

## IB02 - Accreditation of Prior Learning Guidance Notes

### 1. Introduction and Principles

This document sets out the procedure for the Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL) at the Sherwood Psychotherapy Institute (SPTI) and covers all undergraduate and postgraduate programmes leading to awards currently validated by Staffordshire University. Board of examiners/assessment panels apply fairly and consistently regulations for progression within, and transfer between, programmes and for the aware of credits and qualifications. Those who might be eligible for the recognitions of prior learning are made aware of the opportunities available, and are supported throughout the process of application and assessment for recognition.

APL allows eligible students enrolling on award carrying taught programmes of study at SPTI to claim “credit” for previous learning. Assessment and feedback practices, including those for the recognition of prior learning, are explicit, transparent and accessible to all intended audiences. The previous learning must be relevant to the programme for which they are applying, and if their application is successful, the credit will count towards their chosen programme of study. Where professional and regulatory bodies impose any particular restrictions on the use of APL, these will be reflected in the handling of APL applications.

These guidelines have been developed to comply with the QAA (2017, B6) ‘Assessment of Students and the Recognition of Prior Learning’ guidelines on accreditation of Prior Learning:

‘Higher education providers operate equitable, valid and reliable processes of assessment, including for the recognitions of prior learning, which enable every student to demonstrate the extent to which they have achieved the intended learning outcomes for the credit of qualification being sought.’

Applications for the recognition of prior learning are considered in accordance with Staffordshire University’s ‘Recognition of Prior Learning Scheme.

### 2. What is APL?

Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL) is offered by Universities to candidates who have studied elsewhere in order that they do not have to repeat topics when they join a new programme. You can achieve exemption from topics on the new programme if you can demonstrate you have studied them elsewhere at a similar standard.

Accreditation of Prior Learning covers a range of prior learning experience; such learning may be recognised by an education provider (referred to as *Accredited Prior Certificated Learning*; APCL) or it may have been achieved by reflecting upon experiences outside the formal education and training systems (known as *Accredited Prior Experiential Learning*; APEL). Prior learning, both certificated and experiential, may be formally recognised on the Programmes. SPTI operate effective policies, regulations and processes which ensure that the academic standard for each award of credit or a qualification is rigorously set and maintain at the appropriate level, and that student performance is equitably judged against this standard.

### 3. What APL can people apply for?

Typically, SPTI provides curricula in which theory, personal and professional development, and competency acquisition complement and enrich each other and the overall experience of the student. There is a maximum amount of APL that can be agreed as follows:

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- Post Graduate Programmes  
For those applying to one of the Postgraduate Programmes, applicants can apply for recognition of prior learning in regard to the Preparatory Stage and the Postgraduate Certificate Stage (maximum 60 credits at Level 7).
- Under Graduate Programme  
Those applying to the Undergraduate Programme can apply of recognition of prior learning for the first year only (maximum 120 credits at Level 4).

### 4. What does the University need to know?

The University, a degree-awarding body, clarifies which organisation is responsible for admitting and registering a student to modules or programmes delivered with others, and ensures that admissions are consistent with their own admissions policies. Students who have been on a course from the beginning will have studied certain topics. The University wants to know that you have studied similar topics elsewhere. Secondly the University wants to know that you have studied these topics at the level that has been achieved by the students who have been on the course from the beginning. Only appropriately qualified and prepared applicants are admitted to research degree programmes.

For our Postgraduate Programmes, this will be as follows:

Stage/Year	Qualification	Academic Level
Preparatory Stage/ Year 1	None	Intermediate or Honours
PG Certificate Stage/Year 2	PG Certificate	Level 7

For our Undergraduate Programme, this will be;

Stage/Year	Qualification	Academic Level
1	Undergraduate	Level 4

### 5. How does the University decide whether I can be awarded APL?

The way the University decides is through “Learning Outcomes”. This information is made available to prospective students to help them select their programme with an understanding of the academic environment in which they will be studying and the support that will be make available to them. For our courses, these appear in our handbooks so our students know what it is they are supposed to gain from a module, and what they are expected to know by the end of it. They are usually written in the form: “On completion of this module students will be able to: .....

You need to demonstrate that you can meet 100% of the Learning Outcomes for each module that you are applying for exemption from.

*Credit can only be gained for the learning which has been achieved as a consequence of taking part in a particular activity, and not simply for participation in it. It will not be enough to list the learning activities in which you have taken part. It will be necessary for you to provide very specific evidence of the learning which has taken place.*

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### 6. How do I demonstrate that I have met the learning outcomes & clinical requirements?

Assessment and feedback practices are informed by reflection, consideration of professional practice and subject-specific and educational scholarship. For each Learning Outcome you need to detail the module(s), formal assessment(s), etc., which you believe have helped you meet that Learning Outcome. Examples are as follows:

#### Example 1:

*Learning outcome:* On completion of the module the student will be able to highlight significant concepts of the humanistic approach to counselling and psychotherapy.

*Evidence:* I studied humanistic psychology during (name of module) on this course. I successfully completed a 2000 written assignment relating to this. This enables me to fulfil this learning outcome at ..... level.

#### Example 2;

*Learning outcome:* On completion of the module the student will be able to reflect on working in organisations and with fellow health professionals.

*Evidence:* During my initial training I completed a work place observation, which enabled me to gain insight into working in statutory organisations and with multi-disciplinary teams. Part of my training was with (name) – this is within the voluntary sector. I had to reflect on what I observed as part of my assessed personal learning log. As this study was at .... Level this clearly demonstrates that I am able to fulfil this learning outcome at undergraduate level.

Example 2 is where a learning outcome is focused on the mode of learning (experiential) rather than the topic studied. The first example focuses on the topic.

The best way of demonstrating the level at which you studied the particular Learning Outcome is through stating the training organisation attended and the qualification towards which you were studying. Further evidence can be supplied in order to support your statements; for example, transcripts of credits; assessors comment sheets; copies of module outlines from the training you have already completed.

You will also need to demonstrate that you meet the clinical obligations of the Programme for which you are submitting an APL application. For instance, SPTI students are expected to complete 40 hours of personal therapy with a suitably qualified therapist during the first year of training. This could be evidenced by a letter from your personal therapist outlining the number of hours attended and in what time period together with details of the therapist professional background (e.g. a CV summary).

*Please note;* unless there are exceptional reasons, we would not normally consider evidence, which is more than five years old. If you are making a request with qualifications and experience, which are more than five years old, please give reasons why you consider them to be appropriate.

### 7. What costs are involved?

Applicants currently registered and in-training at the Institute who are undertaking the Accreditation of Prior Learning application process are charged £150.00.

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The Institute charges a fee of £250.00 to cover the Accreditation of Prior Learning application process of external applicants.

Fees are payable upon submission of your completed APL application.

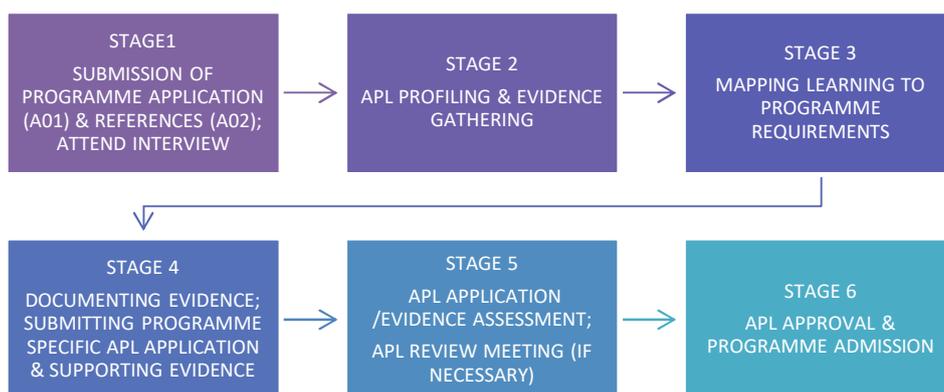
*Please note; the fee is non-refundable should your APL application be unsuccessful.*

### 8. How do I apply?

SPTI makes clear to prospective students how the recruitment, selection and admission process will be conducted and what prospective students have to do. Through inclusive design wherever possible, and through individual reasonable adjustments wherever required, assessment tasks provide every student with an equal opportunity to demonstrate their achievement. The APL application process aims to:

- identify an applicant's skills and knowledge
- equate these with specific standards and requirements
- credit the applicant in an appropriate manner

This process can be divided into six steps as indicated in Figure 1:



**Figure 1 – Overview of the APL Process**

#### Stage 1 - Programme Application & Interview

Assessment and feedback practices, including those for the recognition of prior learning, are explicit, transparent and accessible to all intended audiences. Those who might be eligible for the recognitions of prior learning are made aware of the opportunities available, and are supported throughout the process of application and assessment for recognition.

Before embarking on the APL application process, you should complete and submit a Programme Application Form (form code A01) together with two references (form code A02).

You will then be invited to an interview with the appropriate Programme Leader. This interview will determine your suitability for your selected Programme of study and will include an introductory discussion regarding the APL application process. The latter will focus on your background experience and qualifications.

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In order to prepare yourself for this discussion, we recommend that you also update and submit your curriculum vitae (CV).

Your CV should list in chronological order the various phases of your education, working life and family life. For each of the phases you identify, you should provide the following information:

- The dates when the activities took place
- The role you fulfilled
- The activities and responsibilities you carried out
- Any training you received
- What you learned in doing these activities

Do not forget to include a resume of your personal development (e.g. relevant hobbies, voluntary work and personal therapy) particularly where you can demonstrate that they have resulted in additional 'competencies'.

The CV you produce, together with the application form and references will assist the Programme Leader to assess your potential eligibility for undertaking the APL application process and recommend the first steps that should be taken as you embark on the APL process.

### Stage 2 – APL Profiling & Evidence Gathering

Should the preliminary discussions reveal that you may benefit from the APL process your next step is to gather evidence about your previous qualifications and experience to support your claim for credit towards the new qualification you are seeking. Examples of relevant evidence include;

- Details of previous courses you have studied, supported by certificates showing that you successfully completed them
- A personal report of your accomplishments and skills relevant to the criteria or learning outcomes for which you wish to receive recognition. This should be supported by a statement from an independent referee.
- Copies of reports, and documents you may have written, supported by witness statements that the documents are your own work
- Copies of presentations you have made (again, supported by witness statements)
- Copies of work instructions you carry out (plus witness statements confirming your capability to undertake them successfully)
- A supervisory report outlining details of clinical experience to date, the number of supervision hours attended and the ratio of hours to client contact together with details of the therapist professional background (e.g. a CV summary).
- A therapist letter confirming hours attended to date and in what time period together with details of the therapist professional background (e.g. a CV summary).

### Stage 3 - Mapping Learning to Programme Requirements

SPTI makes clear to prospective students how the recruitment, selection and admission process will be conducted and what prospective students have to do. You must demonstrate that your evidence identified in Stage 2 reflects the stated learning outcomes and clinical

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requirements being sought by the Programme for which you are applying. We suggest you reassemble your learning achievements and the description of the evidence that you can produce for them in a grid like the one in *Figure 2 overleaf* before transferring the relevant information to your APL application Form;

**Figure 2 - Matching Evidence to Learning Outcomes & Clinical Requirements**

Stage Title	Preparatory	Module Title	Ethics & Preparation for Clinical Practice
Learning Outcomes	Learning Achievements		Evidence

The following points should be considered when matching and compiling evidence;

- The evidence produced will need to clearly and self-evidently meet the learning outcomes for which you are seeking credit. *Evidence is valued both for its relevance and for its sufficiency.*
- Although the learning activity may have taken place sometime in the past, you do need to demonstrate that you can still apply the learning that you acquired i.e. *it should be current.*
- Evidence will normally be *direct* i.e. it will have been produced by you. Sometimes *indirect* evidence may be acceptable. This could take the form of a testimonial or a record of activities undertaken. This sort of secondary evidence is usually provided to supplement other direct evidence.

The evidence should be compiled and presented in a portfolio. The portfolio should be suitably organised and indexed to show the link between your prior education, training, work and life experiences and the skills, expertise, knowledge and understanding required. It must demonstrate that your prior education, training, work and life experiences have provided you with skills, expertise, knowledge and understanding required by the Institute. You will find suggestions regarding portfolio presentation in Stage 4.

### Stage 4 - Documenting Evidence & Submitting Application

#### **Documenting Evidence**

To enable student development and achievement, SPTI put in place policies, practices and systems that facilitate successful transitions and achievement. A portfolio is simply your evidence collected together (for instance, in a ring binder) so that it is easy to see what evidence you are providing for each of the learning outcomes/clinical requirements that you are addressing. The better your portfolio is organised, the easier it is to assess and the more likely it is that you will be successful.

#### **Suggested Layout**

Have a front cover which includes:

- your name and address
- the programme title and stage/s of training for which you are seeking exemption
- the date on which the portfolio is being submitted

Make your first page a Contents Page. List the module title and cross-reference to the evidence, so that it is immediately clear where the relevant evidence is to be found. A piece of evidence may address more than one learning outcome.

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**Figure 3 – Overview of Section**

Section A	
Module Title	
Learning Outcomes	Evidence
1	A1; A2
2	A2

In the evidence sections for each module you are addressing, preface the evidence with a grid, as illustrated in *Figure 3* above. This will serve to summarise your evidence against the relevant learning outcomes and so provide your assessor with a helpful overview.

Tag your evidence with the numbering or other sequential system which you are using. This will help for easy cross-referencing. If it is not explicitly clear how the evidence meets an outcome, then preface the evidence with a narrative introduction which makes it clear.

### ***Submitting Your Programme & APL Applications – Deadline Guidelines***

In order to be considered for your selected Programme of study you will need to complete the following:

- Programme Application Form (form code A01)
- Two references (form code A02)

The usual deadline for submission of your Programme Application & references is; 15<sup>th</sup> June

In order to be considered as an APL applicant you will need to complete the following:

- APL Application Form (A03i – Integrative Psychotherapy – Post Graduate Programme; A03p –Person-Centred & Experiential Psychotherapy – Post Graduate Programme; A04 BSc (Hons) in Counselling & Psychotherapy)
- Portfolio of evidence demonstrating how you meet the learning outcomes and clinical requirements of the stage/s of the Programme for which you are seeking exemption.

The usual deadline for this component of the process is: 31<sup>st</sup> July.

The decisions of assessment panels are recorded accurately, and communicated promptly and in accordance with stated timescales. We cannot guarantee that APL applications received after the above dates will be processed prior to the commencement of the forthcoming academic year; however, as Programme Leaders have some discretion in this regard we suggest making contact with the Programme Leader of your proposed Programme of Study in order to ascertain potential flexibility in relation to timeframe.

*Please note; completion and submission of an APL application does not guarantee*

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*Accreditation of Prior Learning.* Also it is important to realise that an application for admission to the Programme is completely separate from an application for APL and each application will be assessed individually on its merits. Selection processes for entry are underpinned by transparent entry requirements, both academic and non-academic, and present no unnecessary barriers to prospective students.

Please send your application forms, references, supporting evidence and payment (cheques made payable to S, C&P) to:

**Admissions**  
**The Sherwood Psychotherapy Training Institute**  
**Thiskney House, 2 St James Terrace**  
**Nottingham, NG1 6FW**

### Stage 5 – APL Application/Evidence Assessment & APL Review Meeting

Your application for APL will be assessed by two or more members of academic staff, usually including the relevant Programme Leader and Director of Training. Recruitment, selection and admission processes are conducted in a professional manner by authorised and competent representatives of SPTI. The assessment includes the following components:

- reviewing your application form for completeness
- ensuring there are no gaps in the provided evidence; i.e. checking that your evidence portfolio contains all stated documentation
- checking that the evidence provided relates to the standards and learning outcomes being claimed

The evidence you provide about your prior learning and experience is assessed against the following criteria:

- **Validity:** Does the evidence match the competences being looked for by the Institute? Are the skills, knowledge and expertise being demonstrated by the applicant at the level required by the Institute?
- **Sufficiency:** Is the amount of evidence sufficient? Does it cover all the aspects being looked for?
- **Authenticity:** This refers to the ownership of the evidence. Assessors need to be confident that the work submitted really is the result of your own effort and expertise.
- **Reliability:** Will different assessors place a similar value on the evidence you have provided and make similar judgements when confronted with the same evidence?
- **Currency:** This refers to the date of the evidence. Assessors must be sure that the evidence submitted by the applicant is recent enough;
  - to be considered a measure of current levels of competence
  - to be appropriate to the assessment given the changes that have taken place in the psychotherapy professional over the years since learning was undertaken.

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### Assessing and verifying the evidence:

*Successful applications*; on completion of the Accreditation of Prior Learning assessment we will write to confirm the successful outcome of your application. This will usually take place within 28 days of APL application receipt.

Assessors record the outcome and recommendation of credit or recognition is made in writing to the University.

*Unsuccessful applications*: in instances where assessors do not deem evidence to be relevant or sufficient (for example, in regard to personal therapy requirements or academic level/s) you will be informed in writing and invited to attend an APL review meeting with the appropriate Programme Leader who will explain to you the reasons for the decision and assist you to consider alternatives; for instance, joining a different academic stage or Programme.

In some instances you may qualify for the right to appeal the decision (see below).

### Stage 6 - APL Approval & Programme Admission

This stage involves the final verification by the Institute and University.

If your APL claim has been successful, the credits awarded to you will be entered onto the University's record system.

SPTI gives successful applicants sufficient information to enable them to make the transition from prospective student to current student. The Institute sends you a Student Welcome Pack with information regarding entry into the Programme for which you have been approved.

### 9. Appeals

The Institute and University will not review an APL decision where the grounds for requesting a review are simply that the applicant disagrees with the academic judgement that has been applied, and where there is no evidence that the correct procedures have not been followed. The Institute/University shall not be obliged to consider an appeal simply on the grounds that the applicant is unwilling to accept the original decision not to grant credit, and seeks to overturn that decision.

If your claim for APL is unsuccessful you may only request a review of the decision on the basis of additional evidence that was unavailable at the time of the application. For example, if you subsequently obtain additional documentation pertaining to your prior certificated study which supports your claim. This request should be made in writing and addressed to the Programme Leader with responsibility for APL.

In every case, all applicant evidence must be retained in order to facilitate either internal or external moderation of the assessment decision. This includes copies of the original certification against which APL is being claimed, the subject mapping undertaken and any portfolio and/or additional assessment required.

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