

The Foundation Learning Tier and APL

Perceptions of APL

Despite all attempts to develop and operate a demand led system, too often it's the requirements of the system which dominate. Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL) seems to be a classic example of a good idea that seems impossible to implement in a simple and learner friendly way.

APL has a poor reputation in the learning and skills system. Recent research conducted by Credit Works for the LSC¹ revealed that APL was regarded by many as tortuous, time consuming and overly bureaucratic. There was little evidence of APL below level 2, and providers' experience and views suggested there is little positive impact on learner progression through APL.

But what do learners think? Recent research on First Steps learning by Credit Works² suggested that learners understood and would like access to APL at the earliest stages of learning and achievement, but the process had to be a positive one and encompass a range of achievements especially at lower levels.

Recognition of achievement

In many cases, recognition of achievement was unimportant or off-putting for learners at first but was wanted later.

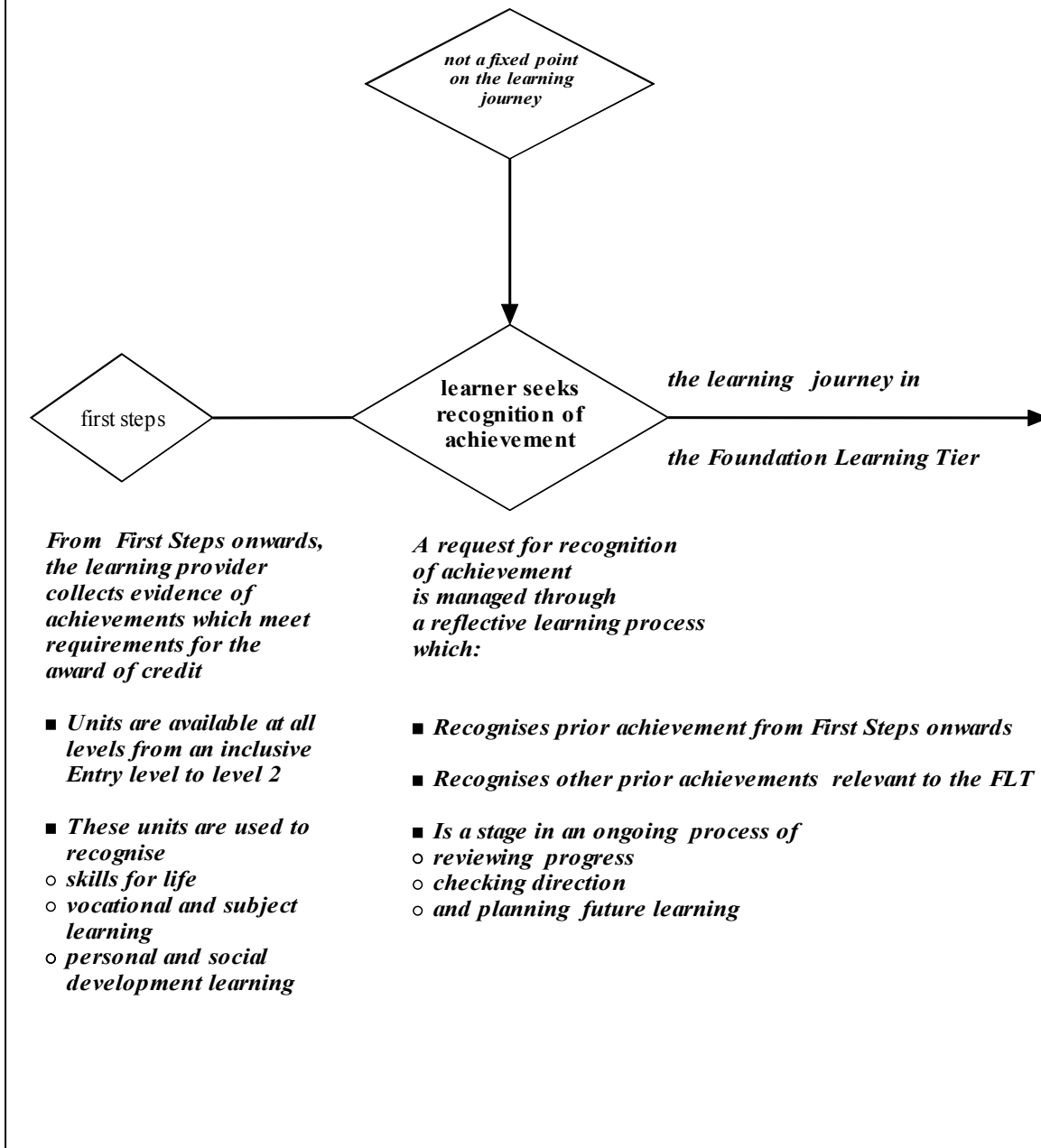
Few learners wanted "qualifications" at the outset of their learning journey, but many wanted recognition for achievements later in the learning process, and they did not want to have to repeat learning in order to get this. All felt that formal recognition should be available if and when they wanted it but not at the expense of their control of their learning.

Is the system capable of recognising prior learning and achievement with the flexibility these learners would like? The First Steps study suggested that the way in which practitioners record what has been learned could be organised to provide *post-hoc* evidence of achievement that counts towards the award of credit. Requests for recognition of achievement at any stage in the process should then be managed through a reflective learning process. This is illustrated in the model below.

¹Credit Works The feasibility of employing the accreditation of prior learning (APL) to identify distance travelled towards the achievement of full Level 1, 2 and 3 qualifications, LSC 2006

² Credit Works, *Characterising First Steps Learning*. LSC 2006

***Entitlement to Recognition of Achievement
from First Steps Learning onwards in the Foundation Learning Tier***



Enshrining an *entitlement* to recognition of achievement in policy will also help these learners.

Recognition of informal learning (outside structured learning programmes) into the curriculum is an essential feature of this model, where the benefits of working with others to reflect on, value and describe prior learning is seen as an integral part of a structured learning programme, and which also identifies further learning needs.

The challenge for learning providers will be to:

- take an approach which assumes the learner may wish to exercise a right to recognition of achievement at a future point
- be organised to identify what they learned from the beginning of their engagement
- support the learner to provide evidence of achievement which counts towards the award of credit

The Foundation Learning Tier and the Framework

Recent reforms in the qualifications system, particularly the implementation of the credit and qualifications framework (the Framework) should help to improve flexibility and responsiveness in the system.

Following the commitment to the Framework, the 2006 White Paper also established the commitment to the Foundation Learning Tier (FLT) to develop coherent provision and validated progression pathways below level 2. The FLT aims to establish an inclusive curriculum offer at Entry and Level 1 for learners of all ages from 14 years upwards. It will be supported by units and qualifications at Entry Level and Level 1 in the Framework. The FLT and the Framework will be of key interest to those involved with basic skills and will play a major role in the strategy for level 2 achievement.

However, whilst these policy developments may support more responsive and flexible learning and achievement, they won't guarantee it, nor will they necessarily offer access to less bureaucratic APL processes. The APL research report therefore recommended that trials of the FLT and the Framework should explore ways of integrating recognition of prior learning into the curriculum and active accreditation of that prior learning within a learning programme, building on examples of positive APL practice identified in the research.

The FLT Mission³ makes learner entitlements explicit, including the critical importance of recognition of achievement and access to progression pathways for learners in the FLT. The mission also recognises the importance of personalised learning, and access to a coherent curriculum which develops and integrates literacy and numeracy, and (purposeful) personal and social development (PSD), regardless of the type of LSC funded programme.

The principle of entitlement to recognition of achievement which values small steps towards goals and supports progression will apply to basic and key skills in the same way as other achievements in the FLT. FLT provision will need to be designed and delivered so that basic and key skills (and their recognition) are offered from the outset and integrated into a balanced FLT curriculum.

³ LSC Requirements for Foundation Learning Tier Providers, LSC National Office, 1st September 2006

This will include access to the development of basic and key skills at all levels, from an inclusive entry level through to level 2. New qualification structures and arrangements for assessment will be tested in the FLT trials and should ensure that learning and development of these skills can be integrated with PSD and vocational learning in the curriculum, and that their achievement can be recognised incrementally and accumulated towards full qualification (including through the award of credit as this becomes developed and implemented).

System requirements and policy will always have an impact on how learners experience and navigate their way through the system.

The emphasis is now on:

- improved planning and focus on provision to support targets
- improved qualifications and curriculum to support progression
- more sophisticated and flexible measures of achievement using credit
- *and* tools for recognising and accrediting prior learning and achievement

These improvements should make it possible for more people to build achievements towards “a wider platform of skills for employability” and full qualification at level 2 and beyond. Enshrining learner entitlements within the FLT will in time encourage learners to make demands on the system and ensure that providers and policy makers keep their eye on the ball.

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