

# **Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination**

## **Applied Learning Subjects**

### **Assessment**

### **Information Package**

### **(Core Part)**

September 2012 (with updates in November 2015)

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# Chapter 1 Introduction

## 1.1 The Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination

In the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (HKDSE) Examination, there are three categories of subjects which are:

- Category A – 24 senior secondary subjects;
- Category B – Applied Learning subjects; and
- Category C – Other language subjects (6 subjects are offered).

Students following the senior secondary curriculum are expected to take the 4 core subjects (i.e., Chinese Language, English Language, Mathematics Compulsory Part and Liberal Studies), and may take elective subjects chosen from the above categories of subjects. Under Category B, Applied Learning (ApL) subjects are structured into six areas of studies: (1) Creative Studies, (2) Media and Communication, (3) Business, Management and Law, (4) Services, (5) Applied Science, and (6) Engineering and Production. The six areas of studies are further sub-divided into course clusters by grouping ApL subjects of similar nature into the same cluster. An ApL subject is a two-year course offered by a course provider (CP) to Secondary 4 or 5 students through schools. Normally, the first year (Y1) of study is in Secondary 5 and the second year (Y2) in Secondary 6. More details and updates regarding the ApL subjects can be found on the websites of the HKEAA (<http://www.hkeaa.edu.hk>) and the EDB (<http://www.edb.gov.hk>).

## **1.2 Assessment of Applied Learning Subjects**

ApL subjects are offered with strong elements of practical learning linked to broad professional and vocational fields.

Applied Learning aims to:

- enable students to understand fundamental theories and concepts through application and practice, and to develop their generic skills in authentic contexts; and
- provide students with opportunities to explore their career aspirations and orientation for life-long learning in specific areas.

In the context of ApL, assessment involves generating and collecting evidence of a student's development and achievement of knowledge, skills, and career-related values and attitudes, and judging that evidence against defined standards. Students are required to take 6 to 10 assessment tasks in an ApL course. These assessments are undertaken by CPs and the HKEAA is responsible for the moderation of the final assessment results.

## **1.3 Assessment Information Package**

As part of the quality assurance mechanism, this Assessment Information Package is developed to give stakeholders a general understanding of the assessment and moderation system of ApL subjects. The package consists of a core part and the assessment profiles of all the ApL subjects offered in the cohort year.

The core part serves as a guide to CPs for administering the assessment of ApL subjects. CPs are expected to comply with the stipulated requirements and procedures when conducting the related assessment activities.

The assessment profiles serve to illustrate the specific requirements of the ApL subjects.

Each assessment profile consists of the following:

- Assessment Scheme
- Performance Descriptors of “Attained”
- Exemplars and Comments
- Internal Quality Assurance Mechanism

The exemplars with comments included in the assessment profile are to illustrate students’ performance standards in relation to the learning outcomes.

## **Chapter 2      Assessment Design of Applied Learning Subjects**

### **2.1 Role of Assessment**

The role of ApL assessment is to facilitate learning, to monitor student progress, and to provide data and information for certification. Assessments of ApL subjects are designed and administered by individual CPs. CPs are required to have in place an internal quality assurance mechanism to ensure the validity and reliability of the assessment results. The assessment results for each ApL subject will be submitted by CPs to HKEAA and are subject to moderation by the HKEAA.

The design of the learning, teaching and assessment activities of individual ApL subjects is based on a common curriculum framework and guiding principles stipulated in the Applied Learning Curriculum and Assessment Guide (Senior Secondary Level) jointly prepared by the Curriculum Development Council and the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority. CPs have devised the attainment requirement for their respective subjects based on the five Applied Learning curriculum pillars, namely (a) career-related competencies, (b) foundation skills, (c) thinking skills, (d) people skills, and (e) values and attitudes. The attainment requirement serves to ensure the ApL assessments are aligned with the curriculum aims and design principles of Applied Learning.

### **2.2 Guiding Principles of Assessment Design**

To help achieve the curriculum aims, the assessments of each ApL subject have been

designed in such a way that a wide range of abilities are assessed: from reflecting on the achievement of expected learning outcomes to demonstrating the ability of transferring the acquired skills to a new context. To sustain the interpretation of attainment, the assessments should consist of a representative set of tasks which can evaluate a wide spectrum of knowledge, skills, and career-related values and attitudes, thereby leading to the requirement of multiple and varied assessments extending throughout the course. Besides variety, the factors of authenticity, balance of theory and application, as well as development of both practical and cognitive skills should also be duly considered in the design of ApL assessments.

The following guiding principles are to be used for designing the assessment tasks:

- aligning the assessment tasks with the learning objectives
- catering for the full range of student ability
- tracking progress over time
- providing timely and encouraging feedback
- making reference to students' own school context and daily life situations
- making reference to current progress in student learning
- providing opportunities for peer and self-assessment
- using assessment information to provide feedback

### **2.3 Four-region Assessment Grid**

ApL assessments can be broadly divided into Continuous Assessment (CA) and End-of-course Assessment (EA); as well as Direct Evidence Assessment (DEA) and Indirect Evidence Assessment (IEA). DEAs are those that can readily be traced back for review and

thus need to be recorded in the form of hard or soft copies. They include, among others, written test and exam scripts, projects, portfolios, and performances recorded on video clips. IEAs relate to student performances that cannot be readily traced back for evidence. They include rating scales which record, for example, impression grading for oral presentation in class and general rating of performances in field work.

Built on the above classifications, a “four-region (2x2) assessment grid” has been developed for the purpose of assessment design. Figure 1 illustrates these four regions of assessment. On each of the two dimensions, appropriate weightings have to be allocated to CA and EA, then DEA and IEA. These allocated weightings can vary according to the nature of the subject.

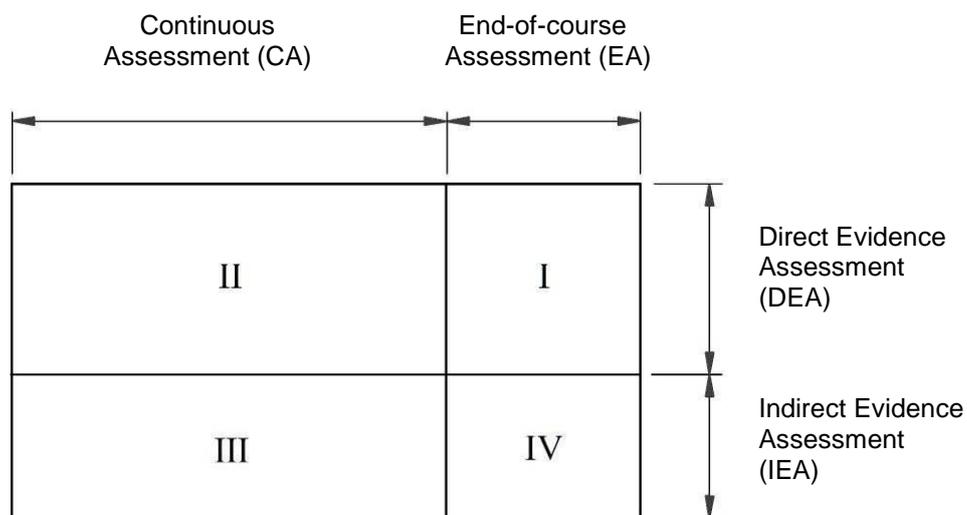


Figure 1. Four-region Assessment Grid

Common assessment tasks (CATs) are designed to facilitate comparability across classes in the same ApL subject. Under normal circumstances, CATs should fall into Regions I, II and IV. The relative weightings of CATs in the total assessment result are decided by the CPs in consultation with the HKEAA. Each individual subject can have its own CATs to

meet its specific curriculum aims and assessment objectives. Preferably the assessment results of CATs should together contribute at least fifty percent of the subject score. The assessment results of CATs may serve as the basis for internal adjustment or standardisation of the assessment results.

#### **2.4 Design of Assessment Tasks**

Assessment tasks should be designed to reflect the learning progress of students over time and provide feedback for adjustments in both learning and assessment processes. Diverse types of assessment tasks should be used to assess the achievements of different learning outcomes. Assessment tasks incorporating different levels of difficulty are to be encouraged to cater for students with different abilities. Authentic assessment tasks, which make reference to students' daily life situations, will facilitate students' transfer of their learning to different contexts. The good use of assessment information will also serve to provide positive feedback on learning in both summative and formative manners.

For each assessment task, CPs should develop task-specific assessment criteria that reflect the performance standards expected of students and the guiding principles in designing the task. These criteria should be explicit, well-articulated and well-understood. The tutors or assessors will assess students' performances against the assessment criteria when making assessment decisions.

To facilitate fair and valid assessments, the criteria of each assessment task should be made clear and explicit to students before they commence their work. Serving both as guidance for students and a yardstick for making assessment judgments, the criteria show the

performance standards expected of the students. Making assessment decisions transparent can also facilitate the students' monitoring of their own learning and achievements.

In view of the uniqueness of individual ApL subjects, CPs are responsible for designing the assessment scheme and appropriate tasks for their subjects in accordance with the stated guiding principles.

## **Chapter 3      Standards and Reporting of Results**

### **3.1 Performance Standards**

Under the HKDSE, assessment results of ApL subjects are reported on the certificate issued by the HKEAA. The certificate provides a common end-of-school credential that gives access to work, further education and training. To this effect, ApL students in their Y2 study are required to register via their schools as candidates for Category B subjects.

Within the context of HKDSE, two levels of performance standard, which are labeled “Attained” and “Attained with Distinction” respectively, will be reported for ApL subjects. For the level of “Attained”, students’ performance is determined with reference to a set of standards which mirror the attainment requirements of the subject. “Attained with Distinction”, which indicates a higher level of performance, is determined by a comparability analysis explained in Section 3.3. A student’s performance below the threshold cut score for the level of “Attained”, or failing the attendance requirement stipulated by the Education Bureau, is considered as “Unattained” which will not be reported on the certificate.

Starting from the 2018 HKDSE, an additional level of performance will be introduced to ApL subjects (except for ApL Chinese). Three levels of performance will then be reported namely, “Attained”, “Attained with Distinction (I)” and “Attained with Distinction (II)”. For ApL Chinese, “Attained” and “Attained with Distinction” will continue to be used. An additional level of performance would be considered upon collection of further evidence

after the first cohort has completed the course in the 2017 HKDSE.

### **3.2 Level of “Attained” and Performance Descriptors**

For the level of “Attained”, a student’s performance is determined with reference to subject-specific attainment requirements stated in the form of performance descriptors. In designing the assessment scheme of each ApL subject, all assessment tasks should have their assessment criteria stipulated in the assessment task specifications. The aggregated final score of these tasks is then used to determine whether the student can be awarded the level of “Attained”. Broadly speaking, a student with typical performance at the level of “Attained” should meet all the attainment requirements of the assessment tasks. At the end of the course, CPs will propose a cut score for the level of “Attained” for each of their respective ApL subjects. It can be said that the proposed cut score is the operational version of the threshold level of “Attained”. With reference to the performance descriptors and samples of students’ work, the proposed cut score may be adjusted, if necessary, by the HKEAA in consultation with the external examiners during the moderation process. In general, a student with an aggregated final score equal to or higher than this final cut score is considered as “Attained”.

The performance descriptors provide a description of what performance within the level of “Attained” comprises, covering knowledge, skills, as well as career-related values and attitudes. They describe performances in positive terms and provide a broad definition of performance standards expected of students. These performance descriptors, together with the exemplars of students’ work provided, illustrate the standards expected. Not only do the explicit standards facilitate teaching and learning, but also help communicate to various

stakeholders such as employers and tertiary institutions the meaning of the performance level. They are also used as a critical reference for moderation.

### **3.3 Award of distinction levels and Generic Descriptors**

Regarding the achievements for the level of distinction (i.e. “Attained with Distinction” and “Attained with Distinction (I) and (II)” starting from the 2018 HKDSE), a comparability analysis with the HKDSE core subjects of Chinese Language, English Language, Mathematics Compulsory Part and Liberal Studies is conducted. ApL students’ performances in the HKDSE core subjects are analyzed statistically to ascertain their overall academic ability. The award percentage for the level of distinction is determined statically based on the Group Ability Index (GAI) which is calculated with reference to the performance of the group of students in the HKDSE core subjects. Currently, “Attained with Distinction” is comparable to Level 3 or above of HKDSE Category A subjects, while “Attained with Distinction (I)” and “Attained with Distinction (II)” are comparable to Level 3 of HKDSE Category A subjects and Level 4 or above respectively. Further details about GAI computation can be found at Appendix 1 of the booklet of “HKDSE Grading Procedures and Standards-referencing and Reporting in the HKDSE Examination” published by the HKEAA.

The descriptors for the award of “Attained with Distinction” cover academic ability, generic skills, and career-related values and attitudes, whereby the level of academic ability is set comparable to that stipulated in the generic descriptors at Level 3 or above for the HKDSE Category A subjects. Students with the award of “Attained with Distinction” typically:

- demonstrate sound knowledge and understanding of the concepts,

principles and issues of the field;

- apply concepts and skills to solve daily problems with innovation and entrepreneurship;
- demonstrate good analytical and decision-making skills to make informed judgments and evaluations;
- communicate ideas effectively and express views in a logical and coherent manner;
- demonstrate good interpersonal and collaborative skills in different contexts;
- show appreciation of professional attitudes and ethics of the field;
- demonstrate a general understanding of the future trends of the field and an ability to identify opportunities for self-development.

More details and updates regarding the descriptors for “Attained with Distinction (I) and (II)” starting from the 2018 HKDSE can be found on the website of the HKEAA (<http://www.hkeaa.edu.hk>).

## **Chapter 4      Administrative Arrangements**

This chapter serves to provide general information on the administrative arrangements for ApL assessments. Details of the arrangements for individual ApL subjects can be found in the respective student handbooks provided by CPs.

### **4.1 Provision of Information to Students**

Students should be informed clearly at the beginning of each course of the requirements and regulations regarding ApL assessments, including:

- assessment scheme of the subject;
- broad assessment criteria of each assessment task;
- schedule of assessments and critical deadlines;
- regulations and administrative procedures for ApL assessments; and
- record-keeping requirements.

After the completion of the marking process, subject tutors are expected to provide feedback to students in terms of marks and comments on individual assessment tasks, their strengths and weaknesses, as well as advice on how improvements can be made.

### **4.2 Assessment Records**

CPs are required to keep proper assessment records until the end of August of the final year of the course. The records include assessment tasks, assessment criteria, assessment evidence, assessment results and documentation of any special cases such as dispute cases,

malpractice cases and the actions taken.

The set of assessment records serves the purposes of: (a) enabling the implementation of the moderation; and (b) providing an archive of assessment samples demonstrating the different levels of performance for future reference.

Students have the right to access to their assessed work. In addition, they are responsible for keeping safe custody of any returned assessed works until the release of public examination results. Where necessary, students will be required to present their work for authentication and inspection purposes at the request of the CP or the HKEAA.

### **4.3 Late Submission and Absence from Assessment**

Students should undertake all assessment tasks on schedule. Late assessments may be subject to a penalty as laid down in the respective student handbooks prepared by CPs.

Students failing to complete an assessment for legitimate reasons should make a formal application to the CP for special consideration by stating the reason(s) and providing relevant supporting documents (e.g. medical certificates).

In accordance with the rules and regulations laid down in the student handbook or related documents, students failing to attempt or submit work for assessment without legitimate reasons may be given zero mark in the assessment concerned. CPs may also consider issuing a warning letter to the students concerned to remind them of the consequences of absence from assessments or failure to submit their work on time.

#### **4.4 Students with Special Educational Needs**

Students with special educational needs (SEN) should not be deprived of their right to ApL assessments. When conducting ApL assessment activities, CPs should exercise discretion in providing special arrangements to these students, depending on the nature and severity of their disabilities. The provision of special assessment arrangements aims to allow these students to be equitably assessed under suitable conditions without having an unfair advantage or disadvantage over other students. Examples of such arrangements include:

- extension of preparation time;
- extension of assessment time;
- provision of ancillary aids;
- provision of special assistance during the conduct of the assessment; and
- provision of equitable, alternative assessments.

To facilitate the HKEAA's review and moderation work, CPs should keep proper record of all the cases of special assessment arrangements granted on the basis of students' special educational needs. While advice from the student's school as regards SEN provision can be sought, CPs should not approach students/parents direct for documentary proof of SEN.

#### **4.5 Malpractice**

CPs are required to operate an authentication mechanism and introduce appropriate measures to ensure originality of students' work. Examples of such include the use of declaration systems, modification of assessment tasks across years, cross-checking of students' work, and the use of plagiarism prevention computer software. Apart from authentication,

adequate procedures for preventing and investigating other forms of malpractice should also be established. It is essential that the consequences of and procedures for handling proven cases of malpractice are explicitly written and strictly enforced.

#### **4.6 Handling Queries against Assessment Decisions**

In general, CPs should have proper procedures in place in handling queries regarding the assessment decisions. They can continue with their existing practices in handling students' queries regarding ApL assessment results. Some procedures appropriate for investigating such cases would include:

- listening to the reasons and justifications raised by the student;
- listening to the views and justifications provided by the tutor;
- assigning the course leader or a different tutor to serve as a third-party to re-assess the student's work; and
- asking the student to complete a task of a similar nature for verification purposes.

Based on the investigation result, the CP will make a judgment as to whether the student's query is valid and justified. The student will then be informed of the result, within a reasonable time frame as stated in accordance with the CP's set procedures.

CPs are required to keep a complete record of all cases and have resolved students' queries regarding assessment results and the fulfillment of attendance requirement before submitting ApL marks to the HKEAA. It should be noted that students are not entitled to lodge appeals against the assessment results made by CPs once the results have been submitted to the HKEAA for moderation. After the release of HKDSE ApL results, candidates may

submit an application to the HKEAA for rechecking of marks only. They cannot apply for a re-assessment of their performance in the ApL subjects.

#### **4.7 Submission of Applied Learning Marks**

CPs are required to submit their students' assessment marks to the HKEAA at designated times in Year 2 of an ApL subject. Before the ApL Supervisor endorses the marks for submission to the HKEAA, ApL Subject Coordinators must check carefully students' marks and other details are correctly entered on the mark file. CPs are required to confirm the accuracy of the assessment results submitted at the end of the course.

## **Chapter 5 Maintenance of Standards**

### **5.1 Overview of the System for Maintaining Standards**

Under the HKDSE, a system is formulated to maintain the standards of all ApL subjects. This system aims to provide consistencies with regard to assessment tools, processes, evidence and professional judgment. Factors which have been taken into account in the design of the system include: (a) integration into the HKDSE system; (b) alignment across ApL subjects; (c) institutional autonomy; and (d) distinctive nature of individual subjects.

To achieve this, a two-tier standards maintenance system is put in place for all ApL subjects. The system primarily encompasses two interrelated mechanisms: (1) the internal quality assurance mechanism maintained by individual CPs, and (2) the moderation mechanism directed by the HKEAA.

### **5.2 Internal Quality Assurance**

CPs are required to establish and operate an internal quality assurance mechanism to ensure fair, reliable and valid assessments. In this regard, three major areas are identified: (a) assessment design; (b) assessment implementation; and (c) assessment judgment.

The internal quality assurance mechanism should embrace the following essential elements:

- means for ensuring the design of valid assessments
- means for ensuring fairness and consistency in applying the stipulated assessment

criteria

- procedures for the provision of relevant information to students
- a system for declaration of conflict of interest
- procedures for handling complaints, malpractice and other irregularities
- procedures for handling assessment documents and records
- an authentication mechanism for ensuring the originality of student work
- procedures for maintaining security and secrecy of assessment tasks

In relation to the above, the HKEAA will pay visits to CPs after the study of Year 1 with a view to advising them on assessment-related matters and fostering the sharing of good practices.

### **5.3 Course Moderation**

#### **5.3.1 Rationale for Moderation**

ApL students are assessed by individual CPs based on defined standards. In order to maintain the standards, HKEAA is responsible for the moderation of assessment results submitted by CPs. The basic principle of moderation is that CPs are accountable for the judgments made in the assessments while the HKEAA is to ensure the overall appropriateness of the results recorded on the certificate. The moderation is essentially a review process focusing on validating the interpretation of specific standards made by the CPs.

#### **5.3.2 Moderation Panel**

A Course Moderation Panel will be set up for each course cluster. The main function of

this panel is to conduct external validity checks of the assessment results of the ApL subjects under the same course cluster. The Course Moderation Panel will comprise assessment experts of the HKEAA and External Examiners appointed by the HKEAA.

The CPs, HKEAA assessment experts and External Examiners assume different roles during the moderation process:

(a) Roles of CPs

The role of the CP for a particular ApL subject is primarily to: (i) prepare and provide all necessary assessment evidence and documents; (ii) provide an overview of the attainment standard with reference to sampled students' work; and (iii) respond to subject and assessment-related enquires put forward by the Course Moderation Panel.

(b) Roles of the HKEAA assessment experts

It is the responsibility of the HKEAA assessment experts to: (i) devise and guide the moderation proceedings; (ii) collect all necessary information from the CPs concerned; (iii) provide professional advice on assessments and standard-setting; and (iv) decide in consultation with the External Examiners on the validity of standards set by the CPs.

(c) Roles of External Examiners

External Examiners in general are academics or practitioners with appropriate academic qualifications, subject knowledge, and trade or teaching experience. External Examiners are appointed by the HKEAA in accordance with its internal appointment procedures. The roles of the External Examiners are to: (i) ascertain candidates' performance standards in conjunction with the HKEAA assessment experts, namely the cut score for the level of

“Attained” for the subject under the course cluster; (ii) comment on the appropriateness of the assessment judgments made by CPs; and (iii) make recommendations, if any, for improvements.

### 5.3.3 Moderation Method

The Panel members will review samples of candidates’ work and related records and judge whether they are appropriately characterised by the defined standards. Sets of assessment tasks of candidates being sampled will be scrutinised to ascertain the candidates’ performance with reference to the performance descriptors of “Attained”. A holistic approach will be used to judge if the proposed cut score can be interpreted as representing the level of achievement specified in the attainment requirements. The External Examiners, together with the HKEAA assessment experts, will validate the standard against the stipulated performance descriptors. Similar ApL subjects within the same course cluster are compared, where appropriate, in terms of their difficulty levels. If evidence indicates that the assessment judgments are appropriate, the assessment results will be validated. If not, a different cut score can be recommended for that particular subject, with the candidates’ rank order in the subject remained unaffected. When the course moderation process is completed, a Report on Course Moderation for each course cluster will be produced.

## 5.4 Area Moderation

The purpose of Area Moderation is to compare the assessment results and performance standards of different subjects in the same area of studies. An Area Moderation Panel will be set up to review the results of all subjects in the same area. The Area Moderation Panel will comprise the HKEAA assessment experts and External Examiners of the respective

Course Moderation Panels. The Panel will meet after all course moderation work within the area has been completed. The purpose of the meeting is to establish how consistently standards have been applied across course clusters in the same area.

Scrutinizing the Report on Course Moderation made by the relevant Course Moderation Panels, the Area Moderation Panel will provide input for the preparation of an Area Moderation Report giving specific comments on the proposed and recommended cut scores of different ApL subjects in the area.

### **5.5 Approval by the Public Examinations Board**

The recommended cut scores for the level of “Attained” of individual ApL subjects and the comments made by the Area Moderation Panels, as well as the provisional cut scores for level of “Attained with Distinction” compiled by statistical analysis, will be presented to the Public Examinations Board of the HKEAA for endorsement. The decision made by the Public Examinations Board in respect of the moderated results of ApL subjects shall be final.

### **5.6 Cross-area Review by the HKDSE Applied Learning Subjects Committee**

After the release of HKDSE ApL results, the HKDSE Applied Learning Subjects Committee will hold meetings to review on the efficacy of the moderation process of the ApL assessments. The membership of the Committee includes ex-officio members, academics from tertiary and post-secondary institutions, teachers and principals from schools offering ApL subjects, and members co-opted from relevant trades and professions. The Committee will review the statistics endorsed by the Public Examinations Board, alongside the

Moderation Report on each ApL subject, with a view to providing useful feedback to CPs for maintaining the performance standards of all ApL subjects. It will also consider the assessment schemes of new ApL subjects as well as changes to existing assessment schemes proposed by CPs. The Committee will see that good practices are sustained in ApL assessments.