

Hong Kong  
Diploma of Secondary  
Education Examination

# Applied Learning Subjects

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香港考試及評核局  
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Examinations and  
Assessment Authority

# Introduction

Applied Learning (ApL) is an integral part of the senior secondary curriculum, offering studies with elements of practical learning linked to broad professional and vocational fields. ApL subjects are approved by the Education Bureau (EDB) and developed and delivered by respective course providers (CPs).

The duration of each ApL subject is about 180 contact hours, extending over two school years. The first year of study (Y1) is usually taken in Secondary 4 or 5 and the second year (Y2) in Secondary 5 or 6.

There are six areas of studies:

- Creative Studies
- Media and Communication
- Business, Management and Law
- Services
- Applied Science
- Engineering and Production

Starting from 2015, two ApL Chinese subjects for non-Chinese speaking students are introduced, with about 270 contact hours extending over more than two school years.

Details about the ApL subjects on offer can be found at the EDB website: [www.edb.gov.hk/apl](http://www.edb.gov.hk/apl)

## Assessment for ApL Subjects

The assessment for ApL subjects aims at evaluating students' knowledge, understanding and skills related to a particular profession or trade, and their generic skills in authentic contexts. There is no public examination. ApL assessments are undertaken by the respective CPs while the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority (HKEAA) is responsible for the monitoring and quality assurance of the assessments conducted by CPs.

The assessments of each ApL subject comprise six to ten tasks. These are stipulated in the form of an Assessment Scheme which includes a brief description of each task, the assessment method, the approximate assessment date as well as its contribution to the subject score. Assessment information regarding ApL subjects is available at the HKEAA website: [http://www.hkeaa.edu.hk/en/hkdse/assessment/subject\\_information/category\\_b\\_subjects/](http://www.hkeaa.edu.hk/en/hkdse/assessment/subject_information/category_b_subjects/)

## Reporting of Results

In the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination (HKDSE), ApL subjects are classified as Category B subjects. After moderation by the HKEAA, the final assessment results of students are reported on the HKDSE certificate. The certificate provides a common end-of-school credential that gives access to work and further education and training.

Currently, ApL subjects are reported at two levels: 'Attained' and 'Attained with Distinction'. Performance below 'Attained' will be designated as 'Unattained'.

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, the existing levels of performance, i.e. '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.

## Attainment Requirements

For the level of 'Attained', students will be graded with reference to the subject-specific attainment requirements stated in the form of performance descriptors covering knowledge, skills, as well as career-related values and attitudes. These performance descriptors, together with the samples of students' work, illustrate the standards expected.

The award for the distinction levels (i.e. 'Attained with Distinction' as well as 'Attained with Distinction (I)' and 'Attained with Distinction (II)') starting from the 2018 HKDSE is linked to the overall ability level of the students taking the ApL subject concerned. Their performances in the HKDSE core subjects (Chinese Language, English Language, Mathematics Compulsory Part and Liberal Studies) are analysed statistically to ascertain their overall ability.

# Determining the Levels of Performance

ApL students are assessed by individual CPs based on defined standards. The HKEAA is responsible for the moderation of assessment results submitted by CPs, ensuring the overall appropriateness of the assessment results.

Standards of 'Attained' are initially determined by CPs and moderated by panels of judges with reference to the performance descriptors of individual subjects (i.e. by expert judgment). A holistic approach is used to judge if the proposed cut score is appropriate by reviewing the assessment results and samples of students' work. If the assessment judgments are considered appropriate, the assessment results will be validated; otherwise, a different cut score will be recommended for the subject, with students' rank order in the subject remaining unchanged.

The award percentage for the level of distinction (i.e. 'Attained with Distinction' and 'Attained with Distinction (I) and (II)' starting from the 2018 HKDSE) is determined statistically 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 in Appendix 1 of the booklet *Grading Procedures and Standards-referenced Reporting in the HKDSE Examination*: <http://www.hkeaa.edu.hk/en/resources/leaflets/leaflets.html>

As for ApL Chinese, both 'Attained' and 'Attained with Distinction' are determined by expert judgment.

## Samples of Students' Work

Authentic exemplars of students' work, together with the performance descriptors, serve to illustrate the expected performance standards of the subjects. The expected standards are made explicit to help explain the meaning of the performance levels to various stakeholders, such as employers and tertiary institutions. Authentic exemplars of students' work are available on the HKEAA website: [http://www.hkeaa.edu.hk/en/hkdse/assessment/subject\\_information/category\\_b\\_subjects/](http://www.hkeaa.edu.hk/en/hkdse/assessment/subject_information/category_b_subjects/)

## Arrangements for Students with Special Educational Needs

When conducting assessment tasks, CPs have the autonomy to provide special arrangements to students with special educational needs (SEN) depending on the nature and severity of their disabilities. The provision of special assessment arrangements aims to allow these students to be equitably assessed without having an unfair advantage or disadvantage over other students. Examples of SEN arrangements include:

- Extension of preparation time
- Extension of assessment time
- Provision of ancillary aids
- Provision of special assistance during the conduct of the assessment
- Provision of equitable, alternative assessments

## Queries regarding Assessment Decisions

Proper procedures in handling queries regarding assessment decisions should be stipulated by CPs. They are required to keep a complete record of all cases and should resolve students' queries regarding assessment results before submitting marks to the HKEAA.

After the release of results, students may submit an application to the HKEAA for rechecking of marks, but not for the re-assessment of their performance in the ApL subjects.

### Enquiries

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