

The Animal Behaviour and Training Council Applicant Guidelines for the Assessment of Prior Experience and Learning

Introduction

The Animal Behaviour and Training Council has set standards for the roles of Animal Trainer (AT), Animal Training Instructor (ATI), Animal Behaviour Technician (ABT) and Clinical Animal Behaviourist (CAB). For every ABTC role an individual must demonstrate that they meet the Standard for the role. Each Standard has two parts: “Knowledge & Understanding” and “Performance Criteria”. This document is concerned with The Knowledge and Understanding (K&U) part, which is the underlying basis of being a professional practitioner. One needs to know and understand before one can apply that knowledge effectively in practice.

For Animal Trainer and Animal Training Instructor roles the Practitioner Organisations carry out assessments of both Performance Criteria and Knowledge & Understanding. For ABT and CAB roles the Practitioner Organisations carry out assessments of Performance Criteria; for assessment of Knowledge and Understanding the ABTC provides a pool of Assessors to carry out the APEL process.

An individual may have completed a course recognised by the ABTC as meeting the K&U requirements, in which case they must apply to their chosen Practitioner Organisation (<https://abtc.org.uk/practitioner-organisations/>) for details of ‘provisional/similar’ membership. However, not everyone will have had the opportunity to undertake formal study in a college/university or may have studied subjects different to those areas covered by the Standards or completed a course that is not yet recognised by the ABTC as meeting the requirements. This is where Assessment of Prior Experience and Learning (APEL) comes into the equation.

The Assessment of Prior Experience and/or Learning is known as APEL. It is a recognised way to progress vocational learners into and through higher education or to meet a professional standard. It does this by the individual showing what they have learnt through provision of documentation and, importantly reflection.

It is clear to the ABTC that APEL is very applicable to the progression of vocational learners into an ABTC role and from one ABTC role to another.

The ABTC aims to provide a common and consistent approach to APEL that is supportive, objective, fair, transparent, timely and confidential.

Assessment of Prior Learning terms:

The Assessment of Prior Experience and/or Learning is known as **APL** and includes:

- APEL (Assessment of Prior Experience and/or Learning): is learning gained outside of a formal course: through work roles, or other activities such as volunteer work, unassessed CPD e.g. webinars, reading, conference attendance etc.
- APCL (Assessment of Prior Certificated Learning): knowledge (learning) acquired on courses that have been formally assessed and certificated

This guidance document is intended for applicants. It is designed to provide a clear explanation of the structure and process of APEL within the ABTC.

Quality assurance of APEL process and decisions

The ABTC is very aware of the need for clarity and transparency in the APEL process. It adheres to the overall ethical stance that assessments must be supportive, objective, fair, transparent, confidential and within defined timescales.

The assessments are only undertaken by competent persons. Competence requires successful completion of the ABTC assessors' training course. Assessors will have the competence and expertise to assess K&U, and are competent in the application of that expertise to meet the ABTC requirements.

This includes training and agreement of all assessors to work to an ABTC agreed set of standards, and to maintain clear and accurate records of their assessments and decisions, using agreed recording processes and documents.

All assessments of an application are carried out by two assessors who are impartial to the process and the applicant.

Applicants are informed of who these assessors are and given the opportunity to indicate if they are concerned about any potential conflict of interest. Such concerns must be reviewed and acted on as required, and new assessor(s) allocated if that is the applicant's wish.

Should there have to be a later change to the assessment panel, e.g. due to assessor illness, then the applicant must be informed of the new proposed assessor and have the same right to request an alternative or delay until their application can be assessed by the originally agreed parties.

Applicants will receive written feedback within agreed timescales, which has been agreed by the assessors. Should there be a discrepancy between the two assessors, a competent third person, who has declared no personal knowledge of the applicant will be allocated to further review the application.

Feedback will be supportive, objective, fair, transparent, and of sufficient detail to enable the applicant to fully understand the decision. This is of particular importance for those who do not succeed in their application.

Where an applicant has not succeeded, they will be provided with clear information of potential next steps regarding

- a. how they may acquire further learning opportunities to facilitate them meeting the K&U requirements for the role including CPD suggestions for them to move forward towards successful assessment
- b. How to re-apply
- c. Appeals procedure

How are assessors related to ABTC Organisations and how does the ABTC perform its regulatory role in this respect?

All assessors regardless of their relationship to any other Organisation will be trained by ABTC prior to carrying out any APEL assessments and all assessments will be impartial.

The ABTC will thus have a pool of suitably trained, competent assessors to draw upon. Please remember this is the assessment of Knowledge and Understanding. The K&U assessment is the prerequisite i.e. the first stage of a 2 stage process to confirm competence in the role. It does not refer to the Performance Criteria. Therefore, an APEL assessor could be recruited from outside the ABTC but from educational practice for example.

The ABTC will regulate the standard of assessment through annual review of 20% of randomly selected applications across all roles and assessors. It may also choose to appoint a third assessor to observe and peer review assessment processes as they are conducted. In this way quality assurance of the process is ensured.

Appeals procedure

Grounds for appeal

Appeals can be made on the following grounds only:

1. The assessment process has not been properly followed.
2. The applicant feels that the assessment decision is not accurate

You will not be disadvantaged by submitting an appeal in good faith. Appeals which are made without evidence will not be considered.

The process

All information submitted in relation to appeals will be dealt with confidentially and will only be disclosed to those persons involved in making a decision on appeal, or as necessary to progress the appeal.

Appeals must be submitted to the assessing organisation/body in writing within six weeks of receiving notification of the assessment outcome.

The assessing organisation/body must notify both the applicant and the ABTC office that an appeal has been lodged, within three working days of the date of receipt.

The applicant has six weeks from the aforementioned date to produce the evidence underpinning their appeal. This will include:

1. Written evidence to show where the assessment process was not followed.
And/or
2. Written evidence to show that disputed assessment criteria have been met.

The applicant is asked to ensure all submitted information is labelled, and accessible as required using the platform for confidential file sharing and storage.

The appeal documents will be considered by the original assessors and two further ABTC assessors who have declared no conflict of interest. This may mean the assessing organisation/body must liaise with the ABTC to find appropriate appeals assessors.

Applicants will be informed of the identity of the further assessors and will be given the opportunity to indicate if they are concerned about any potential conflict of interest. Such concerns will be respected and new assessor(s) allocated, must the applicant wish.

It may be felt necessary for the parties involved in the appeals process to meet. This would be best achieved by video conferencing. The meeting would be recorded with the undertaking that no recordings may be shared by any party with any party outside of the immediate appeals process. The applicant may have a chosen individual to represent, advocate for, or support them at the meeting.

The applicant will be sent written notification of the outcome of the appeal within eight weeks of all relevant documentation having been provided to the assessing organisation/body's office.

What is assessed and how?

The assessors are looking to see that you have met the Knowledge & Understanding requirements of the role (see following sections). These are given as learning outcomes and are grouped into "K & U sections."

You will need to include a record of your evidence and you will be asked to complete Reflective Account Forms to indicate how the evidence provided links to each knowledge section, enabling the assessors to easily find the relevant documents in your record of evidence. You also need to provide an index.

- Once your documentation has been submitted it will be reviewed. Where a limited amount of additional evidence is needed to assess the K & U for the required role you may be offered an online interview with both Assessors to try to obtain the missing information
 - This interview must be within four weeks of the email being sent, with options for the applicant regarding date/time

Please note, you do need to submit written evidence (see next section). However, if you feel that you would be disadvantaged by not having an interview, a request may be made for an interview when you make your APEL application.

Your Evidence

Your evidence may come in several forms. There are four types of evidence and you will submit evidence from one or more of these categories as necessary to meet the standard. They are:

- A. Module descriptors and related certificates showing you have completed relevant formal assessed learning.
- B. Descriptors and related certificates showing you have attended non-assessed courses or events. For example, these may be workplace-based training, informal courses, webinars.
- C. Self-directed learning, which may include reading you have done, leaflets or articles you have written, volunteer activities, life experiences, self-instruction, family responsibilities and hobbies.
- D. Evidence of experience of the role, either through observation or participation in aspects of the role

- Where evidence is from the categories A and B please note you will need to provide the name of the course provider, if known, and any grading document, breakdown of results, tutor feedback.
- Where evidence is from the categories B, C and D it is important to explain why and how you think this relates to the Knowledge and Understanding required for the role. It is worth keeping a reflective log of your learning and experience related to your role anyway, as this is part and parcel of professional practice in relation to meeting Continuing Professional Development (CPD) requirements.

Reflective accounts forms shall be provided to evidence all required ABTC Knowledge and Understanding at the level expected for the role and must give specific examples of how your experience and learning has allowed you to acquire this Knowledge & Understanding. **How** you have acquired your Knowledge & Understanding is not being assessed. It is your level of Knowledge & Understanding which is assessed here through APEL.

Presentation of Evidence: Index

It may be that you submit several documents/certificates/etc as well as Reflective Account Forms. If so, clear labelling and an index are essential parts of your submission. All documents must have a clear identification name. For all electronically submitted documents this must be the File name. It must simply be:

Your name and document number e.g.

Jane Doe 1

Jane Doe 2

A document named [Your Name] Index must also be submitted. This will provide a clear index of every document you have submitted. These will relate to the Reflective Account(s) Forms/Mapping document and will ensure that the assessors can easily find the relevant information.

The index must contain:

The Document name (in numerical order)

Type of Evidence Submitted

The type of learning (as above)

One 'Reflective Account form' is required for each K&U section. It may be that a number of documents relate to the same Reflective Account form; or that one document relates to more than one K&U section

Example:

Document name	Type of Evidence Submitted	Type of learning	Reflective account form number/ K&U section number
Jane Doe 1	Certificate from Rabbits Ahoy	A	3

Jane Doe 2	Certificate of attendance CPD Conference: Behaviour Counselling from Principles to Practice	B	1
Jane Doe 3	Reflection on Book Egan The Skilled Helper	C	2

Where clarity of labelling and location of evidence is not provided, the applicant may be asked to do this and resubmit the evidence before any review is undertaken by the assessors.

If your submission comprises just Reflective Account Forms, please list these on the index as eg

Joe Bloggs Reflective Account Form 1

Joe Bloggs Reflective Account Form 2

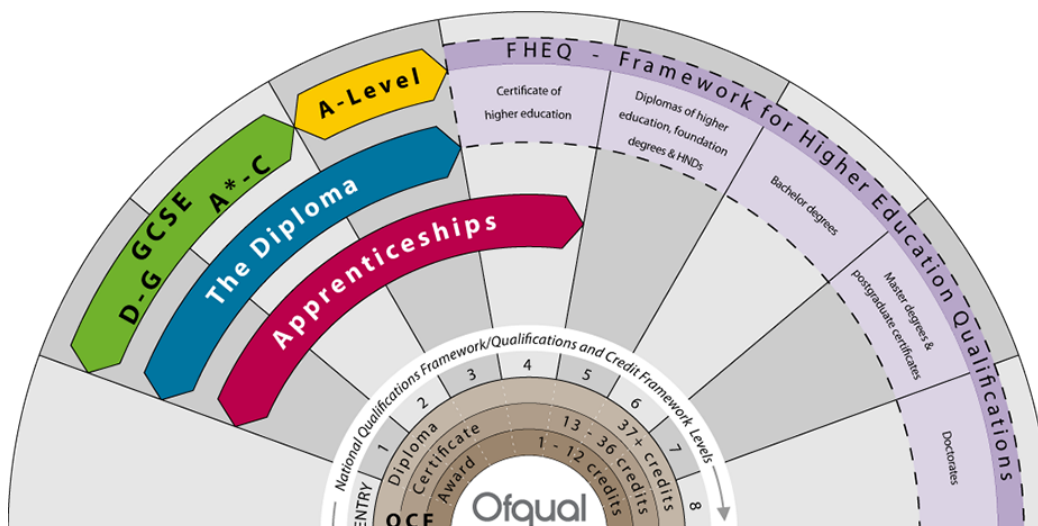
ABTC Standards for K&U

The standard for K&U for each role covers various topics such as ethology, welfare, law and communication. They also refer to the Level at which the topics must be studied. The term “Level” refers to the level at which the knowledge is taught and assessed. Levels are defined in the National Qualifications Framework and relate to increasing levels of depth of knowledge, ability to synthesise and critically assess information. At the end of this sub-section is a diagram and links for further information about education levels. For the ABTC roles the levels are as follows

Animal Trainer – Level 3;
 Animal Training Instructor – Level 4
 Animal Behaviour Technician – Level 5
 Clinical Animal Behaviourist – Level 6

A resource to help understand qualifications is entitled Comparing Qualification Levels available at <http://ofqual.gov.uk/help-and-advice/comparing-qualifications/> (accessed September 2021)

The diagram below is taken from this and shows the England and Wales equivalence. So, for example, ABTC Animal Trainer role is at Level 3 which is equivalent to A Level or QCF Diploma; Clinical Animal Behaviourist is at level 6 which is equivalent to the final year of study for a University undergraduate (Bachelor) degree.



For information regarding equivalence between UK (incl. Scotland) and Ireland please see the Qfqual document Guide to comparing Qualifications in the UK and Ireland available at

<http://ofqual.gov.uk/help-and-advice/comparing-qualifications/> (correct as of December 2021)

Cost

A non-refundable fee of £120 will need to be paid to ABTC for APEL Assessment. Your organisation may add a charge for their administration. You will be notified of this charge by your organisation.

Where to go if you need further information

Please contact your Practitioner or Assessment Organisation or the ABTC office (admin@abtc.org.uk) if you require any further assistance.