



JISC Final Report

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Pineapple Project
JISC Final Report

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- Project partners:
 - South Devon College
 - City College Plymouth
 - Petroc
 - Exeter College.
- UPC Faculty at the University of Plymouth, particularly Clare Ellison.
- The APEL community at the University of Plymouth.

b) Report Summary

2.1 Project Overview

This project was funded by the JISC Institutional Innovation projects in lifelong learning and workforce development programme. Working in partnership with the University of Plymouth College faculty (UPC) and with staff from UPC partner institutions, the PINEAPPLE team investigated Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL).

To begin to understand the challenge, the team firstly carried out a desk study to identify drivers, barriers and models of practice in this area. This showed, amongst other things, that giving academic credit for experiential learning is more often talked about than done and it can be subject to a range of misunderstandings.

To gain perspective on how APEL translated into practice, a survey of UPC HE in FE managers was carried out and numerous formal and informal events were organised and/or attended. Anecdotal and survey evidence largely confirmed the baseline findings.

The university's own APEL regulations were scrutinised in detail which led, eventually, to the setting up of an APEL working party to examine the need to address ambiguities and amendments.

In parallel to these activities a web-based tool was developed to support staff through the management of a claim. Initially planned as a bespoke APEL tool for UPC it had become apparent, that 'one size' would not fit all. The outcome was the development of the PINEAPPLE core builder that can be used to design and deliver an online APEL process for any institution. Benefits Realisation funding enabled the project to verify this with Staffordshire University's APEL process and an additional TransAPEL process.

2.2 Project Outputs

A summary of PINEAPPLE deliverables and outputs with links is given below:

1. Key Publications and Events

- a. Witt, N., McDermott, A., Stillwell, R., (2011), Effectively supporting best practices for Accredited Prior Experiential Learning (APEL), JISC conference, Liverpool.
<http://hdl.handle.net/10293/1053>
- b. Dismore, H., McDermott, A., Witt, N., Stillwell, R., Neville, S. & Stone, M. (2011) Tension of APEL: perceptions of higher education in further education lecturers, *Research in Post –Compulsory Education*, In press.
- c. TELSTAR and PINEAPPLE Projects (2010) Development of Systems: How do Institutions cope with APEL. *Festival of Assemblies*, Oxford Conference Centre, 20th October. Report available from http://assemblies.inin.jisc-ssbr.net/files/2010/11/TELSTAR-AND-PINEAPPLE-ASSEMBLY-output_Oct_2010.pdf
- d. Dismore, H., McDermott, A., Witt, N., Neville, S., Stillwell, R. and Stone, M. (2010) Accrediting prior experiential learning (APEL): perceptions of higher education in further education lecturers. Paper presented at the *British Education Research Association Annual Conference*, University of Warwick, 3rd September.
- e. Witt, N.A.J. McDermott, A.P., Stillwell, R. and Dismore H. (2010) Pineapple – Accredited Prior Experiential Learning (invited poster presentation). *JISC Innovation Forum*. Royal Holloway University, 28-29th July. <http://hdl.handle.net/10293/445>
- f. Witt, N.A.J, McDermott, A.P., Stillwell, R. & Dismore, H. (2010) Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning, *Sustaining Innovation via Organisational Development Conference*, Staffordshire University, 7th June. <http://hdl.handle.net/10293/1062>
- g. Stillwell, R., McDermott, A., Witt, N. & Dismore, H. (2010) Pineapple Project (presentation). *UPC Administrators' Community Forum*. Plymouth, Jury's Inn, 23 March. <http://hdl.handle.net/10293/444>
- h. Dismore, H. and Stillwell, R. (2009) PINEAPPLE Project (presentation) *APEL Assembly*, University of Bradford, 8th October. <http://hdl.handle.net/10293/443>
- i. University of Plymouth, UPC and HELP CETL Seminar Series – APEL, 4th March 2010 - summary outlines the presentations and discussions held as part of the PINEAPPLE/UPC HELP CETL 2010 Seminar Series event summary. <http://hdl.handle.net/10293/439>
- j. Stillwell, R., McDermott, A., Witt, N. & Dismore, H. (2010) Partner college event to discuss APEL and PINEAPPLE model with UPC staff - Pineapple APEL UPC EVENT 4 March 2010.ppt. <http://hdl.handle.net/10293/449>
- k. Witt, Neil (2009) PINEAPPLE UPC APEL lunch time session. University of Plymouth, 2nd December. <http://hdl.handle.net/10293/447>
- l. Witt, N., Stillwell, R., Dismore, H. & McDermott, A. (2009) Institutional Pragmatics: Shaping Change, *JISC Institutional Innovation SSB, Eluminate Conference*, 12 November 2009. <http://hdl.handle.net/10293/448>

2. Software

- a. PINEAPPLE Core – Version 1.0 alpha
- b. PINEAPPLE Core – Version 1.0 final <https://sourceforge.net/projects/pineappletool/>
- c. PINEAPPLE Sandbox <http://www.pineappleproject.org.uk/sandbox/>
- d. PINEAPPLE Installation and Administration Guide <http://hdl.handle.net/10293/1043>

3. APEL Guidance Materials

- a. Difference between APCL and APEL – guidance <http://hdl.handle.net/10293/998>

- b. Staff guide to APEL guidance document <http://hdl.handle.net/10293/993>
 - c. Student guide to APEL guidance document <http://hdl.handle.net/10293/994>
 - d. APEL FAQ's guidance document <http://hdl.handle.net/10293/995>
 - e. APEL Application Form <http://hdl.handle.net/10293/997>
 - f. APEL Assessment Grid <http://hdl.handle.net/10293/996>
 - g. PINEAPPLE UPC User Guide <http://hdl.handle.net/10293/1040>
 - h. PINEAPPLE UPC User Quick Guide <http://hdl.handle.net/10293/1041>
4. **Case Studies**
- a. Case Study – Formalising APEL <http://hdl.handle.net/10293/1033>
 - b. Case Study – Simplifying APEL <http://hdl.handle.net/10293/1034>
 - c. Case Study – Individual and Group Claims <http://hdl.handle.net/10293/1035>
 - d. Case Study – Sharing Good Practice <http://hdl.handle.net/10293/1036>
 - e. Case Study – Managing APEL <http://hdl.handle.net/10293/1037>
 - f. Case Study – Assessment <http://hdl.handle.net/10293/1038>
5. **Baseline report**
- a. Cross-institutional processes and practice in APEL <http://hdl.handle.net/10293/356>
6. **UPC Briefing**
- a. UPC Briefing Report UPC <http://hdl.handle.net/10293/1044>
7. **PINEAPPLE Process**
- a. Initial University of Plymouth (UoP) APEL process <http://hdl.handle.net/10293/1045>
 - b. UPC PINEAPPLE APEL Process (including group) <http://hdl.handle.net/10293/1046>
 - c. UPC PINEAPPLE Process and resources – final <http://hdl.handle.net/10293/1047>
 - d. UoP APEL Regulations and queries <http://hdl.handle.net/10293/1061>
8. **Survey data** (see also Publications)
- a. Survey Questions (see Appendix I) <http://hdl.handle.net/10293/1060>
 - b. Powerpoint of main findings <http://hdl.handle.net/10293/1039>
9. **Pilot Report**
- a. Piloting questionnaire – Parts One and Two <http://hdl.handle.net/10293/1058>
 - b. Piloting semi-structured interview script <http://hdl.handle.net/10293/1057>
 - c. Summary Report <http://hdl.handle.net/10293/1042>
10. **Podcasts**
- a. An Introduction to APEL – video <http://hdl.handle.net/10293/990>
 - b. Group vs Individual APEL - video <http://hdl.handle.net/10293/992>
 - c. What to do with APCL – video <http://hdl.handle.net/10293/991>
11. **Benefits Realisation**
- a. PINEAPPLE Key Questions <http://hdl.handle.net/10293/1056>
 - b. PINEAPPLE Recipe <http://hdl.handle.net/10293/1059>
 - c. Staffordshire University APEL Process for PINEAPPLE <http://hdl.handle.net/10293/1063>
 - d. Staffordshire University APEL and TransAPEL Process for PINEAPPLE <http://hdl.handle.net/10293/1064>
12. **Project Reports**
- a. Interim progress reports x 5
 - b. Final Report
 - c. Completion Report
13. **Other Outputs**
- a. Project website <http://www.PINEAPPLEproject.org.uk>
 - b. Project blog <http://www.PINEAPPLEproject.org.uk/blog>

- c. Newsletters
 - i. <http://hdl.handle.net/10293/99>
 - ii. <http://hdl.handle.net/10293/417>
 - iii. <http://hdl.handle.net/10293/1048>
- d. Eco Banner <http://hdl.handle.net/10293/1051>
- e. Posters
 - i. <http://hdl.handle.net/10293/445>
 - ii. <http://hdl.handle.net/10293/1049>

2.3 Impact and Benefits to the Community

For academic staff the UPC PINEAPPLE process can both guide and record an APEL claim. At each stage it provides appropriate guidance and resources. Busy or inexperienced tutors can easily share the claim with others. This will provide students from across the UPC partnership with an equitable experience of APEL and ensure that a quality driven process is the norm.

At a local level the events and dissemination that the project has undertaken have raised the profile of APEL. Institutional implementation will consist of a soft launch with a small number of UPC partner institutions and a briefing paper has advised UPC of areas that need to be addressed in order for this to succeed. These include marketing, staff development, quality, regulatory and committee changes.

Engagement with the HE and HE in FE community, through events, papers and presentations, have all demonstrated the wide interest in APEL. The UPC process, the APEL process builder and the resources that the project has developed can be used wholly or partially by other institutions. This has been demonstrated by the benefits realisation funded work with Staffordshire University.

2.4 Main Lessons Learnt

Although the awarding of APEL is ultimately a matter of academic judgement, the project found that staff were experiencing barriers and blockages that prevented a claim getting to this point, e.g.

- lack of awareness leading to lack of advocacy
- lack of knowledge about advising on, assessing or managing a claim
- lack of confidence in working with a student claiming APEL
- some local expertise but no central point of contact
- local 'exceptions' to regulations
- concerns about quality processes
- lack of clarity and 'fitness for purpose' in institutional APEL regulations

So that UPC staff can be confident and can evidence that a consistent and quality procedure has been undertaken, the PINEAPPLE project created a tool to produce and support multiple and changing APEL processes. Resources created by the project are used in these processes to provide timely and appropriate materials and guidance.

In relation to the institution, the field of APEL proved to be complex and challenging. It can have wide reaching implications for recruitment, assessment, quality processes, curriculum design and development etc.. Ideally the role of APEL should be defined by the institution's business plan which should then dictate related regulations and policies.

c) Main Body of Report

3.1 *What did you do? (Methodology)*

There were a number of distinct strands to manage:

- software development
- increasing our understanding of the issues surrounding APEL in theory
- understanding the practice of APEL by UPC partner institutions in practice
- synthesising theory and practice to create appropriate support materials
- piloting, testing and evaluating the software and materials
- creating links and partnerships and local, regional and national level through events, meetings, blogs, benefits realisation etc.

Each of these has been ongoing throughout the project and each strand has had a huge influence on the others.

Background

The Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning refers to the granting of academic credit for learning that has been gained through experience and, therefore, has not been formally assessed. This might be gained through work, volunteering or life events. It has benefits for learners, institutions and employers as it recognises and allows students to use their existing knowledge, skills and abilities to gain entry to courses they might otherwise be unqualified to take. It may also be used to confer exemptions from some parts of a course.

APEL is a process that has resulted in many policies and guidelines but surprisingly few applicants¹. The exact reasons for this are unclear, despite the fact that it appears to address a number of nationally important issues such as work force development, widening participation and the increasing need for students to access further training and qualifications in less costly and time consuming ways. In addition, institutions are increasingly looking to strengthen their employer engagement, increase work based learning and develop shell frameworks for CPD.

The University of Plymouth, itself grappling with all of these agendas and has, in the UPC Faculty, a partnership of 19 institutions that could benefit a great deal from addressing the complexities of APEL. The college staff undertaking APEL claims can be either academic or professional support staff and are in the somewhat confusing situation of having to implement both college and university regulations, policies and processes at different times.

The Higher Education Learning Partnerships Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (HELP CETL), on behalf of UPC, and the South West Lifelong Learning Network (SWLLN) had previously investigated APEL related issues. These investigations highlighted the need for a clear, workable approach to be devised². The PINEAPPLE project planned to find a technological solution to help make this easier to handle and thereby encourage take up. Anecdotal evidence had suggested that complexity was only one of a range of issues that seemed to be acting as a deterrent to the promotion of APEL and this was something that the project also wished to explore with UPC staff. Therefore PINEAPPLE aimed to investigate, implement and evaluate methods, technologies, associated

¹ Merrill, B. (2001). *Social Inclusion through APEL: The learner's perspective*.
<http://crl.gcal.ac.uk/SOCRATESSite/NRENGLAND.pdf> (accessed 30th Sept 2008).

² Dismore H and Stone M (2009) Gathering Evidence of APEL: methods and issues - brief report provides the context for the HELP CETL projects on accrediting prior experiential learning (APEL).
<http://hdl.handle.net/10293/288>

interventions and policies that will assist HE in FE staff in the embedding and widespread acceptance of APEL. In this it was building on the APEL related work undertaken as a development activity funded by the HELP CETL and other work carried out by SWLLN.

JISC had previously funded a student facing support tool, the Derby eApel project³, therefore PINEAPPLE chose to focus on staff and institutional needs in relation to APEL, although in practice we found that providing information, advice and guidance for claimants became a necessary part of the toolkit.

Aims and objectives

The aim of PINEAPPLE was to work collaboratively with UPC and partner FECs to develop a shared understanding of APEL issues and to develop a shared solution that can be embedded across the regional partnership.

The main objectives were to:

- review existing APEL resources and identification of any information gaps
- review the current situation within the partnership
- investigate the role of the institution as a service provider, allowing stakeholders to interact with, relevant resources that are easily discovered and reusable
- use the findings to inform institutional decision makers of the pertinent issues and to suggest adaptation of current and future institutional strategies
- develop processes to allow the collation and sharing of APEL data
- develop, implement and evaluate an APEL toolkit/diagnostic for stakeholders to explain APEL process and for the user to record/register APEL
- develop an APEL tracker to record and monitor APEL applications (successful and unsuccessful) with a view to building up cases that can be referred to as and when needed
- develop central support and training for staff and external examiners
- dissemination of the above, appropriate support and well-targeted marketing for employers and Professional Bodies.

Data Collection Methods used in the Baseline Study

The initial stage of the project focused on collating the information required for the baseline report.

The team took this as an opportunity to carry out a desk study that reviewed APEL from the perspective of a range of stakeholders and looked at local, national and international models and perspectives. This involved searching at national, regional and local levels all available APEL related guidance and support materials.

The baseline provided a good overview and helped to form ideas about how an electronic tool could help staff with the process (see Section 3.2 for results of the baseline study).

Data Collection Methods used in the Survey of HE in FE Managers

A questionnaire was developed which was designed to collect quantitative and qualitative data about two main areas:

1. General awareness of APEL in the respondents' institution, including understanding of policy and responsibility for APEL.
2. Support currently received for APEL, as well as the support required.

This was used to create a web-based survey so that it could be completed online, enable tracking of responses and monitor individual results.

³ <http://www.derby.ac.uk/e-apel>

After piloting and amending the questionnaire, an email explaining the background and a link was sent to all HE in FE managers as they had been identified by UPC central as the group who would have had most experience of APEL (see Section 3.2 for results of the survey).

Creation of the UPC APEL Workflow and Resources

The project team were in continuous dialogue with University of Plymouth Colleges' staff and Associate Dean (Teaching and Learning) to refine the process and support materials

Ongoing throughout the project have been discussions between team members and members of staff dealing with APEL in UPC faculty and University of Plymouth.

Creation of the PINEAPPLE Tool

These activities fed into the development of a system specification and creation of Version 0.5 Alpha of the PINEAPPLE core. Using a rapid prototyping approach this version was developed incrementally in response to formal and informal consultations to arrive at the Pilot version of the code - Version 1 Alpha. Feedback and evaluation from the piloting phase led to the creation of the final version of the PINEAPPLE V1 Final which can be downloaded from the sourceforge website⁴.

Figure 1 shows a screen shot from the beginning of the UPC APEL process which illustrates the use of guidance, resources and a decision choice in a single step.

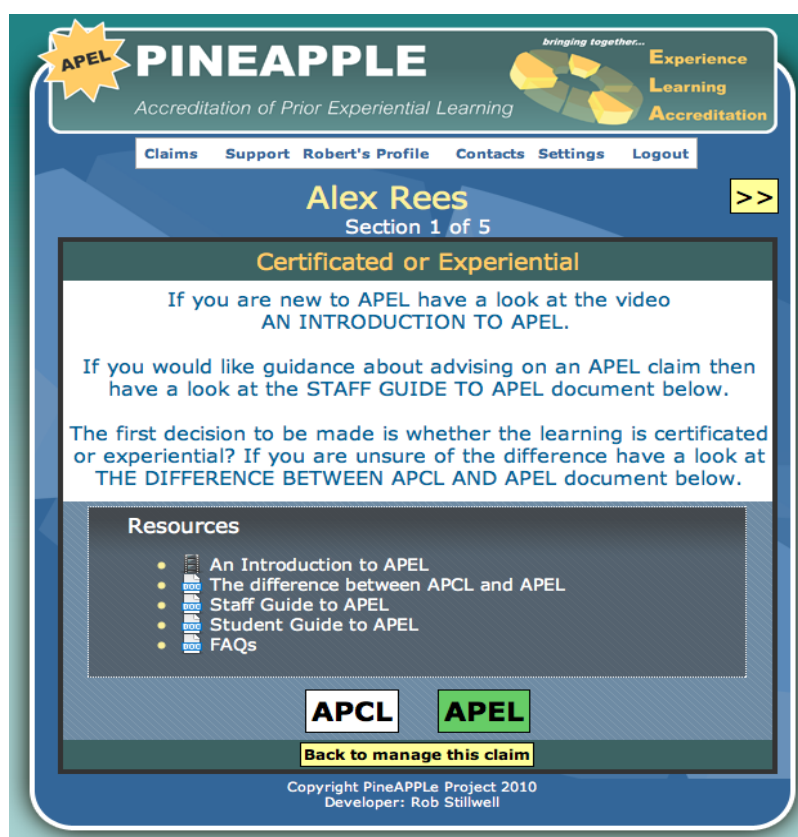


Figure 1. An example of guidance, resources and choices.

In this way a process is built step-by-step until completed.

⁴ <https://sourceforge.net/projects/pineappletool/>



Figure 2. APEL Claimant summary page.

Whilst a claim is ongoing it may be worked on or printed out; other users may be invited to also work on the claim (see Figure 2). When completed it may be archived.

It was an intrinsic principle of PINEAPPLE that it should adhere to standards defined as facilitating interoperability, and accessibility.

The standards which were used were:

- XHTML 1.0 (WC3)
- CSS level 2.1

Technologies:

- HTML
- JAVASCRIPT
- CSS
- PHP
- MySQL.

All software produced by the project is open source.

Data Collection Methods Used For Piloting

The purpose of the piloting phase was to test the diagnostic tool with some of the users in the partnership. We particularly wanted to evaluate its usability, the processes involved and the documents that would be issued as part of the tool.

The piloting phase was one part of the project that could not be executed according to plan due to the long time period associated with the University of Plymouth APEL regulations. These state that a claim should be made on application of an offer or at least 6 months before the beginning of the session before the module in question would normally begin. To address this issue college staff working on the 6 identified pilots tested the software, process and support materials with authentic APEL cases they had previously encountered, thus testing PINEAPPLE with real-world data.

To obtain triangulation of data the actions of the member of staff using PINEAPPLE for an APEL claim was observed, followed up by a semi-structured interview⁵ and then review, rating and feedback⁶ on the PINEAPPLE interface, content and support materials.

The next stage of the pilot focused upon the PINEAPPLE materials that would be made available to users. Respondents were asked to review each of the documents in detail before completing and returning by post a second questionnaire⁶. This questionnaire sought information about general confidence in using the documents and the guides for each of the audiences (e.g. students, staff and employers), asking respondents to provide comments on each individual document. Some of the respondents also annotated the copies of the documents highlighting changes needed to wording.

The involvement of users in the review, piloting and associated feedback allowed the PINEAPPLE team to use a rapid prototyping methodology, responding to user feedback to make changes and improvements to the PINEAPPLE interface throughout the life of the project.

Community engagement

All of the above activities resulted in continuous engagement with academic and support staff who are involved, or would like to be involved, in APEL in UPC faculty project partners and the University of Plymouth. The project ran workshops and produced a range of newsletters and posters for general distribution, and for the many events that were attended (see Project Outputs)

In addition to continuous engagement with University of Plymouth's Senior Management via newsletters, blog site and formal reporting at Teaching and Learning Committee, the PINEAPPLE project has engaged with APEL practitioners and Senior Management at all partner colleges via Faculty Board, Senior Administrators and Subject Forums. The project was instrumental in getting an APEL Working Party set up at the University.

Activities with the JISC community were also undertaken which included attendances, presentations, posters at numerous events. This enabled many discussions on the subject of APEL with a wide range practitioners and interested parties. The APEL assembly in Bradford afforded a similar opportunity.

The project benefitted greatly from a close working relationship with Staffordshire University. This was facilitated by Benefits Realisation funding. It gave the opportunity to:

- gain a detailed knowledge of another institution's approach to APEL

⁵ <http://hdl.handle.net/10293/1057>

⁶ <http://hdl.handle.net/10293/1058>

- verify that the PINEAPPLE core could accommodate another institution's current APEL process⁷
- confirm that it was possible to add in another potential APEL route on to an existing process⁸
- think carefully about what another institution needs to know about using PINEAPPLE for their own APEL

These activities led to the formulation of the PINEAPPLE APEL Key Questions⁹ (see Appendix II) and PINEAPPLE Recipe¹⁰ (see Appendix III).

3.2 What did you learn?

Results of the Baseline Study

The baseline study¹¹ identified the benefits of APEL for learners, institutions and employers as it recognises and allows students to use their existing knowledge, skills and abilities to gain entry to courses they might otherwise be unqualified to take. It may also be used to confer exemptions from some parts of a course.

Despite a general, but vague view that APEL 'is a good thing' there was evidence of a lack of awareness amongst learners and employers, exacerbated by a lack of clarity, understanding and advocacy on the part of many institutions. This was in spite of numerous reports and bodies offering guidance and models of implementation.

It was evident from this report that, though there are many commonalities, institutions differ in the detail of their processes. Also there was no such thing as an ideal APEL policy that could be recommended but that it depended on the role that an institution envisages for it.

Thus to create a technology enhanced process that would benefit the wider HE and HE in FE communities, it would have to be able to deal with the variations in regulations and procedures that were becoming apparent. Also it would have to be capable of providing an overview for those experienced in the process yet detailed guidance for those who were not.

Results from Survey of HE in FE Managers

The survey was sent to HE in FE programme managers at 19 partner colleges. Of the 161 participants who were emailed the survey, a response rate of 81 (50%) was achieved. The questionnaire collected quantitative and qualitative data about general awareness of APEL in their institution, the support already received for APEL and the support programme managers require.

The survey of HE in FE managers¹² contributed to the project by revealing the kinds of issues that were concerning practitioners. These managers were identified by UPC central as the group who would have had most experience of APEL. Most respondents demonstrated a general awareness of

⁷ <http://hdl.handle.net/10293/1063>

⁸ <http://hdl.handle.net/10293/1064>

⁹ <http://hdl.handle.net/10293/1056>

¹⁰ <http://hdl.handle.net/10293/1059>

¹¹ <http://hdl.handle.net/10293/356>

¹² Dismore, H., McDermott, A., Witt, N., Neville, S., Stillwell, R. and Stone, M. (2010) Accrediting prior experiential learning (APEL): perceptions of higher education in further education lecturers. Paper presented at the *British Education Research Association Annual Conference*, University of Warwick, 3rd September.

APEL in their institution but were unsure about policies and responsibilities. These findings suggest some confusion about current information, advice and guidance.

Table 1 shows that actual experience of APEL was quite limited amongst this group.

Answer Options	Response Average	Total Responses
Over the last year	1.17	29
Between 1-3 years ago	2.24	29
Between 3-5 years ago	.87	23
Over five years ago	.22	18

Table 1. The incidence of APEL applications of the past 5 years.

Amongst other things, respondents indicated that support would be extremely welcome, particularly in the areas of advising, planning, producing and assessing APEL claims.

UPC Work Flow and Resources

HE in FE staff work in an environment that is notably different to traditional HE, particularly in relation to the amount of time available for non-teaching activities. To a certain extent, APEL could be seen to fall into this category. In the past, an able student might have been given more challenging work rather than academic credit for what they already knew.

The project succeeded in creating a pragmatic work flow for the University of Plymouth Colleges Faculty and the core builder has been used to model this. To support the process the project has developed the following:

- staff guide to advising and assessing APEL¹³
- information, advice and guidance for students applying for APEL¹⁴
- APEL application form¹⁵
- APEL assessment grid¹⁶
- APEL FAQ¹⁷.

¹³ <http://hdl.handle.net/10293/993>

¹⁴ <http://hdl.handle.net/10293/994>

¹⁵ <http://hdl.handle.net/10293/997>

¹⁶ <http://hdl.handle.net/10293/996>

¹⁷ <http://hdl.handle.net/10293/995>

As the focus of PINEAPPLE was staff support, the project had not intended to produce APEL information, advice and guidance for students but it became apparent that we could not support staff without creating congruent materials for claimants and that there was nothing available that we could readily draw on for this purpose.

Use of PINEAPPLE is intuitive as each step can incorporate decision choices, documentation, hyperlinks and video clips but to support less confident users there is

- a detailed guide to using the tool¹⁸
- a quick start guide¹⁹.

From the piloting/evaluation phase, 6 case studies highlight particular aspects of APEL such as concerns about assessment and sharing good practice^{20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25}. The case studies highlighted two main areas where problems arise in relation to APEL. One relates to institutional regulations, policies and processes. These should be 'fit for purpose' or else they become another barrier to APEL. The other area is awareness and understanding on the part of staff and students.

A final output from the project is a briefing paper for UPC faculty²⁶ which addresses key findings and highlights areas that should be addressed to in the short term to increase APEL uptake.

At events with UPC staff it was suggested that the project team investigate the possibility of including the management of group APEL claims, an added layer of complexity. The team developed a work flow and incorporated it into the existing PINEAPPLE process. However further work and discussions indicated that group APEL was something of a 'red herring' as any group of APEL claimants would vary in relation to:

- what other experiences that might influence a claim
- the speed at which they progress through the process.

Intuitively, it feels as if a means of managing applications from claimants with a similar background should be possible. Perhaps one answer would be that where an employer is seeking to gain accreditation for informal learning, it may be better for an institution to give an academic credit value to that specific piece of learning.

The area of institutional regulations, navigating through the institutional committee structure and the latency in institutional decision making has proved a particular challenge for this project. Currently, one of the most challenging aspects of increasing APEL in uptake in UPC is that of the University of Plymouth APEL regulations. Anecdotal evidence suggests that where APEL is working best in the University, health and business studies, those implementing APEL are doing so by virtue of a range of exemptions to Regulations²⁶. This would appear to be a common occurrence across the sector.

During the project, team members have endeavoured to get the current regulations reviewed and to bring in an APEL expert with a national profile to address senior members of the University. In this the project has been largely unsuccessful and underestimated the tendency for large institutions to maintain the *status quo*. There is now agreement at PVC level to re-examine institutional APEL policy

¹⁸ <http://hdl.handle.net/10293/1040>

¹⁹ <http://hdl.handle.net/10293/1041>

²⁰ <http://hdl.handle.net/10293/1033>

²¹ <http://hdl.handle.net/10293/1034>

²² <http://hdl.handle.net/10293/1035>

²³ <http://hdl.handle.net/10293/1036>

²⁴ <http://hdl.handle.net/10293/1037>

²⁵ <http://hdl.handle.net/10293/1038>

²⁶ <http://hdl.handle.net/10293/1044>

and 3 key team members will be able to continue their efforts for at least the next year and have reason to hope that the situation may improve.

The PINEAPPLE Tool

Using the PINEAPPLE key questions⁹ (see Appendix II) and the PINEAPPLE Recipe¹⁰ (see Appendix III), an institution can gather and construct the information necessary to put a process in to the Pineapple tool.

As was noted in interim reports, the modelling and advocacy of APEL proved to be complex and challenging and it became apparent that the software tool would have to have a great deal of flexibility to be able to cope with our fast developing understanding of the complexities of APEL. This had the added benefit of creating a PINEAPPLE core builder that can now be used by any institution to model APEL processes to suit each context. To support this

- PINEAPPLE software V1 Final available from sourceforge⁴.
- PINEAPPLE software setup guide²⁷.

Results from the Pilot Study

Overall, the Pilot Study²⁸ showed that the PINEAPPLE tool was viewed as extremely useful for providing the appropriate guidance essential for supporting APEL in their institution. For some, the process was valued simply because one did not currently exist in their institution. Most respondents strongly agreed that it was worth the time spent on PINEAPPLE, an important result given that time is so valuable to HE in FE staff. Another important aspect of its usability was clarity, about which many staff made positive comments.

Any concerns about using PINEAPPLE tended to centre upon regulations, assessment and group claims to APEL. Whilst answers to some of these may lie at the institutional level, respondents did perceive that PINEAPPLE could help issue guidelines about particular matters. For example, several discussions focused upon different ways to manage the assessment of claims. The more favoured options were to involve more than one member of staff to assess a claim, as well as to involve review by a member of UPC. Indeed, this was linked to how members of staff perceived their own roles and responsibilities to APEL. Rather than referring to their role as an advisor or assessor, they were conscious that the boundaries between roles may be blurred in practice. Instead they required more flexibility in the way that responsibilities were described.

The documentation available to download was reported to be useful to staff, although minor suggestions were made to wording. However, further support was required to provide more individual support. For example, most members of staff wished to have contacts within their own institution as well as in UPC to refer to about specific information relating to particular cases. However piloting showed that tutors strongly agreed that spending a little time becoming familiar with the PINEAPPLE tool was well worth it and they expected it would reduce the time spent managing an APEL claim.

3.3 Impact

UPC faculty wanted to be able to support partner institution staff and to ensure that students had a consistent experience when making and APEL claim. Prior to this project there was no formal process for a student at a UPC partner institution to make an APEL claim. There is evidence that a claim might not occur because the tutor was not aware of APEL or because of a lack of knowledge or confidence. Where a claim did occur, its progress would be dependent on the knowledge of the individual staff member involved. If approached, UPC faculty would offer assistance, but this would be on an *ad hoc* basis by a single individual. Lack of confidence was a major issue for academic staff at partner

²⁷ <http://hdl.handle.net/10293/1043>

²⁸ <http://hdl.handle.net/10293/1042>

institutions due to concerns about knowledge, quality and making the 'right decision' for the 'right reasons'.

An overview of the impact of this project is shown in Table 2.

STAKEHOLDER	IMPACT
Teachers	PINEAPPLE helps those unfamiliar with APEL to work through an application providing support as they progress
	For those who are more familiar PINEAPPLE provides claim management functionality
	PINEAPPLE helps teachers develop confidence working with the APEL process and provides support both through documentation and the ability to see others on the system working on APEL
	PINEAPPLE can ease pressure by allowing them to share a claim with other tutors or administrators to help with the claim or simply for a second opinion
	In time PINEAPPLE could build up a range of case studies if made anonymous and could provide useful statistics on APEL
Administrators	PINEAPPLE can ease pressure by allowing them to share a claim with others
	PINEAPPLE can assist with managing large numbers of claims
	PINEAPPLE makes all documentation easily available when needed to be sent to students
	PINEAPPLE can help them monitor a claims' progress once it has been picked up by a tutor
Students	PINEAPPLE helps formalise the APEL process when going through steps with staff providing confidence and credibility in the process
	Information, advice and guidance for students claiming APEL
	PINEAPPLE will help improve consistency and fairness
UPC Institutions	PINEAPPLE could build up a range of case studies if made anonymous and could provide useful statistics on APEL
	PINEAPPLE has helped promote APEL on the agenda with UPC and UOP
	Documentation can be adapted according to local needs
	PINEAPPLE will help improve consistency and fairness
	APEL raised as an area that needs addressing at strategic level
Other Institutions	Due to the flexible nature of the PINEAPPLE Core tool many institutions could use it to manage their own processes. This has been demonstrated through the benefits realisation funded Staffordshire University processes
	The process and documents we have made available can be adapted and used
	Baseline report, journal publications and final report summarise the project's findings

Table 2. Impact of the Pineapple Project on Stakeholder Groups

An area where the project has been less unsuccessful is that of engaging with employers. One of the pilots took place with an educational institution of one of the armed services and it is an area of interest for a large engineering based employer, both employers with dedicated training/education managers. A lack of wider engagement may be due to the high proportion of small and medium sized enterprises that predominate in the South West region, businesses that tend to lack staff with this role.

The events and dissemination that the project has undertaken have raised the profile of APEL and there will shortly be specific staff development in the UPC faculty to promote the PINEAPPLE tool.

PINEAPPLE will have a soft launch with a small number of UPC partner institutions and a briefing paper²⁶ has advised UPC of areas that need to be addressed in order for this to succeed. These include marketing, staff development, quality, regulatory and committee changes.

Many of the LLL/WFD projects had an APEL interest and some interesting conversations were started at various programme events. To assist with evaluation and development of PINEAPPLE, an application was made for Benefits Realisation funding. As a result of this the team worked with Professor Mark Stiles at Staffordshire University, an institution with very different policies, on the integration of a competence based APEL tool. PINEAPPLE was able to create processes to mirror Staffordshire's existing APEL routes and incorporate an additional route based on the new tool. This experience revealed the challenge was not putting the process in to PINEAPPLE but understanding the precise detail at micro level. No matter how carefully guidance, regulations etc. are written there seem to be assumptions, ambiguities and omissions.

Any institution is able to use the PINEAPPLE software and APEL resources which are hosted by the UPlaCe repository.

d) Conclusions & Recommendations

The aim of the PINEAPPLE project was to use technology to aid UPC partner institution academic and support staff with the Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning. The importance of this to the HE and HE in FE community has been obvious at every event that team members attended.

After initially appearing to be a relatively straightforward process to implement, it has turned out to be complex and variable. APEL has the potential to impact on many areas of institutional activity

- assessment
- quality
- fees
- the role of the institution
- what it means to be a student.

It is likely to be for these reasons that staff experience barriers and blockages that prevent claims reaching the point of assessment. Specific problems include

- lack of awareness leading to lack of advocacy
- lack of knowledge about advising on, assessing or managing a claim
- lack of confidence in working with a student claiming APEL
- some local expertise but no central point of contact
- local 'exceptions' to regulations
- concerns about quality processes
- lack of clarity and 'fitness for purpose' in institutional APEL regulations.

All of this needs to put in to the context of there being no single best approach to APEL. An institution must decide on the role it expects APEL to play in accordance with its business plan. This should then be underpinned by clear and logical regulations supported by workable processes, appropriate documentation and suitable staff development.

When this difficult task has been done the PINEAPPLE core is capable of being the tool to guide, record and monitor claims through

- a tool to produce and support multiple and changing APEL processes
- recipe and key questions to develop workflows for insertion into PINEAPPLE
- resources created by the project to provide timely and appropriate materials and guidance
- an online process to support UPC staff so that they may be confident and can evidence that a consistent and quality procedure has been undertaken.

e) Implications for the future

In the time since the project began, the Higher Education landscape has changed substantially. Students will shortly be paying substantially higher fees and will be looking for *value for money* and *time well spent* as never before. Institutions should view APEL as part of a package that makes obtaining an award attractive, fast and economic and gives due regard to quality.

Making an APEL claim will only become more mainstream if students are aware of this route to gaining academic credit. Our findings suggested that a claim is most likely to arise when a member of academic staff becomes aware that a student has the potential to APEL. Often this will happen after a module has begun. To increase APEL and to improve the chances success, a student should apply as soon as they receive the offer of a place on a course. To become more mainstream, there are a number of areas that should be targeted by the HE community:

- Increasing student awareness and understanding
- Staff development – e.g. PINEAPPLE
- Business model selection and supporting regulations, policies, costing etc.
- Institutional governance - to cope with the need to be more agile in their responses to changing priorities and demands
- Innovative ways of measuring and/or grouping experiential learning.

The project website, which will be hosted until at least 31 March 2014, will be updated with any further news, publications, presentations etc.. In addition to placing all outputs on this site, they have also been submitted to the UPlaCe repository²⁹. This is maintained by the University of Plymouth Teaching and Learning Directorate and this should ensure that they are available to the wider community for many years to come.

At the end of the project, two team members will be taking up other roles with the University but will be allocating some time to the embedding of the processes, software and resources within UPC, after the project ends. Any critical updates to outputs may be undertaken during this period.

As recommended in the UPC Briefing document²⁶, there are areas of institutional functioning that will continue to be addressed over the forthcoming year. To embed PINEAPPLE into practice a 'soft launch' will be taking place:

- Small scale roll out from March (1 or 2 colleges)
- Full scale roll out from January 2011
- Further improvements feedback and possible piloting.

Other members of the team now hold the roles of Head of Technology Enhance Learning and Associate Dean for UPC Faculty, which will assist greatly with implementation of this plan.

²⁹ www.uplace.org.uk

f) References

Dismore H and Stone M (2009) Gathering Evidence of APEL: methods and issues - brief report provides the context for the HELP CETL projects on accrediting prior experiential learning (APEL). <http://hdl.handle.net/10293/288>

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Merrill, B. (2001). *Social Inclusion through APEL: The learner's perspective*. <http://crl.gcal.ac.uk/SOCRATESite/NRENGLAND.pdf> (accessed 30th Sept 2008).

g) Appendixes

APPENDIX I - UPC Survey Questions

APPENDIX II - APEL KEY QUESTIONS

APPENDIX III - PINEAPPLE RECIPE

APPENDIX I - UPC Survey Questions

1. **What is your name?**
2. **What is the name of your institution?**
3. **How long have you worked at the institution?**
Years | Months
4. **What is your current role?**
5. **How long have you occupied this role**
Years | Months
6. **From the drop down menus, select the programmes that you currently manage:**
Choice of 205 foundation degree programmes
7. **Are you aware of APEL in your institution?**
Yes | No
8. **Does your institution have an APEL policy?**
Yes | No | Not Sure
9. **Are you aware of the APEL policy addressing any of the following:**
Widening participation | Attracting experienced students | Employer requirements |
Encouraging progression to HE | Other (please specify)
10. **Is there a person responsible for APEL in your institution?**
Yes | No | Not Sure | If yes, how many?
11. **When do you think students find out about APEL?**
12. **How do you think students find out about APEL?**
13. **Are you aware of how much students are charged for APEL?**
Yes | No | Not Sure | Comments (optional)
14. **Are you aware of the time regulations for students applying for APEL?**
Yes | No | Not Sure | Comments (optional)
15. **Have you ever had any enquiries about APEL from students?**
Yes | No | Not Sure | Comments | Please provide details:
16. **Please indicate whether you would be happy for us to contact you separately about these enquiries:**
17. **Have you ever been involved in an APEL application?**
Yes | No
18. **Please tell us how many APEL applications you have been involved with:**
Over the last year | Between 1-3 years ago | Between 3-5 years ago | Over five years ago
19. **Please tell us whether you ALREADY receive support in the following areas:**
Advising on APEL | Planning a claim | Producing a claim | Arranging for assessment |
Monitoring review and evaluation | Other (please specify)
20. **How much support do you think you WILL NEED in the following areas:**
Advising on APEL | Planning a claim | Producing a claim | Arranging for assessment |
Monitoring review and evaluation | Other (please specify)
21. **In general, do you envisage APEL becoming more popular among your students?**
Yes | No | Not Sure | Please explain why:

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APPENDIX II - APEL KEY QUESTIONS

Your will need to know your institutional process(es) in detail before you can create a process in PINEAPPLE. These questions will help you cover the key points and will form the steps of your PINEAPPLE process as a choice, action or piece of information.

These details might be available from an APEL officer, regulations, guidance materials or application forms. Check all sources that you can find as they may contain out of date or contradictory information.

- 1. What existing guidance is available for staff and students?**
What is available to support staff and students through the process. Your institution's guidance, forms etc. can be uploaded into your process or added as links. Alternatively you can create your own or see www.pineappleproject.org.uk for materials that can be adapted to your needs.
- 2. Who will be managing the claim?**
It may be an administrator, an academic or a combination. How are responsibilities managed?
- 3. Which details about the claimant will you need to capture?**
This will vary depending on your needs but bear in mind data protection issues.
- 4. Are there specific forms to be used?**
By staff, by students, by panels or boards? You will need to add these or link to them.
- 5. What are your institution's time limits for a claim?**
Some faculties may have gained exceptions to the regulations for these.
- 6. How much APEL can be claimed towards an award?**
Factors such as level of course and professional registration requirements may mean that this varies.
- 7. How should an application be made?**
The student may need to put it writing or complete a particular form.
- 8. How should a claim be assessed?**
Is there existing guidance about this, if not consider creating some as this tends to be an area where there is uncertainty.
- 9. Are certain meetings stipulated?**
Your institution may need one or more meetings between staff and student, between assessors, between panels and/or boards and assessors etc..
- 10. Is there an APEL module available?**
How and under what circumstances can this be used?
- 11. Can an application be referred?**
What is the process for this?
- 12. What is the right of appeal?**
What is the process for this?
- 13. How should the outcome be recorded?**
The student record will need to be updated and external examiners should be informed. Check the requirements in your institution.

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APPENDIX III - PINEAPPLE RECIPE

1. COLLECT INSTITUTIONAL GUIDANCE

- ❖ **Search out**
 - Regulations
 - Policies
 - Processes
 - Handbooks
 - aimed at staff
 - aimed at students
 - Any other sources, for example
 - prospectus
 - website
 - Forms of application
 - Names of key players

2. UNDERSTAND YOUR INSTITUTION'S PROCESS(ES)

- ❖ **Compare written guidance you have found looking, in particular, for**
 - Anomalies
 - Contradictions
 - Points that are unclear
 - Local 'exemptions'
- ❖ **Find out how APEL is working in practice**
 - Speak to staff with responsibility for the guidance
 - Speak to staff who are, or have done, doing it
 - Speak to staff who are interested but not doing it, find out
 - what is stopping them
 - what would encourage them
- ❖ **Try to clarify any areas of uncertainty**
 - Uncertainties about meaning e.g. what do the Regulations/Policies mean
 - these can be difficult to resolve
 - Uncertainty about the APEL Process e.g. how to mark a claim
 - these are areas about which you should give specific guidance in your PINEAPPLE process

3. CREATE A WORKFLOW

- ❖ **Create a prototype workflow** this can be in PINEAPPLE or on paper
 - Check the Pineapple Key Questions Guide
 - if you can answer all of these you will be in a good position to create your PINEAPPLE APEL process
 - Decide on resources to be included
 - what have you got that you can use
 - what do you need to create
 - Make decisions about how to handle remaining areas of uncertainty
 - these may be areas where extra guidance is needed
 - Keep in mind the feedback from staff who are interested but not doing it
 - think about how your process can help with these
 - Decide in detail about the steps required, including where they loop back e.g. for appeals or referrals

- ❖ **Check out your workflow and resources**
 - Consult with those who have responsibility for existing regulations, guidance etc.
 - Consult with staff who are doing it
 - Consult with staff who might do it with some encouragement
- ❖ **Re-work workflow**
 - Use your feedback to amend your process
 - This will probably be an iterative process in the short-term and an ongoing process in the long term

4. PUT YOUR WORKFLOW AND RESOURCES INTO PINEAPPLE

- ❖ **Actions**
 - Things that must be done
- ❖ **Choices**
 - Options for staff or claimants with different progression paths
- ❖ **Resources**
 - Policies
 - Forms
 - Contacts
 - Student handbook
 - Podcasts

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