for credit exemption from BA(Hons):.....

Your future study choices with OCA must be consistent with the degree your APL is enrolled to.

OCA Level 1 (HE4) course titles (up to 2 required) .....

.....

OCA Level 2 (HE5) course titles (up to 1 required) .....

.....

By submitting an application OCA reserves the right to use this for our promotional purposes.

# Qualifications and credit framework (QCF)

		UNIVERSITY	
LEVEL 8	<b>Doctorate</b> PhD		
LEVEL 7	<b>Master's Degree</b> MA, MSc, MPhil		
LEVEL 6	<b>University Degree</b> BA, BSc		
LEVEL 5		<b>Foundation Degree</b> FdA, FdSc	<b>HND</b>
LEVEL 4			<b>HNC</b>
LEVEL 3	<b>A-Level</b>	<b>A2</b>	<b>AS</b>
		<b>L3 Extended Diploma</b> (National Diploma)	<b>L3 Diploma</b> (National Certificate)
LEVEL 2	<b>GCSE</b> Grades A-C	<b>L2 Diploma</b> (1st Diploma)	
LEVEL 1	<b>GCSE</b> Grades D-G	<b>L1 Diploma</b> (Foundation)	
ENTRY LEVEL 3	Key Stage 3	<b>E3 Diploma</b> (Foundation)	
SCHOOL / 6TH FORM		F.E. COLLEGE	

