



Assessment of Prior Learning Staff Guidelines

Introduction

It is intended these guidelines be a 'living document' that is updated and improved regularly on the basis of user feedback.

So bear the **version date** in mind if you print and/or download this document

Fact Sheet for APL Guidelines

Assessment of Prior Learning (APL) has been divided into four stages: Awareness, Evaluation, Preparation and Outcomes. These guidelines present a description of how the process works supplemented by appendices with more in depth information for the relevant staff involved at each stage.

[A] AWARENESS Enrolling students are encouraged to respond 'Yes' to question 12 in the online enrolment application form if they believe they have work experience etc relevant to their intended path of study.

[B] EVALUATION If the information provided in response to question 12 indicates substantial prior learning, an APL process is offered.

[C] PREPARATION Applicants identify which of their experiences etc. are most relevant and present their evidence for formal evaluation.

[D] OUTCOMES Processes are needed to accommodate both successful and unsuccessful APL applications.

For every 100 students enrolling at Unitec, an average of 10 will have related experience [A], 5 of those will go on to apply for APL [B] and most of those will complete the full process [C]. Regardless of whether they are successful in their claim or not, students who go thru APL do better in their subsequent studies [D] than those who do not.

These guidelines are based on the 2014 version of the Unitec APL Policy. The policy requires all Unitec programmes have processes for the evaluation of prior learning so students can minimise unnecessary study.

Assessment of prior learning is based on the same principles as all summative assessment but the context and the methodology used are often very different. A key objective of these guidelines therefore is to draw attention to and explain these differences.

Introduction

Scope of these Guidelines

The APL Policy requires that Unitec students have access to fair and reasonable APL processes on a non-prejudicial basis i.e. that they have a right to have their 'prior learning' from work or other activity evaluated and, on the basis of the evidence they present, have their study requirements reduced to avoid unnecessary duplication of learning.

These guidelines have been written to indicate how those requirements laid down in the APL Policy can be met and are designed for **multiple user groups**:

- Any Unitec staff **dealing with enrolling** students,
- Academic staff responsible for **programme development** and the design of systems contingent on these programmes such as APL,
- Academic staff **advising students** about APL,
- Academic staff involved in **assessing APL** and
- Support staff responsible for **administering APL** processes.

The **main body** of this text presents the APL process as a sequence of steps with an emphasis on contextualising each step as part of the overall process. More detailed information about specialized parts of the process of interest to different user groups has been provided in the **appendices** and referenced in the main body of the text.

In this way it is hoped all reader groups can get a necessary grasp of the 'big picture' of APL and how it works, plus the in depth information they need given their specific role in the APL process.

In addition to the information contained in these guidelines and the APL Policy, Unitec staff should definitely read the Unitec APL policy and will also find it useful to consult the APL Guidelines for Students and the Moodle APL module curated by Te Puna Ako.

Assessment of Prior Learning (APL) is the term used at Unitec to represent any process for evaluating combinations of **Informal**, **Non-formal** and **Formal learning** in terms of Unitec's **Formal** learning framework (courses, programmes and qualifications). Definitions of these terms and the principles underlying these guidelines are provided in the Unitec APL Policy.

The term APL is to all intents and purposes interchangeable with recognition of prior learning (RPL), recognition of current competency (RCC), PLAR, APEL and VAE. **'Cross-crediting'** also refers to the award of credits for prior learning but only **Formal** prior learning i.e. cross-crediting is the process of comparing courses or qualifications and is governed by a different policy.

APL Policy Statement# 1:
"Unitec will recognise and give credit for prior learning wherever such learning is equivalent to a Unitec qualification, its graduate profile and course learning outcomes."

APL Policy Statement# 2:
"The extent of credit awarded is to be adjudged on the basis of the evidence presented by the candidate so arbitrary maximum limits on credits gained by APL are incompatible with the intention of this policy."

Formal learning means learning that occurs in an organised and structured environment and is explicitly designated as learning. Formal learning is **intentional** from the learner's point of view and is normally assessed.

Informal learning means learning resulting from daily activities related to work or personal life. It is not organised or structured in terms of objectives, time or learning support. Informal learning is mostly **unintentional** from the learner's perspective and is **not** assessed.

Non-formal learning means learning which is embedded in planned activities not always explicitly designated as learning, but which contain an important learning element. Non-formal learning is **intentional** from the learner's point of view and is often **not** assessed.

Introduction

Overview of the APL Process

The APL process has three important **MILESTONES** (**Inquiry, Letter of Offer** and **Assessment**) which divide the process into four stages (**Awareness, Evaluation, Preparation** and **Outcomes**). The simplified overview below emphasizes the different responsibilities for Unitec at each stage of the process.

A **Awareness** of students about the availability of APL as an option

We need students to accurately self-diagnose before they enrol:

“Have I already learned what course x is offering?”



Awareness leads to **INFORMAL INQUIRIES** about APL **(Q.12)**, and then...

‘(Q.12)’ is a reference to a question about prior learning in the online enrolment application form.

B **Evaluation** of student prior learning and its potential for APL

Does the student know enough about course x to make a good decision about investing in APL?

Do I know enough about his/her relevant experience to offer this student good advice about APL?



Evaluation leads to **FORMAL LETTERS OF OFFER** for APL, and then ...

C **Preparation** for APL assessment

Does the student understand clearly what he/she has to prove and how he/she has to prove it?



Preparation leads to **APL ASSESSMENTS**, and then ...

D **Outcomes** of APL assessment

Have we provided a clearly justified decision?

Have we made sure the student knows what to do next?

Outcome of APL assessment leads in most cases to **successful study**...

Students who have been through an APL process tend to have better success and retention outcomes than other students.

Introduction

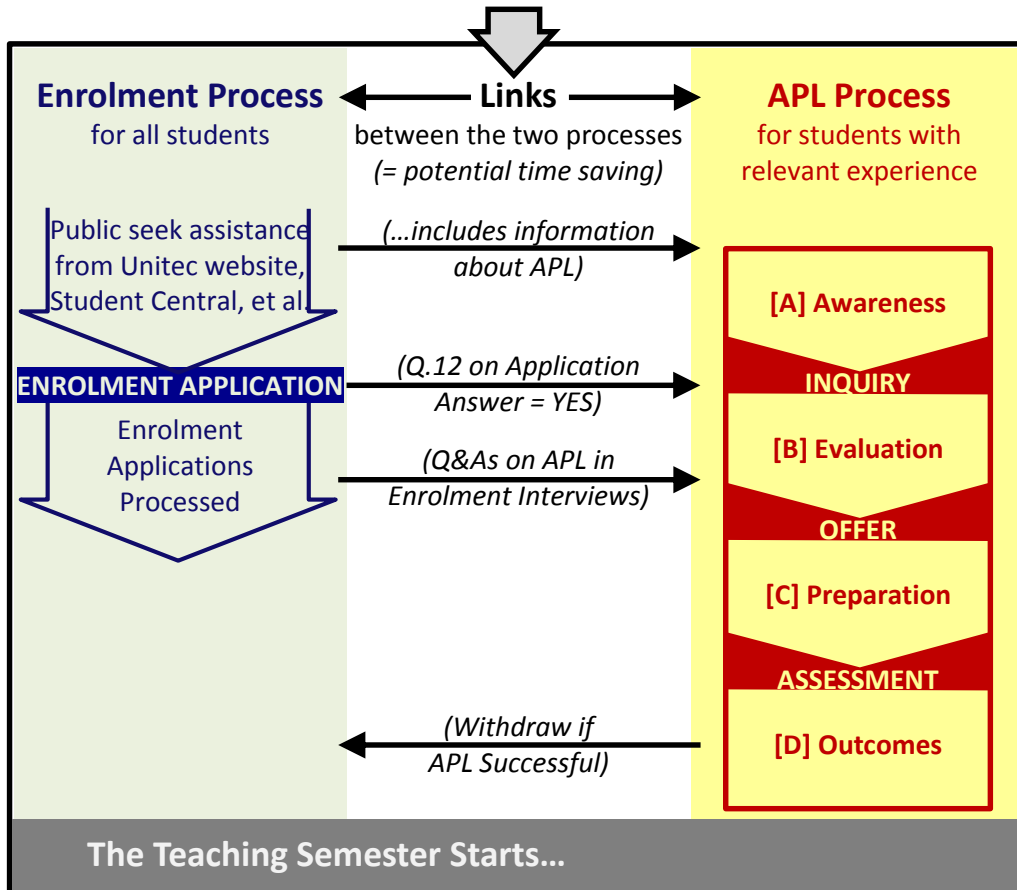
Timing of the APL Process

Can students apply for APL at any stage during the semester?

Yes but most inquiries about APL occur during course enrolment at the start of each semester. These APL applications usually relate to courses the student is currently enrolling in to study and inevitably creates extra work at a very busy time but it is worth trying to synchronise the two processes. Why? because it creates a **better student experience** at the crucial 'first impressions' stage of their Unitec 'journey' and that leads to **more successful enrollment completions**. The key is process **efficiency**.

These guidelines describe how the efficiency needed for students to complete APL and withdraw from those courses before teaching starts can be achieved.

How to Link APL to the Enrolment Process:



APL applications made **outside the enrolment cycle** usually relate to courses the student is going to enroll in in the future. These cases are less problematic because they are subject to less time pressure.

Introduction

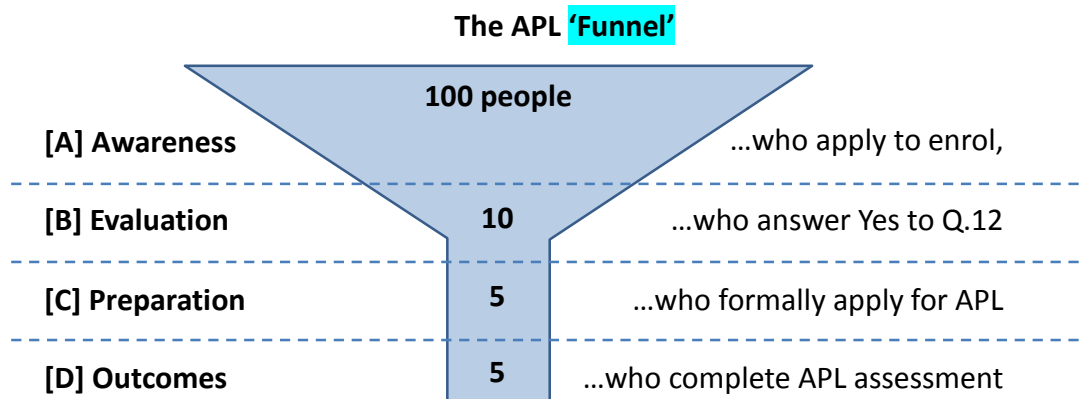
Is it realistic to complete whole APL processes during the enrolment cycle?

Yes but only if an efficient APL process is used. Efficiency in APL largely depends on three factors:

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1. The number of staff involved at each stage of the APL process, | The APL policy requires that sufficient staffing needs to be allocated to meet demand and that the fees charged for APL should be allocated to making sure enough staff are available. |
| 2. How much APL each student is looking to gain | The average number of courses sought by APL is two and that should be achievable before the end of enrolment |
| 3. The amount of work needed to complete the steps in the APL procedure | The process outlined in these guidelines has been designed to minimize the input needed without compromising the key principles of the APL Policy |

APL Policy Statement# 5:

*"A service charge for APL is justified on the grounds of cost recovery. **Academic departments are obliged to provide a robust APL process to all eligible candidates** so appropriate and sufficient resources are to be made available for that purpose."*



Stages C and D are often the greatest concern for staff unfamiliar with APL, but in practice the biggest practical challenge lies at stages A and B = **how to make the workload at the 'mouth' of the funnel manageable while still meeting student needs.**

The Key: Keeping the one-to-one communication with students very focused in the manner explained in sections A and B Resist the urge to explain to the 100 people what happens at stages C and D – just direct them to the **Student APL Guide** on the website to find out more about the process in general.

An explanation of how to execute each of these stages for the relevant staff involved is provided in the following sections with links to supporting resources.

The APL 'Funnel Effect'

For every 100 people applying to study at Unitec, 10 will think they have relevant experience for APL consideration and half that number will go through an APL assessment (these numbers have been averaged across APL processes used in different contexts). At a departmental level, some industries/disciplines will have fewer than 10% of people with relevant experience while others will have more.

Student APL Guide (LINK)

A: Awareness Phase

‘Awareness’ refers to the awareness of enrolling students that their previous informal and non-formal learning might allow them to avoid repetitious and unnecessary study.

Our objective is to make sure that students are ‘aware’ of this when they answer Question 12 on their **online enrolment applications**:

Q.12 We invite applicants to let us know if they have relevant prior learning or work experience in the field of study for the programme(s) they are applying. If you think this may be you and would like to be contacted please select “Yes”.

☐ Yes

☐ No

A: AWARENESS

... of students about the availability of APL as an option
We need students to accurately self-diagnose before they enrol:

“Have I already learned what course x is offering?”

Awareness leads to **INFORMAL INQUIRIES** about APL via **Q.12**

B: EVALUATION

C: PREPARATION

D: OUTCOMES

Applicants who answer ‘Yes’ will then be asked to provide some details about their experience which are important in the next phase (Evaluation).

Answering ‘Yes’ to question 12 does **not** constitute an application for APL but applicants may need reassuring about this. It just represents an informal inquiry that will lead to the opportunity for them to find out more – that’s all.

At this first stage of the process where we are potentially talking to every enrolling student the focus is on **Raising Awareness** rather than explaining APL. We need to keep the conversation simple so we just talk about self-identification of ‘relevant prior learning’ – we only discuss the full APL process at the **next stage** when we are just talking to the 10% who have answered ‘Yes’ to question 12.

Raising Awareness of APL

See Appendix A

When applicants answers ‘Yes’ to Question 12 they move to the second phase of the APL process: **Evaluation**

B: Evaluation Phase

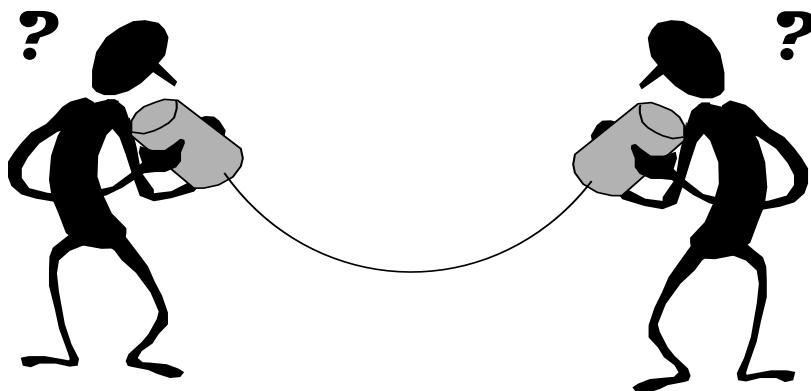
Two types of 'evaluation' need to take place at the same time:

UNITEC:

We need to evaluate student prior learning and then offer them APL where appropriate.

STUDENTS:

They need to evaluate whether they think it is worth their while going through an APL process.



A: AWARENESS

B: EVALUATION.

...of student prior learning and its potential for APL

Q: Does the student know enough about course x to make a good decision about investing in APL?

Q: Do I know enough about his/her relevant experience to offer this student good advice about APL?

Evaluation leads to **FORMAL APPLICATIONS** for APL.

C: PREPARATION

D: OUTCOMES

1. Our Evaluation: Is Their Prior Learning Relevant Enough?

Each programme needs one or more **APL 'Advisors'** to work with applicants.

The enrolling students who answered 'Yes' to Q.12 on the application form are also required to provide information about their relevant learning/(work) experience and that should be available to APL advisors. The advisors' responsibility is to:

- review** the information available about the applicant's work history etc,
- ask** some clarifying questions if needed and then
- offer and opinion** on whether an APL application for course(s) x has a good chance of being successful based on the information on hand.

This process requires some thought: the objective is to offer the applicants **good advice** but without creating an **unsustainable workload**.

Firstly the communication between APL advisor and applicant needs to be very efficient which means it should be **verbal rather than written/typed**.

Secondly the prior learning information provided by the applicants has to be **taken at face value** at this stage – the onus is on them to make sure it is accurate.

Thirdly it needs to be made very clear that if the advisor's recommendation is to apply for APL that there is **no implied guarantee** or promise associated with it.

If student are **interviewed** as part of the enrolment process for the programme in question then the communication needed for this evaluation fits naturally into the question and answering process so it should involve minimal extra work for Unitec staff.

APL 'Advisors'

Each programme needs one or more staff members who are sufficiently knowledgeable about APL and the programme to act as 'advisors' and liaise with students interested in APL. The greater the experience of these staff with APL applications for the programme, the easier and quicker these advisors will find it to complete this stage of the process. This responsibility falls on the Programme Leader if APL advisors have not been appointed.

: Evaluation Phase

If interviews are **not** a standard part of the enrolment process for the programme in question then contact with students needs to be initiated by us as a response to their 'yes' answer to Q.12. A **phone call** may be the most efficient way to get this evaluation done because it results in the immediate, two-way identification and sharing of the crucial information.

APL advisors also have a responsibility to reciprocate and provide the applicants the information they need to determine whether they want to be involved in APL.

2. Students' Evaluation of APL as a Desirable Option

Students will want more explicit information about APL and how their particular APL process might work before they make a commitment decision. Early in the conversation APL advisors should direct applicants to the set of **Student Guidelines for APL** on the Unitec website and suggest they read through these to get a general understanding of APL and how it works.

As the two-way communication process between advisor and student leads to better shared understanding and the need for more specific details, decisions need to be made about a possible assessment process. It is better practice to negotiate the evidence gathering process with the student than it is to apply a standard template **Assessment Design**. Although it is logical to assume that where there has been a previous application for APL of a similar nature that the same assessment process should be usable, that is only advisable if the **forms of evidence available** to the student are the same and that requires good shared understanding.

It is absolutely essential the students understand clearly the criteria they are going to be assessed against so they can tell their advisor about the most relevant examples of their prior learning. In most cases that course information is contained in the **Learning Outcomes** of the course(s) in question but great care needs to be used by the advisor with regards the language of any documentation offered to the prospective APL applicant because there are significant differences between 'experiential' APL and academic student **Types of Learners**.

Instead of recycling the documentation explaining the course designed for enrolled students, ideally an equivalent document will be available in the form of **APL Guidelines** for the course(s) in question. If that is not available it is important the candidate is given a plain-English verbal explanation that gives them the opportunity to ask clarifying questions.

Student APL Guidelines
(Weblink)

APL Assessment Design
See Appendix D

Learning Outcomes
See Appendix E

Types of Learners
See Appendix F

APL Guidelines
See Appendix K

: Evaluation Phase

Making a Formal Offer of APL to Students

If at the end of the Evaluation stage both parties agree that APL is a good option, Unitec needs to provide a formal Letter of Offer to create an agreement for service. The **Letter of Offer** (L. of O.) combined with the **Assessment Guide** (Ass. Gui.) contains all the key APL information. Samples of these two documents are provided in Appendices H and J.

Sample Letter of Offer

See Appendix J

Sample Assessment Guide

See Appendix K

Key Decisions Needed for an APL Agreement and where Recorded

	L. of O.	Ass. Gui.
1. Which course(s)/qualification is/are going to be assessed	✓	✓
2. What the student has to prove = the Assessment Criteria		✓
3. How the criteria can be proven = acceptable forms of evidence		✓
4. When the evidence has to be submitted	✓	
5. How much support the student will get from the department	✓	
6. How much (and when) the student has to pay for the APL process	✓	

Most of the assessment details will have been discussed with the candidate and agreed in principle during the preceding Evaluation stage (Pp. 7 & 8). Negotiations also need to be finalised covering when the evidence needs to be submitted and how much support for **Preparation for APL** is going to be provided to the applicant. Once those decisions are made, the full cost of the process can be calculated and a formal 'Letter of Offer' sent to the applicant with a copy of the Assessment Guide if that has not already been provided.

Preparation for APL

See Appendix C

Once a signed copy of this Letter of Offer has been received by the appropriate Unitec administrator, the agreement is deemed formal and an invoice can be issued. Note that the department has discretion to allow a cooling off/enrollment withdrawal period but is under no obligation to do so. Likewise the department has discretion to start providing the agreed service before the invoice amount has been paid in full but is under no obligation to do so.

So the department/programme leader needs to have made a number of 'policy' decisions before APL candidates can be contracted: what **Forms of Evidence** are acceptable for summative assessment (there should be some degree of leeway on this – **Appendix H**), how much support/how many support options can be provided, how to go about determining the fees to charge and what the applicants rights of withdrawal should be. This is similar to the decision-making done for a new taught course.

Evidence and Judgments

See Appendix H

The **Fees to be charged for APL** are standardized as a flat rate per course up to a maximum fee limit.

APL Fees

See Appendix G

The acceptance of the formal Letter of Offer marks the transition from Evaluation to **Preparation** phases...

C: Preparation Phase

This phase of the process deals with 'Preparation' for the APL assessment and the assessment process itself.

Support

Once the administration has been completed, the APL candidate has to set about collecting and selecting evidence to present for assessment. A guarantee of a certain level of support formed part of the Letter of Offer and that now needs to be provided by academic staff.

The same **duty of care** exists for Unitec during this stage of the process as exists in the Evaluation phase and for the same reason: experiential learners usually do not have the academic skills to de-code academic language with the same proficiency as students in taught courses.

So, unless that academic proficiencies are stated Learning Outcomes, care has to be taken by Unitec staff 'facilitating' APL assessment preparation to ensure the candidates' understanding is clear and accurate.

This duty of care is stated explicitly in APL **Policy Statement# 7**. If, at the time of the assessment, the APL candidate is still unclear about what he/she has to do to prove his/her case, it constitutes an underperformance by Unitec every bit as significant as failing to teach the content needed for students to be able to satisfactorily complete an assignment.

The support options the department can offer (see **Appendix C**) depend on what APL resources are available in the form of advisors and Unspecified Study courses but this decision needs to allow for the strengths and weaknesses of the candidate as independent agents in the formal education context as a priority concern.

Assessment

Most of the assessment design decisions were finalized before the **Letter of Offer** was written. The gathering of Evidence and Judgment processes should match that plan and also need to comply with the same assessment principles as any other summative assessment.

Applying the principles of assessment is not, however, synonymous with applying the same assessment methodology because the **Types of Learners** are very different. Those differences need to be accommodated if principles of good assessment are to be upheld

Because of the extensive yet imprecise and potentially overlapping nature of experiential learning, the APL candidate commonly has multiple histories that may all provide relevant evidence. The dilemma facing the APL candidate therefore is one of selection and that selection is only going to be as good as their understanding of the assessment criteria. Because the '**burden of communication**' lies with Unitec to ensure APL candidates have sufficient understanding of these requirements (APL Policy Statement#7), we have to accept some

A: AWARENESS

B: EVALUATION

C: PREPARATION.

...for APL assessment

Q: Do students understand clearly **what they have to prove, and how they have to prove it?**

Preparation leads to **APL ASSESSMENTS**

D: OUTCOMES

APL Policy Statement# 7:

*"The burden of proof in APL falls on the candidate while the **burden of communication** falls on the academic staff. Unitec is responsible for communicating course and programme documentation relating to an APL claim **in language that will be clear to the candidate irrespective of his/her level of academic literacy.**"*

Types of Learner

See Appendix F

: Preparation Phase

responsibility if the candidate makes bad evidence selections and we can do that by making the needed clarification and accepting supplementary evidence for consideration.

To put this another way: for an APL candidate to not be awarded a course because of an evidence shortage in relation to a competence when the candidate does in fact have that competence is an indictment of the assessment process.

Crucially the assessment process in APL should be more **open-ended** than assessment in taught courses to allow for the greater difficulty faced by APL learners in making immediate matches between what they have to prove and their 'free range' learning experiences.

For that reason APL evidence presentation usually occurs in **several stages**. The first of these 'layers' should consist of a **Presentation of the Evidence** the candidate is most confident is highly relevant to the assessment criteria. This is typically 'naturally occurring' evidence that is relatively straight forward for the candidate to prepare as a portfolio and then explain the assessor(s).

This presentation of 'artifacts' should be followed by an oral interrogation by the **Assessor(s)** to ascertain the full value of that evidence. Gaps identified in that discussion form the goals of a third, 'mopping-up' round of supplementary evidence.

Although this description may seem complicated to the uninitiated, the practice of it is straightforward. The value of cross-referencing different pieces of evidence has proven to allow comprehensive assessment Judgments to be made with a minimum of work being imposed on **all** parties as only just enough evidence is being collected, presented and judged to make the necessary decisions.

The face-to-face question and answer phase is the key to high quality APL. Sandwiching that flexible, interactive process between low-stake 'hard evidence' phases has allowed the gap between the candidate's understanding of the assessment criteria and the assessor's understanding of the full range of the candidate's experience to be closed **efficiently** and **accurately**.

When the assessor(s) decide sufficient evidence has been collected they finalize their judgments and notify the candidate of the **Outcome...**

Evidence and Judgments

See Appendix H

APL Assessor(s)

There is a strong case for using more than one assessor to make APL judgments.

Firstly oral assessment requires a specific skillset which needs to be developed and that is facilitated by sharing the process with colleagues.

Secondly it yields more robust, defensible assessment decisions.

Thirdly it brings multiple perspectives to the process if one of the assessors is from industry.

D: Outcomes Phase

There are three possible 'Outcomes' after APL judgments are made:

Outcome:	Consequence:
1. The candidate's experience does not cover the Learning Outcomes to any significant extent.	The candidate is given a written summary of the judgments and stays enrolled to study the courses as originally planned. APL candidates have the same right of appeal/review as any student.
2. The candidate's experience covers enough of the Learning Outcomes for the candidate to not need to study the course in full.	The candidate is offered an independent learning project (below) by the assessors to provide the extra evidence needed. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If the candidate does that: he/she withdraws his/her enrolment for the taught version of the course, • If the candidate decides not to do that: he/she stays enrolled and studies the course normally.
3. The candidate's experience covers all the Learning Outcomes thoroughly enough for the candidate to be awarded that course.	The candidate withdraws his/her enrolment for the taught version of the course - no further work needed for that course. APL credits (below) are awarded.

A: AWARENESS

B: EVALUATION

C: PREPARATION

D: OUTCOMES

...of APL assessment

Have we provided a clearly **justified decision**?

Have we made sure the student knows **what to do next**?

Independent Learning Projects (ILPs)

If the assessment decision indicates that candidates have relatively minor gaps in their knowledge, the assessors may feel it is more appropriate for them to undertake an ILP than enroll to study whole courses. The APL advisor directs the candidate to an appropriate source of content knowledge and then, at an agreed point in the future, an extra assessment task is administered to generate the missing evidence.

Where this ILP is a minor piece of work requiring little supervision and straightforward assessment, it might be considered to be part of the original APL process and require no extra invoicing. In the case of more substantial processes a new Letter of Offer will be required.

If/when all the necessary evidence has been obtained the outcome would be processed in the same way as option# 3 above.

Monday, February 02, 2015

: Outcomes Phase

What is the status of credits gained by APL?

Candidates get the full credit value of the courses assessed on their Records of Learning but they do not get a grade – just an indication they passed. The reason for not getting a grade is that APL just measures whether the candidates have reached the level expected of a graduate of the course. To get a grade indicating **how well** he/she had passed would require more assessment that evaluated in more detail how well experience matched the learning outcomes of the course.

Courses gained by assessment of prior learning are not included in the GPA calculation so they have no impact on GPA calculations.

APPENDICES

		Any Unitec staff dealing with enrolling students	Academic staff developing programmes	Academic staff advising students about APL	Academic staff assessing APL	Support staff responsible for administering APL
A	Raising Awareness about APL	✓				
B	Advising Students about Applying for APL	✓		✓		
C	Supporting Candidate Preparation		✓	✓		
D	Assessment Design		✓	✓	✓	
E	Learning Outcomes (What is being Assessed)		✓		✓	
F	Types Learners APL v Students			✓	✓	✓
G	Fees for APL	✓				✓
H	Forms of Evidence and Judgment Decisions			✓	✓	
J	Sample: Letter of Offer			✓		✓
K	Sample: Assessment Guidelines		✓	✓		

Appendix A – Raising Awareness of APL with Students

Here is a good 'Awareness' conversation between a prospective student inquiring about study and a 'front-line' Unitec staff member who may be from a department or Student Central:

Relevant for:

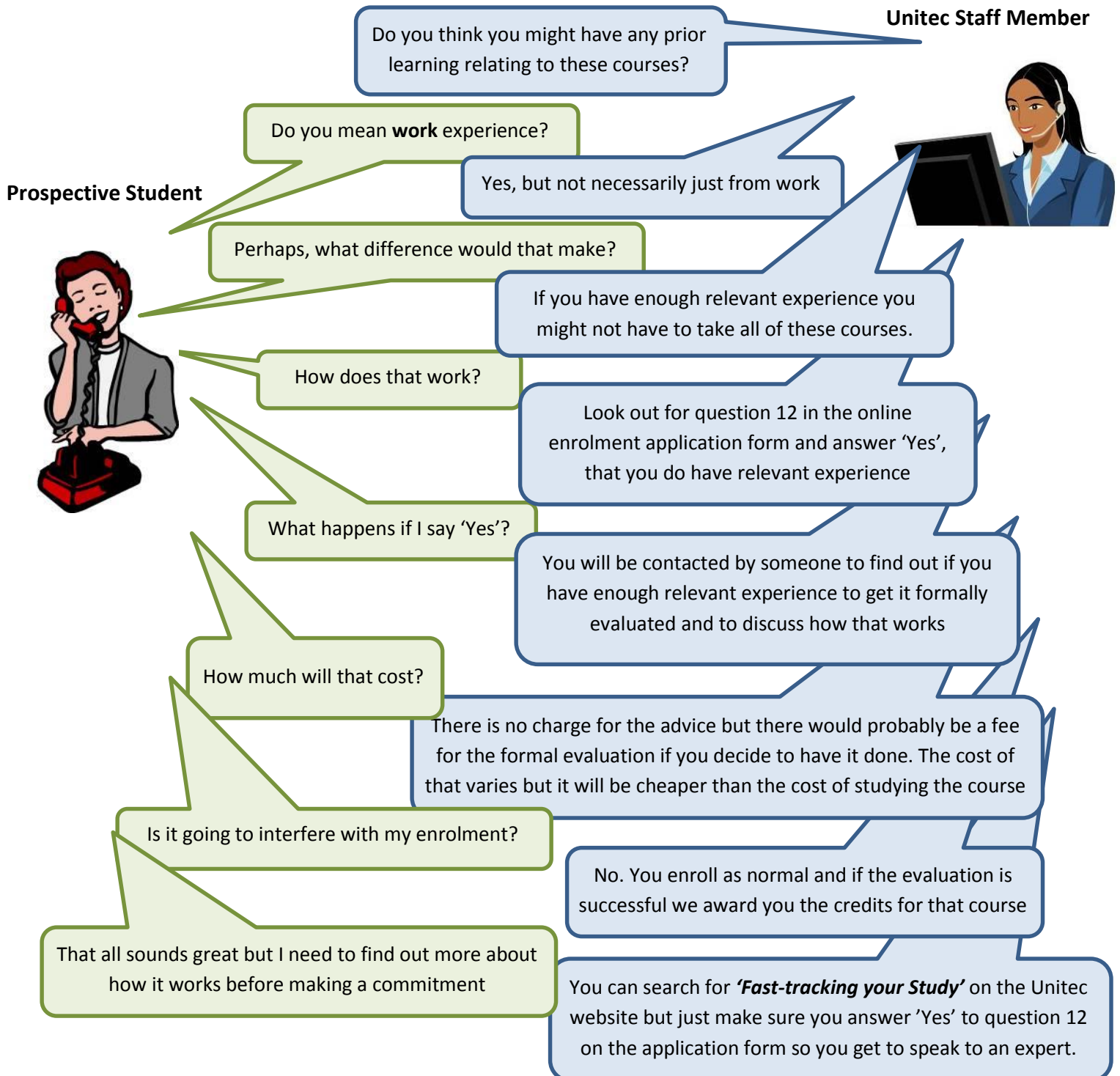
Any Unitec staff dealing with enrolling students

Academic staff developing programmes

Academic staff advising students about APL

Academic staff assessing APL

Support staff responsible for administrating APL



Appendix B – Advising Students about Applying for APL (Evaluation Phase)

Historical precedent is the key for the APL advisor looking to make quick and accurate decisions: **what sort of experience did the previous successful applicants have?** Or, to look at it another way, what sort of experience did the **unsuccessful** ones have?

Patterns indicate potential predictors e.g. people who have performed a particular role at work have usually been successful in getting APL for course XYZ, or alternatively: that job role has proved in the past to be insufficient to meet the specific requirements of one of the Learning Outcomes in course XYZ.

Ideally the APL advisor can draw on his/her knowledge of previous APL applications, combined with the judicious use of data available. The more APL applications that have been processed, the greater the predictability so identifying suitability becomes quicker and more accurate.

Offering advice about APL requires the same **duty of care** we have to ‘not set students up for failure’ by accepting enrollment applications when evidence suggests the applicants are not equipped academically to cope with the study. At the same time it is equally inappropriate to refuse access to APL or a course of study simply because the outcome **may** be unsuccessful for the student. Our duty of care is really to offer sound advice that predicts what the **likely** outcome will be based on the information as presented to us.

The wording of our recommendations is dictated by the need to minimize the potential for conflict that might occur if we recommend to students that they apply for APL and subsequently are unsuccessful. The recommendation of the APL advisor needs to emphasise that it has been based on the ‘face-value’ of the information given by the student and that, if that information subsequently proves to be inaccurate, Unitec cannot be held responsible.

Underpinning this proviso is the fact that there is usually **insufficient time** available to undertake a thorough investigation of the applicants’ backgrounds so we have to take what they say at face value at this stage of the process. It is important therefore we do **not overstate** the significance of our recommendation when we communicate this to the applicants, just as we would not ‘promise’ success to a student who is going to enroll in a course.

Relevant for:

Any Unitec staff dealing with enrolling students

Academic staff developing programmes

Academic staff advising students about APL

Academic staff assessing APL

Support staff responsible for administering APL

Appendix C – Supporting Candidate Preparation for APL

There are two sides to the decision about how much support to offer applicants: Firstly how much support do the candidates feel they need (and how much they are willing/able to pay for)? Secondly what/how much support is the department able to provide. This second consideration involves:

Relevant for:

Any Unitec staff dealing with enrolling students

Academic staff developing programmes

Academic staff advising students about APL

Academic staff assessing APL

Support staff responsible for administering APL

- the level of **expertise** of the APL advisor e.g. in APL facilitation and mentoring,
- how much **time** the APL advisor has available (given the cost of this should be paid by the candidate),
- whether an '**Unspecified Studies**'-type course is an available option in the programme in question.

Four Types of Supported APL Preparation:

	Description of Support Offered: The APL Advisor is always responsible for providing clear communication In addition she/he needs to...	APL Advisor Expertise: Level of skill needed for each option	APL Advisor Workload: (this represents the main cost of APL)	Unspecified Studies Course¹: (needed for intensive support)	Candidate: Experience as an adult student? At what level?
1	... be available to go over the communication to clarify it = a reactive role in a process that relies on the self-direction of the candidate .	Advisor just provides information (no specialised skills)	Light workload (so lowest cost)	Not Necessary	Candidate needs to be academically 'fluent' and self-assured
2	...set up milestones with targets for providing feedback and guiding decisions about evidence selection and presentation = a reactive role but one with plenty of structure for the candidate.	Generic coaching/ mentoring skills needed	Moderate workload	Not Necessary	Candidate needs to be able to work quite independently once given direction
3	...provide a lot of guidance about evidence selection and how to prepare for assessment = a more pro-active role because that is what the candidate needs.	Facilitation skills needed (PD may be needed)	Significant workload;	Useful but not essential	Candidate just needs faith in the value of his/her experience
4	... lead a transformative process aimed at developing the candidate's self-awareness as a skilled practitioner to allow him/her to provide good evidence.	Specialised APL facilitation skills needed (PD required)	Most expensive option (but may be SAC Funded)	Unspecified Studies Course Required	Candidate may have major self-doubts about own expertise

¹ 'Unspecified Studies' courses are designed for learning of an unspecified nature in a supported environment. These courses may **not be intended** for APL but still may provide 'class time' for those applicants who are going to find APL preparation too daunting or difficult without significant levels of support from an advisor to build their confidence and skills in working in an academic context.

Appendix D – APL Assessment Design

First and foremost APL Assessment has to meet the same quality standards as all other summative assessment conducted at Unitec (**APL Policy Statement#4**):

While the same ‘principles’ apply to all summative assessment, this does **not** mean the assessment **tasks** and processes are interchangeable. It is important that academic staff well versed in assessment of taught courses understand the reason for this distinction otherwise they are likely (understandably) to apply familiar ‘tried and trusted’ assessment tasks which may not be appropriate in the APL context.

The design process for **all** summative assessment should include:

Writing Assessment Criteria (how the evidence is going to be judged) based on the course Learning Outcomes (Appendix E)	The Assessment Criteria written for APL should be the same as that for conventional summative assessment if they are well written.
Designing Assessment Tasks that provide the candidates with suitable opportunities to provide all the evidence needed to satisfy those Assessment Criteria	This will normally result in different assessment procedures and generate different types of evidence because APL and conventional summative assessment are assessing different learning processes involving different Types of Learners (Appendix F)
Writing Assessment Guidelines (Appendix K) explaining the process to candidates (what they have to do, what evidence they have to produce, when and how it must be submitted, and how that evidence will be judged)	The subject matter will be the same but the language used will usually be quite different because of the differences between the Types of Learners involved (Appendix F)

Relevant for:

Any Unitec staff dealing with enrolling students
Academic staff developing programmes
Academic staff advising students about APL
Academic staff assessing APL
Support staff responsible for administering APL

APL Policy Statement# 4:

*“The academic rigour of APL at Unitec is assured by compliance with the encompassing **principles of evidence and process** articulated in the Assessment and Feedback Policy.”*

Efficiency is of huge practical importance to assessors. Maximising efficiency means **minimising the workload** needed to make accurate assessment judgements **without compromising** the principles of assessment. Assessors for taught courses have access to both the pieces of information needed to design efficient assessment tasks:

1. what has to be demonstrated (the Assessment Criteria) and
2. how the students **should** be able to demonstrate their knowledge - this predictability is based on what students have been required to do in their coursework.

The problem APL designers face is that they lack clarity around the second of these factors because of the nature of experiential learning (**Appendix F**). If evidence criteria are designed on the basis of **assumptions** about how learning has occurred it puts APL candidates at an unfair disadvantage.

If selection of evidence is left to APL candidates they will submit **too much evidence** because their depth of experience is typically much greater than their understanding of the Assessment Criteria - the **more evidence they present, the less efficient the assessment** is. The alternative recommended here is to collect evidence in **stages** punctuated by **feedback** from the assessors about the cumulating **relevance** and **sufficiency**.

Appendix E –Learning Outcomes v Graduate Profile (What and How Much is being Assessed)

These guidelines emphasise the most common type of APL claim = **a new student looking to gain credits for 1-2 courses and thereby enter a programme at an advanced stage.**

Relevant for:

Any Unitec staff dealing with enrolling students

Academic staff developing programmes

Academic staff advising students about APL

Academic staff assessing APL

Support staff responsible for administrating APL

In that situation the assessment criteria are always based on the **Learning Outcomes** of the courses under consideration hence there is frequent reference to Learning Outcomes in these guidelines, but it can occur that the assessment criteria are based on the Graduate Profile when an applicant is at such an advanced level of expertise that an APL claim for a **whole** qualification may be justifiable.

The rationale behind preferring the **Graduate Profile** of the qualification as the basis for the assessment criteria in those circumstances is because the Graduate Profile is a singular focus on what someone completing the qualification should be able to do i.e. we are assessing whether someone has reached that end point and not the developmental stages he/she has passed through which is what the Learning Outcomes of the various courses represent.

Note: the administration of Graduate Profile APL is quite different from the normal assessment result process. Guidance for this should be sought from an administrator who has experience with Graduate Profile APL and the Academic Quality Management team are a good place to go for assistance.

A third variation can occur if the applicant is **seeking to complete an interrupted qualification**. Because this assessment will, if successful, lead to the award of the qualification, the same rationale exists for using the Graduate Profile as the basis for the assessment criteria rather than the Learning Outcomes - the more courses involved, the stronger the argument for using the Graduate Profile. The APL Policy requires this choice between Learning Outcomes and Graduate Profile as the basis for assessment should be made on the grounds of equity and efficiency.

Warning: Learning Outcomes are written as part of the academic programme development process and that colours their wording if not their substance. Their core meaning needs to be faithfully preserved but Learning Outcomes have to be rewritten in the 'language of assessment' as **Assessment Criteria** (**Appendix D**) to ensure they are fit for purpose. Furthermore this process should apply the 'polytechnic lens' so the academic origins of the Learning Outcomes have been given a thoroughly vocational focus. This rewriting process also needs to make sure the Assessment Criteria are articulated in 'plain English' to ensure clarity of understanding for APL candidates who are academic laymen (**Appendix F**).

The principle of **validity** means that Learning Outcomes are pivotal in Unitec summative assessment design but they have to be used in a judicious manner to ensure the spirit of the validity principle is upheld.

Appendix F – Types of Learners

Types of Learners: APL Candidates v Students (= Taught Courses)

The difference in the way these two groups have learned (formal v informal and non-formal learning) affects the ways they access and express their knowledge. Consider:

Relevant for:

Any Unitec staff dealing with enrolling students
Academic staff developing programmes
Academic staff advising students about APL
Academic staff assessing APL
Support staff responsible for administrating APL

1. Students (in taught courses) are typically presented with assessment tasks that have been designed to test the content of their course so they have a **finite body of ‘declarative’ knowledge** (below) to consider when selecting evidence. In contrast APL candidates are selecting from their ‘free range’ learning experiences in response to an assessment task that was written with no real understanding of the scope of their body of knowledge.
2. Students are expected to have a level of **academic skills** commensurate with the academic standing of their course when addressing academic assessments. In contrast APL candidates approach their assessment tasks with no such associated level of academic ‘fluency’ (unless academic skills are stated as Learning Outcomes, they should **not** be a requirement for APL - **Appendix E**).
3. Students prepare for taught course assessments in a richly **contextualised learning environment** whereas APL candidates only have their APL advisor and the Assessment Guidelines for support.

Knowledge

The ‘form’ of knowledge (which is closely associated to the way in which it has been learned) has a significant impact on how a learner is able to access and represent it. The knowledge structures resulting from formal learning typical of the taught course environment are typically **explicit** and **‘declarative’** in nature which means the learner **should** be able to represent that knowledge in written or oral form relatively easily. Knowledge absorbed from action, experience and observation is often **‘tacit’** knowledge that is **not** easy to articulate in the sort of decontextualized situations most assessments create.

Most assessment forms were originally designed for the academic environment and focus on assessing acquisition of knowledge and theory. In the context of vocational education and training, however, the significance of knowledge is as an **enabler of performance** rather than a goal of learning in its own right so academic assessment processes may not be appropriate in a vocational context.

In general the process of developing real expertise involves the internalising of novice-stage declarative knowledge and its transformation into tacit knowledge which causes it to be at the same time more sophisticated and less easy to articulate. In fact experiential learners with the **most** prior learning are often the **least** able to articulate their knowledge because it has been thus internalized.

So while it may seem counter-intuitive to academic staff with a lot of experience with conventional assessment to assess APL candidates in the way we would assess the students of our taught courses in which we might assess theory directly would be to create a significant additional barrier for APL candidates and that would breach the principles of good assessment.

Appendix G – Fees for APL

APL Fees: \$500 per course assessed, up to a maximum fee of \$2,500 for any one APL application in relation to any one qualification.

This is a standard 'flat rate' fee across Unitec Institute of Technology

Relevant for:

Any Unitec staff dealing with enrolling students

Academic staff developing programmes

Academic staff advising students about APL

Academic staff assessing APL

Support staff responsible for administering APL

Applications by Staff for APL

In keeping with institute policy on charging staff for other services, Unitec staff applying for APL are to be charged 75% of the APL cost charged to students which means \$375 per course up to a maximum of \$1875.

Rationale

The **APL Policy** stipulates that the fees charged for APL cover the costs of provision. In reality the actual costs in terms of staff time used will vary from assessment to assessment, but for purposes of practicality and perceived fairness it has been decided to set a flat fee based on the historic costs of executing APL. The rate of \$500 has been determined on the basis of the average time taken to carry out an APL process of the type being promoted in the current APL guidelines.

The maximum fee of \$2,500 reflects both the efficiencies of assessing multiple related courses in one process and the intention to keep APL accessible for as many students as possible.

Note: Students need to be made aware that 'Studylink' does **not** fund the cost of APL processes and that courses achieved by APL do **not** contribute to the calculation of 'fulltime' study.

APL Policy Statement# 5:
*"A service charge for APL is justified on the grounds of **cost recovery**. Academic departments are obliged to provide a robust APL process to all eligible candidates so appropriate and sufficient resources are to be made available for that purpose."*

Appendix H – Forms of Evidence and Judgment Decisions

APL follows the same principles as all summative assessment, but it is **not** interchangeable with taught-course assessment in a number of ways, including the forms of evidence it targets.

Relevant for:

Any Unitec staff dealing with enrolling students
Academic staff developing programmes
Academic staff advising students about APL
Academic staff assessing APL
Support staff responsible for administrating APL

The person designing taught course assessment knows not only **what** the students (should) have learned, but also a good deal about **how** it has been learned (as much as learning can be a function of a predetermined, structured teaching programme). That context justifies the design of prescriptive evidence requirements and what it needs to demonstrate. That degree of prescriptiveness and specificity **cannot** be transferred to APL because there are significant differences between the **Types of Learners** involved (see **Appendix F**).

Because their learning paths are unstructured and often much longer, APL candidates can draw on forms of evidence not usually available to students of taught courses and that evidence needs to be given consideration by assessors. Much of it is '**naturally occurring**' evidence like actual products made, photos of work produced, appraisals by managers and customer satisfaction surveys. In prospect this evidence is messy and problematic for the assessors to process as it was not tailor-made for assessment purposes (unlike the evidence expected from students of taught courses which is usually generated specifically for assessment purposes). This may be true but it can still meet the criteria of good evidence and so cannot be marginalized.

To explain this distinction in a slightly different way: the evidence for taught course assessment represents **what has been learned** whereas most of the evidence for APL represents **what the candidates have done** as a consequence of their learning. This is where the concept of **Equivalence** in APL Policy Statement#6 is important. Judgment decisions need to allow for the fact that APL candidates and the students in taught courses are different **Types of Learners** (**Appendix F**). Equivalence requires APL assessors accept evidence that demonstrates the right level of capability even though it is not necessarily expressed in the academic form expected of students in taught courses unless that is an **explicit** requirement stated in the Learning Outcomes.

Remember that the underlying assessment principle of **validity** requires that all summative assessment judgments are based on criteria stated in the Learning Outcomes of the relevant course, and **only** on those criteria.

At the same time the '**burden of proof**' lies with the APL candidate. This means candidates can offer non-academic forms of evidence and claim they are equivalent but they still have to demonstrate the **value** of this evidence in terms of its **relevance** and **authenticity**. The assessor is only responsible for deciding whether these qualities have been demonstrated and ultimately for determining **sufficiency** (whether the evidence satisfies the assessment criteria).

APL Policy Statement# 6:

*"To the extent APL measures learning experiences from work and life against Formal learning outcomes, judgment is premised on the concept of **Equivalence**. If the sum of Competences evidenced is equivalent to the Capabilities articulated in course Learning Outcomes and/or programme Graduate Profile, then the main criterion of a positive judgment outcome has been met."*

Appendix J – Sample Letter of Offer for APL

A **Letter of Offer** is needed to formalize the agreement that Unitec will provide the candidate with APL-related services.

Relevant for:

Any Unitec staff dealing with enrolling students
Academic staff developing programmes

Academic staff advising students about APL

Academic staff assessing APL

Support staff responsible for administering APL

(Date)

(Address)

Re Letter of Offer for Assessment of Prior Learning.

Dear XXXX

We are pleased to offer you the opportunity to have your prior learning formally evaluated. To proceed we would ask you to read the description of the assessment process below and return a signed copy to Unitec to indicate you wish to proceed. If, however, you are uncertain about any of the stated details, please contact us before signing to ensure we have full agreement.

Once the signed letter has been returned, we will complete the administration process and send you the relevant invoice. If you wish to discuss terms of payment please contact the department (be advised that assessment of prior learning fees **cannot** be covered by 'Studylink').

Assessment of Prior Learning Process

Courses Sought (& Qualification): 7828 Advanced Construction Law
7418 Integrated Design & Construction Management
(B. Construction - Construction Management)

Assessment Process Description: Presentation of a portfolio of evidence; oral interview by assessor;
additional evidence requested by the assessor (if needed).

Pre-Assessment Support: Up to 3 hours of assistance from a designated APL Advisor on request

Cost (including GST): \$1,150.00 (inc. GST of \$150.00)

It is the intention of Unitec to carry out the process in the manner outlined above but the institute reserves the right in consultation with you to modify aspects of it.

Upon completion of the assessment process, and subject to Unitec having received payment of our invoice, you will be notified of the outcome and have the opportunity to seek clarification or reconsideration of the decision. After the results have been finalised, successful completions will be considered by an academic programme committee for formal approval and then registered on your Record of Learning.

We look forward to working with you on this process and hope you find it to be a rewarding experience.

Yours faithfully

XXXXXX

Signature: (Name of Candidate) **By signing this Letter of Offer I am acknowledging that I have read, understood and accepted the terms and conditions it contains.**

Appendix K – Sample Assessment Guidelines for the APL Candidate

APL Assessment Guidelines need to explain the preparation and assessment/evidence gathering process in 'plain English'.

Relevant for:

Any Unitec staff dealing with enrolling students

Academic staff developing programmes

Academic staff advising students about APL

Academic staff assessing APL

Support staff responsible for administering APL

Bachelor of Construction (Construction Management)

Guidelines for Assessment of Prior Learning (APL) Candidates

The person designated to help you work through this Assessment of Prior Learning (APL) process is your Unitec APL Advisor, XXXXX. After you have familiarised yourself with the information in these guidelines, your next step should be to contact Chris and go over how to prepare for the assessment and, most importantly, what exactly you have to prove.

Try to think of this preparation phase as a two-way responsibility: we are responsible for giving you the information that will ensure you understand exactly what you have to do but you are responsible for asking us the right questions.

How APL Works

It may be useful to think of APL as being similar in approach to painting a house because you are going to be asked to carry out this task in a series of overlapping 'layers'. The first layer should give you good coverage of the evidence but is unlikely to satisfy all the assessment requirements because you need the feedback of the assessors to see where the gaps are (they are the experts in what is required so you don't need to be). The subsequent layer(s) should provide better coverage of the 'thin' evidence areas that have been highlighted and that continues until the assessors have all the evidence they need in order to make good, accurate judgement decisions.

This layered approach is intended to help reduce the sort of high-stakes pressure on you to get it perfect first time that is associated with other forms of assessment (where typically you have one chance to get it right and then, perhaps, a reassessment opportunity).

This process is **not** about you having to defend your professional status. The fact you have been offered an APL process covering the whole qualification is an acknowledgement of your standing in the industry – congratulations! This process is intended to be a dialogue between professional equals (not an interrogation of a 'novice' by 'experts') so hopefully it will be a constructive and rewarding experience for all parties involved.

Overview of This APL Process

After a period of supported preparation, you will take part in an assessment 'interview' consisting of a brief presentation on the topics outlined below, followed by a discussion with the assessors (or single assessor but the language of these guidelines assumes it will be more than one). The assessors may then request supplementary evidence and negotiate with you how and when this needs to be presented to them.

The date of that interview is XXXXX (time yet to be finalized)

Step#1 – Your Introduction

The first phase of the assessment process is usually conducted as a face-to-face meeting with your assessors at which you present ‘hard’ evidence about one or more of the construction projects you have managed and about your ongoing professional development (see the following table for more details about what you should present). This evidence may include documents, photos, signed testimonies by people you have worked with/for, and any other ‘artefacts’ that help to establish what you have done. It is strongly advised that you discuss the selection of project(s) with your APL Advisor early in this preparation phase, once you have become familiar with these guidelines and what you have to demonstrate.

Instead of then handing over a portfolio of paperwork for the assessors to evaluate, you will be expected to use these items as prompts for a verbal explanation of how you carried out your role as a project manager, or rather, how you carried out the dimensions of the role which are important to this assessment. Official and ‘unofficial’ documents can both be useful in this context because your explanation (and subsequent discussion) really provides the weight of the evidence. The important consideration here is **relevance: everything you present needs to be explained in terms of how it helps meet the assessment requirements in the following table:**

What you have to talk about:	What you are trying to prove:
A project for which you held a project management role with sufficient evidence available to help prove what is needed (see right-hand column)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The range of your body of knowledge as a construction management professional,• Your interpersonal skills and ability to deliver on the communication dimensions of construction management,• Your ability to solve problems - both individually and collaboratively,• Your ability to deliver as a project manager (this includes levels of customer satisfaction).
A second project you have managed if needed to cover any skills, knowledge or competency gaps not sufficiently apparent in the available evidence relating to the first project	
A summary of ‘ learning accomplishments ’ over the last year (approximately)	This includes formal and informal professional development such as workshops, working with a mentor and/or reading/watching influential material. It also might include professional set-backs or personal experiences from which you have learned and in doing so become a better practitioner.

Step#2 – The Discussion

After your initial presentation, the assessors will ask you some **questions** on areas where they need more evidence. In essence this is a collaboration - you and the assessors are working toward the common goal of gathering all the evidence needed to allow accurate assessment decisions.

When the assessors feel they gathered all the evidence available from this discussion they will indicate that to you. They may also ask if you have any other evidence that would help verify your claims that has not been presented.

Step#3 – Completion

If the assessors feel more evidence is needed than you have available at this session, they will negotiate with you how and when that evidence needs to be submitted (on some occasions this involves some developmental work in the form of a work based learning project). The final assessment decision is held over until the extra evidence has been considered - there will be a deadline though.

If instead the assessors feel they have all the evidence they need, you will normally be informed of their final decision more-or-less immediately. If their decision is that your experience does **not** cover an important aspect of the Graduate Profile that is in no way a criticism of you, your career or your professional competence – it really reflects the limitations of our qualification as a universal template for every variation of professional practice in your industry.

Key Takeaways

- Plan, ask questions, listen to the answers and repeat this cycle until you have **a really clear understanding of what you have to demonstrate** and the best way you can do that.
- You need to resist the temptation to 'over-supply' evidence. Focus on what this guide states you have to demonstrate and do not try to tell the whole story of your career. **Your ability to be selective in what you present actually reflects better on your professionalism than an indiscriminate 'shotgun' approach.**
- Remember that if you offer insufficient evidence in your presentation the assessors will just keep asking questions until they feel they have enough.