APPENDIX A: STUDENT GUIDELINES FOR ACCREDITATION OF PRIOR EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING (APEL)

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY PROPER INFORMAL AND NON-FORMAL LEARNING AND APEL?

Prior informal learning is learning based on experience. It includes all learning which you have done up to this point which has not already been formally assessed. This includes prior learning gained through life and work experiences (paid and voluntary), as well as prior learning gained through community-based learning, workplace learning and training, continuing professional development and independent learning.

APEL is a process through which the learning you have gained from experience can be counted.

APEL can help you to:

- Think about the learning you have already achieved and to plan how to build on this learning to meet your personal and career goals.
- Get a place on an appropriate Higher Education course at a college if you don't have the normal entry qualifications but can show that you have the necessary knowledge, skills and understanding.
- Gain credit towards modules of a Foundation Degree/HNC so as to shorten the normal period of learning by showing that you already have the knowledge, skills and understanding needed for particular parts of the programme or qualification (eg units or modules).

It is important to stress that recognition or credit is not given for the experience itself. It is what you have learned from experience that counts.

WHO IS APEL FOR?

Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) can benefit:

- Individuals in the workplace looking for recognised credit for entry to an academic programme at higher education level.
- learners who may have exited a higher education programme prior to completion or the receipt of credit and who wish to count that learning towards another award;
- learners who wish to 'top up' an existing qualification.

APEL AND HIGHER EDUCATION COURSES

The requirements for the Higher Education Course are outlined in the course information *which you should have received prior to interview.*

You should note GCSE English Language at grade C is still required, however Level 2 Essential Skills in Communication will be accepted in lieu of a grade C in GCSE English Language in fulfilment of General Entrance Requirements by the Ulster University and Queen's University Belfast.

Some courses will require GCSE Mathematics at grade C or above. Level 2 Essential Skills in Application of Number will be considered on an individual basis, when offered in lieu of a grade C in GCSE Maths, in fulfilment of General Entrance Requirements or Course Requirements by the Ulster University and Queen's University Belfast.

For applicants who do not meet the entry requirements consideration for entry to the programme may alternatively be based on accreditation of prior experiential learning (APEL).

All APEL claims must be made to the APEL Adviser using the APEL Application Form Appendix D) and submitted with the portfolio of evidence.

The APEL Adviser will guide you through the process and an APEL assessment panel will review your experience against the skills/knowledge criteria for the course.

WHAT DOES APEL INVOLVE?

APEL is about getting evidence and explaining how it allows you to meet the knowledge and skills requirements for a course of study. This means that you must reflect on that experience and on the learning that you have already achieved as a result. Before you go through the process of APEL there is an important guiding principle you should remember.

It is what you have learned that is being recognised, not what you have done.

So, for example, two people might have the same experience through doing identical jobs but one might have learned much more from the task(s) involved than the other. People who have learned something are able to use that learning to help them in other related situations. So you need to provide evidence of what you have learned from your experiences, not just describe what you've done. This involves reflecting on your experiences and drawing out from them what you have learned, then writing this down and talking about it with your facilitator. The writing and the talk will help to provide the evidence you need.

PORTFOLIO OF EVIDENCE

Your claim for APEL is to be supported by a Portfolio of Evidence of Learning including a Personal Reflection and examples of evidence to authenticate your claim. Your Portfolio should contain:

- Title page
- Table of contents
- Curriculum Vitae
- Employment History
- Education & Training History
- Training and Professional Qualifications
- Informal Learning Activities eg conferences/workshops etc.

Additional Information to support your submission can include:

- Practice-based documents
- Reports on observation of practice
- Video/audio recordings, with commentary and analysis related to the achievement of learning outcomes
- Analytic and evaluative description of practice
- Statements from supervisors in relation to aspects of practice
- Continuing Professional Development (CPD) records and appraisals
- Reports of professional discussions
- Reflective statements.

That evidence is then assessed by the APEL Adviser and Subject Specialist at the College. The table below outlines the criteria that will be used to assess your portfolio of evidence.

Currency	Your evidence should relate to current learning i.e. within the last five years. Where the course/subject and/or professional, statutory or regulatory bodies have specific requirements and/or time limits for the currency of evidence, certification or demonstration of learning, these should be made clear and transparent.
Reliability	The extent to which there is inter-assessor agreement or consistency in the assessment of claims.
Sufficiency	There should be sufficient written evidence to demonstrate fully the achievement of the learning being claimed.

Validity:	There should be a clear and transparent link between the learning being evidenced and the outcomes against which recognition is being sought.

Once the evidence has been assessed and once it is decided that your evidence allows admission to a course you will be notified of the outcome of your APEL application.

By going through an APEL process, you will be encouraged to value your professional experience. The table below outlines the APEL process and suggested timeline for each stage.

APEL Process

Stage	Task	Timeline
Pre - Stage	• APEL advisor will discuss the knowledge and skills requirements that are essential for the course that is being applied for and outline the APEL process	
Stage 1	Applicant submits application with accompanying evidence.	Normally by end of May
Stage 2	**Receiving the Claim** • You should receive acknowledgment of your claim. • A date for the APEL assessment panel meeting to consider the claim will be arranged within 15 working days from receipt of application. • The panel will consider your APEL evidence. • The Panel may ask to meet applicant to establish authenticity of evidence in advance of the Panel meeting.	5 working days 15 working days from date application received
Stage 3	**Assessing the Claim** • The APEL adviser will map evidence to learning outcomes or entry criteria. • APEL Assessment Panel will meet to consider application. • The Quality representative will assess procedural correctness and that there is sufficient evidence to determine outcome. • APEL Assessment Panel will determine outcome having considered currency, reliability, sufficiency and validity. • The Chairperson will communicate with the Awarding Organisation (eg Ulster University/Pearson) if needed to confirm the APEL Assessment panel decision within 10 days.	15 working days from date application received 10 working days

	• Upon receipt of Awarding Organisation confirmation of decision, the chair will confirm outcome to the applicant (normally within 5 days). • All documentation is forwarded to College APEL Coordinator, and information is recorded on APEL database.	5 working days
Appeal Stage	• If you have new information not previously available or believe that the APEL process has not been applied correctly, you may appeal the decision within 5 working days. • Appeals follow the College Academic Assessment Appeals Procedure (stage 2) available on the College website.	5 working days

You will see that you will be supported throughout the process by staff from the College. Your main role will be to reflect on what you have learned from your experience and to bring it together in a format that can then be assessed by the Panel to establish your readiness to progress to your chosen course of study.

This next section will further explain the APEL process by helping you to reflect on your experience and the learning you gained from it.

HOW DO YOU LEARN BEST?

There is no right or wrong way to learn – everybody is different and everybody learns in different ways.

- **Different styles of learning**

Learning is a process which involves gaining knowledge, processing information and making connections between different bits of knowledge. Adults are likely to learn differently from the way children learn – and are likely to have different reasons for wanting to learn. It has also been suggested that men and women might learn in different ways.

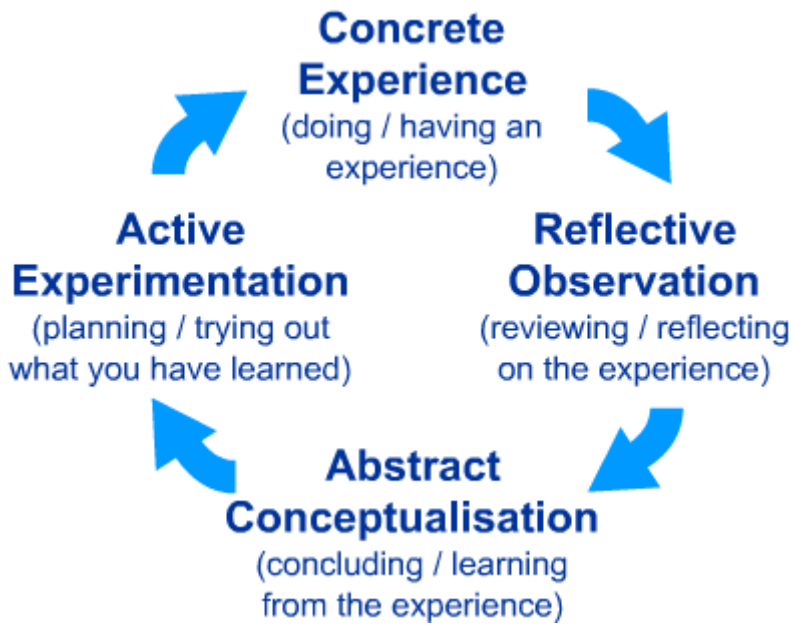
Sometimes we learn by experience. Over time we do things repeatedly and improve how we do things (ie, through learning to get better at it) or we watch others doing things and learn from observation. We also learn by reflecting on our experiences, going over in our minds how we did something, how we might do it better next time, what was good about what we did and what could be better.

- **How do we learn from experience?**

Most people learn a great deal from doing something (or seeing someone else do something), experiencing (or seeing) the consequences of that action and 'learning a lesson' as a result.

People may often learn more from the experience of doing something than from reading books or from listening to a trainer or lecturer. Learning can be an individual or a shared experience.

Various attempts have been made to describe the process of learning but it is often described as a learning cycle in four stages.



STAGE 1 - DOING

Learning begins with a real experience – this can be any experience of 'event'. It may be a specific experience or a series of related tasks/experiences in connection with your job

STAGE 2 - REVIEWING

The experience or event may 'make us think'. If we do, we move into Stage 2 of the cycle.

STAGE 3 - CONCLUDING

Thinking about the experience may make you realise that 'there is more to it than meets the eye', that the experience is simply one example of a pattern of things. We may begin to make connections to form ideas or theories about what that pattern is. We may make generalisations about the experience.

We may, of course, then confirm those ideas by repeating similar experiences and maybe observing similar results.

STAGE 4 - PLANNING

However, we may go on to apply those ideas to new or different situations in order to test them out. If our ideas are borne out in practice then the 'lesson has been truly learnt' and we are likely to apply it in future situations/experiences, and so the cycle may be related.

WHAT TYPES OF EXPERIENCE CAN WE LEARN FROM?

We can learn from any experience we have had or some event we have observed which was significant to us in some way. Any experience/event will do: it could be from work, home, leisure – anything at all, as long as we feel it as significant.

It might be significant because it:

- Taught us a great deal.
- Had successful outcomes.
- Gave us a sense of achievement.
- Earned us respect and recognition from others.
- Involved a major investment of time, energy or effort.
- Changed the way we did things.

Examples of types of work-related learning experience we might consider include, but are not limited to:

- A particular piece of work, task or project undertaken at work, or through community learning and development or voluntary work or independent study.
- The experience of doing a particular job (paid or unpaid) over a period of time.
- An educational or training course which may have been assessed but was not credit-rated by an academic institution.
- The experience of training or teaching others, either formally or informally.

WHAT IS REFLECTION?

Learning through reflection is a skill that involves thinking about our own experiences from the past, thinking about our feelings about those experiences and drawing out some of the lessons that we have learned from those experiences.

We can reflect on our learning in a number of ways – for example, reflection might be an activity that we do thinking by ourselves. Or it might occur in a more social setting – for example as part of a group learning situation where we talk about and reflect on our experiences and share these thoughts with other people.

Reflection is something that we often do as part of our day-to-day activities – we often reflect as we are doing things and sometimes change the way that we do things according to that reflection. At other times, reflection is used long after an event or activity has been completed. In both cases, reflection can help us learn from ourselves and our experiences.

HOW DO WE REFLECT?

One way to reflect is to simply think about things from the start of an event to the completion of that event. Another way to reflect is to ask ourselves questions about our work experience. The questions below can help you organise the outcomes from your reflection:

We might ask:

- What did I do in that role?

- What were my main responsibilities and tasks?
- How easy or difficult did I find that role?
- What were some of the challenges I faced undertaking that role?
- What have I learned from undertaking this role?

WHO CAN HELP?

You can contact the Quality Enhancement Unit at qeu@nwrc.ac.uk who will help you to make contact with an APEL adviser in your subject area.

Your APEL Adviser at the College will support you through the APEL process by:

- Introducing you to the NWRC APEL Guidelines.
- Building your confidence as a learner through identifying your strengths and skills.
- Advising you on how to prepare your portfolio of evidence of learning.

Staff in the College Careers Academy will be able to support you with aspects of building a portfolio for example writing a CV.