



# GUIDELINES TO GOOD PRACTICES : ACCREDITATION OF PRIOR EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

GUIDELINES to  
**GOOD**  
practices

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Guidelines to Good Practices:  
Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning  
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GUIDELINE TO GOOD PRACTICES :

**ACCREDITATION OF  
PRIOR EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING - APEL**



# GLOSSARY

## **ACCREDITATION OF PRIOR EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING**

A systematic process that involves the identification, documentation and assessment of prior experiential learning, i.e., knowledge, skills and attitudes, to determine the extent to which an individual has achieved the desired learning outcomes, for access to a programme of study.

## **COURSE**

Course is a component of a programme. The term course is used interchangeably with module or unit.

## **FORMAL LEARNING**

Intentional learning/programme of study delivered within an organised and structured context (pre-school, primary school, secondary school, technical college and university) that may lead to formal recognition/a recognised qualification.

## **GOOD PRACTICES**

Good practices are a set of internationally accepted norms which are expected to be fulfilled to maintain high quality.

## **INFORMAL LEARNING**

Learning which takes place continuously through life and work experiences (sometimes known as experiential learning). It is often unintentional learning.

## **MALAYSIAN QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK**

An instrument that classifies qualifications based on a set of criteria that are approved nationally and benchmarked against international best practices.

## **NON-FORMAL LEARNING**

Learning that takes place alongside the mainstream systems of education and training. It may be assessed but does not normally lead to formal certification.

**OPEN ENTRY**

Open entry refers to entry requirements, applicable to adults who possess the learning experiences which can be assessed and matched against the normal requirements to enter into a programme of study.

**OPEN LEARNING**

Open learning represents approaches that focus on opening access to education and training provision, freeing learners from the constraints of time and place, and offering flexible learning opportunities to individuals and groups of learners.

**PROGRAMME**

A set of subjects that are structured for a specified duration and learning volume to achieve the stated learning outcomes, which usually leads to an award of a qualification.



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## SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

The European Commission defines lifelong learning as ‘all learning activities throughout life, with the aims of improving knowledge, skills and competence, within a personal, civic, social and or employment-related perspectives’. Lifelong learning is about providing a second chance to update basics skills and offering learning opportunities at more advanced levels. All this means that formal systems of provision need to be more open and flexible, so that such opportunities can be truly tailored to the needs of potential learners (ESAE, 2007).

The Malaysian Government has realised the importance of lifelong learning to be adopted as the main agenda in achieving the nation’s human capital development. Lifelong learning is one of the important targets to be achieved in the Ninth Malaysia Plan (9MP) and the Tenth Malaysia Plan (10MP) for developing a knowledge society to achieve its goal of becoming a developed nation by the year 2020. Therefore, it is timely for lifelong learning activities to be recognised as part of the mainstream education system to drive our human capital development.

In line with the national agenda, in the year 2007, the Ministry of Higher Education launched the National Higher Education Strategic Plan which articulates its vision for the transformation of higher education in Malaysia from now to 2020 and beyond. The transformation of education aims primarily on holistic human capital development, to produce Malaysians who are intellectually active, creative and innovative, ethically and morally upright, adaptable and capable of critical thinking. Seven strategic thrusts have been outlined in the Plan. Specifically, Thrust 6: Enculturation of Lifelong Learning aims to achieve four targets, namely recognition of lifelong learning through the Malaysian Qualifications Framework (MQF). One of the key elements required is the recognition of non-formal and informal learning through the Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL). Provision for APEL as prescribed in the MQF will provide learners to progress in the context of lifelong learning to widen participation of adult learners and learners’ mobility.

APEL serves as an 'alternative' entry route and a means of gaining credit within formal programmes of study, keeping the MQF open to recognition of the value of learning gained outside the formal education system. It is critical to the development of an open, inclusive, accessible and integrated tertiary education in Malaysian context, to allow learners to have their formal, non-formal and informal learning to be assessed against learning outcomes and MQF level descriptors.

APEL seeks to remove the need for duplication of learning. APEL encourages learners to continue upgrading their skills and knowledge through structured education and training, leading towards formal qualifications and better employment outcomes.

### **The History of The Open Entry System in Malaysia**

The practice of open entry is not a new phenomenon in Malaysia because some conventional institutions had provided an alternative entry route to non-traditional learners to enroll in their programmes of study. The alternative route is normally for mature students who may not meet the entrance requirements but possess relevant experience, to enroll in a programme of study. This type of entrance shows slight resemblance to the current practice of open entry introduced by the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) in 2006.

The Ministry has approved the establishment of three open universities: Open University Malaysia (OUM), Universiti Tun Abdul Razak (UniRAZAK) and Wawasan Open University (WOU) to practise the open entry system, in order to promote open learning more aggressively and effectively. Such system allows for a more flexible admission practice by institutions in providing higher education to adult learners who would otherwise be denied such opportunities via the conventional route. These universities serve as pioneer practitioners in open learning in the country and mark a significant development in the democratisation and massification of higher education.

The National Accreditation Board has then published the Code of Practice for Quality Assurance in the Open Entry Admission System in May 2006, to guide the institutions to establish their criteria and procedures to ensure that student selection in the open entry system meets quality requirements.

In the light of the potential growth in open learning, the Ministry further approved the establishment of three more institutions in 2008, i.e., Asia e University (AeU), International Centre for Education in Islamic Finance (INCEIF) and Al-Madinah International University (MEDIU), to exercise open admission.



At present, lifelong learning is widely practiced across many different levels in Malaysia. There are many different parties involved in the provision of lifelong learning programmes at formal and non-formal levels, such as public universities, post secondary institutions, open and distance learning (ODL) institutions, MARA as well as certain relevant ministries. As of February 2009, there were 7,870 learners enrolled in part-time programmes at Diploma and Certificate levels at the Polytechnics, while as at June 2009, there were 56,056 learners enrolled in short term courses at Community Colleges, 8,000 learners enrolled in programmes at UniRAZAK, 2,336 at WOU and 81 at AeU (MOHE, 2010). In 2008, it is estimated that more than 50,000 learners have enrolled in the part-time and distance education programmes at various IPTAs. As at May 2010, a total of 66,252 learners have enrolled at OUM.

The acceptance of lifelong activities has paved the way for APEL practices in the country where learners may be granted entry and credits for a programme, with the recognition of learning regardless of how and where it was acquired. Therefore, it is hoped that this Guideline will provide direction and encourage for the effective operation of APEL by others.

## **1.1 DEFINITION OF APEL**

Generally, different terms have been used in various countries to describe the activities related to accreditation/recognition of prior learning, according to context. For instance, accreditation of prior learning (United Kingdom); recognition of prior learning (Australia, South Africa, Scotland and Ireland); recognition of current competency (New Zealand); prior learning assessment and recognition (Canada); and prior learning assessment (United States). All the terms include the key notion that prior learning should be recognised regardless of how and where it was acquired, provided that learning is relevant to the learning or competency outcomes in a subject or programme of study.

In the Malaysian Qualifications Agency Act 2007 (Act 679), prior learning means knowledge, skills or attitudes previously acquired and includes prior experience. APEL is defined in the MQF as a verification process of an individual's achievement of a set of learning outcomes acquired through formal, non-formal or informal learning irrespective of time and place.

In this Guideline, APEL is defined as a systematic process that involves the identification, documentation and assessment of prior experiential learning, i.e., knowledge, skills and attitudes, to determine the extent to which an individual has achieved the desired learning outcomes, for access to a programme of study and/or award of credits. APEL process generally involves the assessment of experiential learning, including those which have not previously been assessed or credit rated.

This learning may be acquired through formal, non-formal and informal means, including formal schooling, work and life experiences, training, independent study, voluntary work, hobbies and family experiences.

Examples of prior experiential learning include the relevant knowledge, skills and attitudes gained through:

- work experience: full-time, part-time or casual;
- voluntary and community work;
- family duties;
- hobbies or leisure activities;
- coaching and mentoring others;
- attending and participating in seminars, conferences and workshops;
- attending short courses;
- fluency in other languages;
- private study and research; and
- any other life experiences.

This Guideline adopted the term APEL to encapsulate the range of activities and approaches used formally to acknowledge and establish publicly that some reasonably substantial and significant element of learning has taken place. The term prior experiential learning as used in this Guideline encompasses formal, non-formal and informal learning.

## **1.2 PURPOSE OF THE GUIDELINE**

In acknowledging the vital roles of APEL in the enculturation of lifelong learning, the MQA has taken the initiative to develop this Guideline to Good Practices: Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning. This initiative signifies the MQA's commitment to support the implementation of APEL as an important element in our higher education and training sectors.

### **The purpose of the Guideline is to:**

- support the practices of APEL as part of lifelong learning agenda in Malaysia, besides promoting public awareness and understanding of APEL;
- support the implementation of provisions under Sections 74-77, Malaysian Qualifications Agency Act 2007 and the proposed Malaysian Qualifications Agency (Prior Learning and Credit Transfer) Regulations 2009; and
- provide a set of core principles to ensure consistency in approaches to accrediting prior experiential learning.

In general, the Guideline intends to provide a guide or source of information for:

- coordinators, advisers, assessors, moderators and external examiners involved in the APEL process;
- professional bodies and employers; and
- learners as a useful aid to seek information about institutional APEL policies and practices.

Derived from intensive consultations with all the stakeholders and interested parties, the Guideline seeks to encourage national consistency through sharing and facilitating good practices across various sectors in education. They are not prescriptive in intent but, acknowledging the wide diversity of APEL policy and practice.

This Guideline should be read in conjunction with the following publications and any other related future publications:

- i. The Malaysian Qualifications Framework, Malaysian Qualifications Agency, 2007;
- ii. Code of Practice for Programme Accreditation, Malaysian Qualifications Agency, 2008; and
- iii. Code of Practice for Institutional Audit, 2nd edition, Malaysian Qualifications Agency, 2009.

## SECTION 2: CORE PRINCIPLES OF APEL



A variety of different approaches to accreditation of prior experiential learning (APEL) can be developed and used by institutions to meet the needs and goals of learners across the different sectors. There is no one APEL model that is suitable for all qualifications and situations.

The aim of the core principles of APEL is to ensure effective and quality-assured practice that will enable all users of the Guideline to have confidence in the outcome of APEL. By identifying the core principles as the parameters within which all APEL provisions should operate, consistency will be more feasibly achieved.

All APEL provisions should be underpinned by the following core principles:

- Prior experiential learning should be recognised regardless of how and where it was acquired, provided that the learning is relevant to the learning or competency outcomes;
- Assessment should be evidence based, equitable, unbiased, fair, flexible, valid and reliable;
- Assessment should be undertaken by experts/practitioners in the subject content or skills area, policies and procedures;
- Assessment methods should accommodate the literacy levels and experiences of students, hence providing ways for students to demonstrate the required outcomes;
- Decision should be accountable, transparent and subject to appeal and review;
- Information and support services should be actively promoted, easy to understand and recognise the diversity of learners; and
- Quality assurance mechanisms should be clear and transparent to ensure confidence in the decisions.

## SECTION 3: BENEFITS OF APEL



APEL has been identified as a powerful tool for bringing people into the learning system — it reassures them that they do not have to start from scratch and that the skills they already have are valuable. The growing body of research on the subject has revealed evidence that APEL has many benefits to various stakeholders, i.e., learners, institutions, employers and the nation.

### **3.1 BENEFITS FOR LEARNERS**

Learners seek APEL because it can help them:

- increase self confidence and enhance the motivation to continue learning;
- get access and recognition to higher qualifications;
- document knowledge, skills and experience better through the preparation of portfolio of evidence;
- plan for further learning and personal career development;
- map prior learning onto the MQF to identify a notional level;
- develop analytical and learning skills through the process of undertaking APEL itself;
- increase mobility and employability; and
- reduce time and cost.

### **3.2 BENEFITS FOR INSTITUTIONS**

APEL can help education institutions to:

- increase access and widen participation for non-conventional learners;
- support the development of curriculum; and
- enrich the teaching-learning experience with the presence of non-conventional learners.

### **3.3 BENEFITS FOR EMPLOYERS**

APEL acknowledges workplace learning for the benefit of both the employers and employees. It supports training and staff development strategies. Employers encourage APEL because it helps the organisation to:

- increase motivation and interest in workplace practice on the part of the employees;
- reduce the amount of time needed to complete a qualification and therefore, requiring less time away from the workplace;
- generate new ideas and development in the workplace as a result of process of reflection on practice by employees; and
- improve employee retention, and reduce recruitment and training cost.

### **3.4 BENEFITS FOR THE NATION**

APEL may bring various benefits to our nation by:

- promoting lifelong learning culture as a means of upgrading its workforce in response to global k-economy (knowledge economy) trend;
- enhancing productivity through the acquisition of skills and knowledge among its workforce; and
- boosting the nation's competitiveness at the regional and global levels.

## SECTION 4: NATIONAL APEL POLICIES



### 4.1 ADMISSION CRITERIA

Applicants should comply with the admission criteria set by the Ministry of Education Malaysia (MOE) as follows:

#### **Programme at the Certificate level**

The candidate should be a Malaysian more than 19 years of age in the year of application, possess relevant work experience and passed APEL assessment.

#### **Programme at the Diploma level**

The candidate should be a Malaysian more than 20 years of age in the year of application, possess relevant work experience and passed APEL assessment.

#### **Programme at the Bachelor's level**

The candidate should be a Malaysian more than 21 years of age in the year of application, possess relevant work experience and passed APEL assessment.

#### **Programme at the Master's level**

The candidate should be a Malaysian more than 30 years of age in the year of application, possess at least STPM / diploma / equivalent (e.g., foundation), with relevant work experience and passed APEL assessment.

#### **Programme at the Doctoral level**

The candidate should be a Malaysian more than 35 years of age in the year of application, possess at least a Bachelor's degree in relevant field or equivalent, with 5 years of relevant work experience and passed APEL assessment.

All applicants are subjected to appropriate APEL assessments conducted by MQA. This may lead to the granting of access to a programme. A successful APEL application may then allow a student to apply for enrolment in any institution. The APEL provision is only to be applied to Malaysian nationals seeking recognition for their prior learning and is not a provision for non Malaysians. Eligibility to apply APEL on a programme does not guarantee admission. On the other hand, for professional programmes, the entry requirements must abide by the requirements set by the respective professional bodies.

#### **4.2 MQA AS APEL ASSESSMENT CENTRE**

The MQA will act as the key assessment centre of APEL. The roles of the MQA in APEL are as provided in Sections 74-77 (Part VIII - Chapter 7) of the Malaysian Qualifications Agency Act 2007.

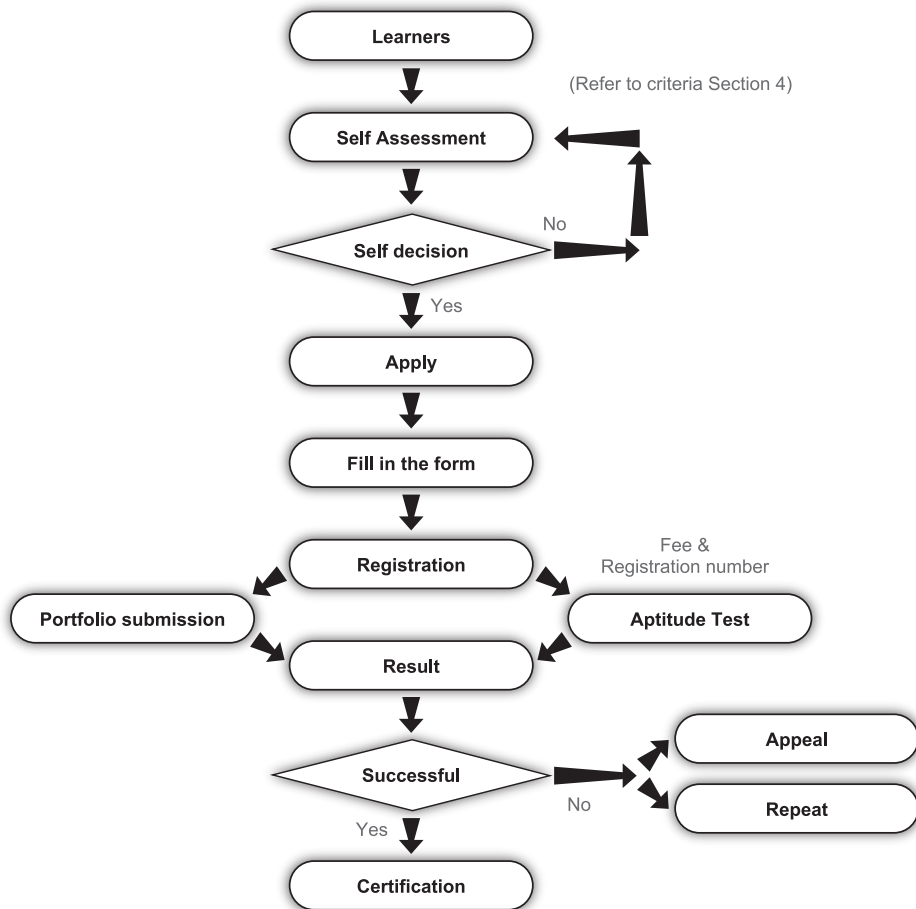
#### **4.3 QUOTA ON RECRUITMENT OF APEL LEARNERS**

A 5% quota, based on total student population at any point in time, will be imposed on institutions as they are set up to cater mainly to the needs of traditional students.



# APPENDIX

## FLOW CHART FOR A GENERIC APEL ASSESSMENT PROCESS



Note : Timescale for an assessment will depend on the complexity of the application.



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