

FAQs on Senior Secondary Applied Learning
October 2020 version

Curriculum Design of Senior Secondary Applied Learning (ApL)

- Q1 [What is Applied Learning \(ApL\)?](#)
Q2 [What are the courses provided in ApL? What can students learn?](#)

Course Provision and Application

- Q3 [How many ApL courses can each student take?](#)
Q4 [How long does an ApL course last? Who will teach ApL courses?](#)
Q5 [What is the medium of instruction for ApL courses?](#)
Q6 [What is the lesson arrangement for ApL courses?](#)
Q7 [How can students apply for ApL courses?](#)
Q8 [Do students need to pay the course fees for ApL courses?](#)
Q9 [How can students or parents obtain information about ApL courses?](#)
Q10 [What are the features of the ApL course ‘Tech Basics’?](#)
Q11 [What is Applied Learning \(Vocational English\) \[ApL\(VocE\)\]?](#)
Q12 [Can a student repeat an ApL course?](#)

Funding Arrangement of ApL

- Q13 [Do schools need to share part of ApL course fees?](#)
Q14 [How should schools top up the deficit in the Diversity Learning Grant \(DLG\) in the funding support for ApL courses?](#)
Q15 [Will the subsidy to the students be clawed back if they withdraw from the ApL courses in the second year or after a few months of study?](#)

Reporting of Results, Qualification Recognition and Quality Assurance

- Q16 [How are students assessed in ApL courses?](#)
Q17 [How will the performance of students in ApL courses be reported?](#)
Q18 [Will the qualification of ApL courses be recognised?](#)
Q19 [How does the Education Bureau assure the quality of ApL courses?](#)

Catering for Students’ Diverse Learning Needs

- Q20 [Can students with Special Educational Needs \(SEN\) take ApL courses?](#)

Course Information

- Q21 [How can schools get further information on ApL courses?](#)

Applied Learning Chinese (for non-Chinese speaking students) (ApL(C))

- Q22 [What is ApL\(C\)?](#)
Q23 [Who can take ApL\(C\)?](#)
Q24 [Could non-Chinese speaking students taking ApL\(C\) \(Category B subjects in the HKDSE Examination\) also take Chinese Language \(Category A\) at the same time?](#)
Q25 [How will the performance of students in ApL\(C\) be reported?](#)
Q26 [Will the qualification of ApL\(C\) be recognised?](#)

Curriculum Design of Senior Secondary Applied Learning (ApL)

Q1 What is Applied Learning (ApL)?

A1 ApL is a valued senior secondary elective subject which offers studies with equal emphasis on practice and theory linked to broad professional and vocational fields. For holistic learning, a flexible combination of ApL with core subjects, elective subjects and Other Learning Experiences helps provide theoretical and applied learning opportunities to cater for students' diverse learning needs.

[Back](#)

Q2 What are the courses provided in ApL? What can students learn?

A2 There are six areas of studies in ApL, namely, Creative Studies; Media and Communication; Business, Management and Law; Services; Applied Science; and Engineering and Production. In addition, Applied Learning (Vocational English) [ApL(VocE)] and Applied Learning Chinese (for non-Chinese speaking students) [ApL(C)], which is provided exclusively for non-Chinese speaking (NCS) students fulfilling the specified circumstances¹, are introduced.

Same as other school subjects, ApL focuses on developing knowledge, skills, values and attitudes. ApL aims to enable students to understand fundamental theories and concepts through application and practice and to develop their generic skills and beginners' skill set for further studies and work. ApL helps students explore their career aspirations and orientation for lifelong learning.

[Back](#)

Course Provision and Application

Q3 How many ApL courses can each student take?

A3 Apart from the four core subjects (Chinese Language, English Language, Mathematics and Liberal Studies), schools should encourage students of different abilities, interests and career aspirations to take 1 or 2 ApL courses² to broaden their horizons, and to realise their talent and potential.

[Back](#)

Q4 How long does an ApL course last? Who will teach ApL courses?

A4 The duration of each ApL course is 180 contact hours, generally spanning 2 school years at the senior secondary level; whereas the duration of each ApL(C) course is 270 contact hours, spanning Secondary 4 to 6. All ApL courses are provided by course providers and delivered by tutors recognised by course providers.

[Back](#)

Q5 What is the medium of instruction for ApL courses?

¹ Students who have learned Chinese Language for less than 6 years while receiving primary and secondary education; or students who have learned Chinese Language for 6 years or more in schools, but have been taught an adapted and simpler Chinese Language curriculum not normally applicable to the majority of students in local schools.

² Including ApL(VocE) but excluding ApL(C)

A5 Generally speaking, medium of instruction (MOI) of ApL courses can be Chinese as well as English. Some courses can only adopt either Chinese or English as the MOI due to their specific nature. Course Providers will decide finally whether to operate classes with Chinese/ English as the MOI according to individual situation (e.g. number of student applicants for individual courses).

[Back](#)

Q6 What is the lesson arrangement for ApL courses?

A6 Schools can choose to offer ApL courses in Mode 1 and/or Mode 2. Lessons for Mode 1 are mainly conducted on Saturdays at the venues of course providers; whereas lessons for Mode 2 mainly take place at schools offering the courses, with timetables subject to the arrangement by course providers and schools. Schools may also consider collaborating with other schools to offer ApL courses with the support of course providers.

[Back](#)

Q7 How can students apply for ApL courses?

A7 All students must apply for ApL courses through their schools. However, individual schools may consider submitting application for their students in light of schools' curriculum plan and students' needs, etc. Also, whether applications of students successful or not is subject to the selection results from course providers.

If the ApL courses that students are interested in are not offered in their schools, students or parents can reflect their needs to the school for exploring the possibility of offering relevant ApL courses in Mode 1 or Mode 2, including collaboration with other schools in the same district.

[Back](#)

Q8 Do students need to pay the course fees for ApL courses?

A8 All students in aided, government and Direct Subsidy Scheme secondary schools, caput schools and special schools with senior secondary classes following the senior secondary curriculum recommended by the Curriculum Development Council will be fully subsidised by the EDB to take ApL courses. Students do not need to pay the course fees. Each student may take a maximum of two ApL courses³ as elective subjects in senior secondary.

[Back](#)

Q9 How can students or parents obtain course information of ApL?

A9 Students and parents may visit the website of the Education Bureau (EDB) at www.edb.gov.hk/apl for course information (including course synopses, learning and teaching). Information such as “List of Applied Learning Courses” and “Prospectus for Applied Learning” are available on the above website and updated annually.

[Back](#)

Q10 What are the features of the ApL course ‘Tech Basics’?

³ Including ApL(VocE) but excluding ApL(C)

A10 The ApL course “Tech Basics” was launched in 2020 and is being implemented at S4 in individual schools. The course is part of a 5-year pilot project that aims to develop a learning pathway related to information technology and STEM with the engagement of industries. The learning pathway starts with students taking “Tech Basics” at S4, and provides students privilege to articulate to a related Higher Diploma programme, in addition to the existing articulation pathway, if they are interested in pursuing further studies and their HKDSE Examination results meet the minimum entry requirements for sub-degree programmes. Apart from the existing participating schools, “Tech Basics” is also open to S4 students of other schools in the 2020/21 s.y.

[Back](#)

Q11 What is Applied Learning (Vocational English) [ApL(VocE)]?

A11 Applied Learning (Vocational English) [ApL(VocE)] is a senior secondary elective subject. The course is designed to enhance the learning opportunities of students with diverse learning needs, particularly those who will benefit from a strong practical orientation in English language learning. Through ApL(VocE), students can advance their English communication skills and career-related competencies in simulated applied learning contexts related to work and social situations. For details, please refer to the webpage of ApL(VocE) ([www.edb.gov.hk/apl/ApL\(VocE\)](http://www.edb.gov.hk/apl/ApL(VocE))).

[Back](#)

Q12 Can a student repeat an ApL course ?

A12 If a student has completed Year 1 of an ApL course (including ApL(VocE) and Applied Learning Chinese (for non-Chinese speaking students)) but repeats his/her secondary level, the student may continue to study Year 2 or choose to repeat Year 1 of the course (if the course is still provided) with support from the school principal and the course provider. For enquiries, please contact the ApL Section, EDB at 3698 3186.

[Back](#)

Funding Arrangement of ApL

Q13 Do schools need to share part of ApL course fees?

A13 Full subsidy is provided for students to take ApL courses. Each eligible student is entitled to funding for a maximum of TWO ApL courses (excluding ApL(C))⁴. Starting from the 2020/21 s.y., the EDB will subsidise students to take ApL as the 4th elective subject to encourage students to take ApL to broaden their studies and learning experience.

[Back](#)

Q14 How should schools top up the deficit in the Diversity Learning Grant (DLG) in the funding support for ApL courses?

A14 Under the full subsidy arrangement, schools will be allocated with an amount of DLG equal to the total course fee of ApL courses enrolled by eligible students. If necessary and under special circumstances, schools can deploy the resources tabulated below for paying course fees:

⁴ In case a student also takes the adapted ApL course(s), each adapted ApL course will be counted as an ApL course in the funding arrangement. If a student takes ApL(C), relevant course will be fully subsidised by the Student Grant for ApL(C).

School Type	Resources to be Deployed by Schools
Aided Secondary Schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Capacity Enhancement Grant (CEG) ● Surplus in the General Domain of Operating Expenses Block Grant (OEBG) / Expanded OEBG ● Substitute Teacher Grant / Teacher Relief Grant (TRG) ● Senior Secondary Curriculum Support Grant (SSCSG) ● Schools' own funds
Government Secondary Schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Expanded Subject and Curriculum Block Grant ● TRG ● SSCSG
Caput Schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● CEG ● SSCSG ● Fee Subsidy ● Schools' own funds
DSS Secondary Schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● CEG ● DSS Subsidy ● Schools' own funds

[Back](#)

Q15 Will the subsidy to the students be clawed back if they withdraw from the ApL courses in the second year or after a few months of study?

A15 DLG and Student Grant for ApL(C) will be calculated based on the actual number of enrolments in ApL and ApL(C) courses respectively as at September of each school year (February for first year of ApL(C)). There will not be further adjustment or claw back of subsidies for that particular school year afterwards. However, any unspent subsidies by the end of the senior secondary cohort will be clawed back by the EDB.

[Back](#)

Reporting of Student Results, Qualification Recognition and Quality Assurance

Q16 How are students assessed in ApL courses?

A16 ApL courses are Category B subjects of the HKDSE Examination, and there is no public examination for ApL subjects. The assessment of each ApL subject comprises 6 to 10 assessment tasks to be undertaken within the period of study. Course providers will conduct assessments of respective ApL subjects while the HKEAA is responsible for moderation of the assessment results submitted by course providers. The moderated results will be recorded on the HKDSE certificate.

[Back](#)

Q17 How will the performance of students in ApL courses be reported?

A17 Starting from the 2018 HKDSE Examination, the reporting of ApL students' performance is refined to "Attained", "Attained with Distinction (I)" and "Attained with Distinction (II)". Performance of "Attained with Distinction (I)" is comparable to Level 3 while "Attained with Distinction (II)" is comparable to Level 4 or above of Category A subjects of the HKDSE Examination. Candidates with performance below the standard of "Attained", or attendance rates below 80%, will be designated as "Unattained", which will not be reported on the certificate.

For ApL(C), "Attained" and "Attained with Distinction" will continue to be used, and refinement of these levels would be considered when more data is collected.

[Back](#)

Q18 Will the qualification of ApL courses be recognised?

A18 For further studies in undergraduate programmes – In general, the tertiary institutions value the learning experiences that students acquire in ApL. ApL subjects are used as elective subjects, or considered for award of extra bonus or additional information, varying by individual institutions, faculties or programmes. Please refer to the websites of individual institutions for details.

For further studies in sub-degree programmes – The updated Revised Common Descriptors for Associate Degree (AD) and Higher Diploma (HD) Programmes under the New Academic Structure set out that students are eligible to apply for admission to AD or HD programmes if they meet the minimum entrance requirements of Level 2 in five HKDSE subjects (including Chinese Language and English Language). In general, each student is allowed to use up to two ApL subjects in the application. The updated Revised Common Descriptors were announced to schools through the [EDB Circular Memorandum No. 40/2017](#) issued on 17 February 2017. Please refer to the websites of individual institutions for details.

For further studies in the Diploma Yi Jin Programme – Students who have completed their study of an ApL subject with the result of “Attained” or “Attained with Distinction” may be exempted from taking up to a maximum of two elective courses in a relevant study area in the Diploma Yi Jin Programme. Please refer to the websites of individual institutions for details.

Information on multiple pathways for senior secondary graduates is available at the New Academic Structure Web Bulletin (334.edb.hkedcity.net/new/en/index.php).

For further studies in the Mainland / abroad, details are available at the New Academic Structure Web Bulletin (<https://334.edb.hkedcity.net/new/en/pathway2.php>).

For work, the Civil Service Bureau (CSB) announced that results in the HKDSE (including the results of “Attained” and “Attained with Distinction” in ApL, subject to a maximum of two ApL subjects) will be accepted for civil service appointment purposes. Details are available at the CSB website (www.csb.gov.hk/english/info/2170.html).

In addition to the HKDSE qualification, a student taking an ApL course will obtain a Qualifications Framework (QF) Level 3 certificate to be issued by relevant course provider upon successful completion of the course if the course has been registered in the Qualifications Register as certificate programme at QF Level 3. Details are available at the Qualifications Register website (www.hkqr.gov.hk).

[Back](#)

Q19 How can the quality of ApL courses be assured by the Education Bureau?

A19 The EDB has institutionalised an ApL quality assurance mechanism involving the Curriculum Development Council Committee on ApL, the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications and the HKEAA to ensure that courses are developed according to the design principles; the curriculum is delivered as designed; and the learning outcomes of students can meet the set standards.

[Back](#)

Catering for Students' Diverse Learning Needs

Q20 Can students with Special Educational Needs (SEN) take ApL courses?

A20 Same as other senior secondary subjects, students with special educational needs can take ApL courses as other students. Course providers will adapt the teaching strategies, etc. as appropriate according to their learning needs. Schools may opt to submit supplementary information for the students with SEN in submitting application for ApL courses for the reference of the course provider(s) so as to effectively support the students taking ApL courses.

As for assessment, course providers would exercise discretion in providing special arrangements to these students, in accordance with the nature and severity of their disabilities.

For details, please refer to the HKEAA website:

http://www.hkeaa.edu.hk/en/HKDSE/assessment/subject_information/category_b_subjects/faq_index/faq_03.html

Besides, the EDB provides adapted ApL courses for senior secondary students with intellectual disabilities. For details, please refer to the EDB website:

edb.gov.hk/en/curriculum-development/major-level-of-edu/special-educational-needs/adapted-applied-learning/index.html

[Back](#)

Course Information

Q21 How can schools get further information on ApL courses?

A21 Course information of ApL (including course synopses, learning and teaching) is uploaded to the EDB website (www.edb.gov.hk/apl). Besides, course information will also be provided in the "Prospectus for Applied Learning" published yearly by the EDB and accessible on the EDB website. Other information in the EDB website will also be updated regularly. Schools may obtain more course information from individual course providers as well.

[Back](#)

Applied Learning Chinese (for non-Chinese speaking students) (ApL(C))

Q22 What is ApL(C)?

A22 ApL(C) is introduced, starting from the 2014/15 school year, to provide an additional channel exclusively for non-Chinese speaking (NCS) students fulfilling the specified circumstances* to obtain an alternative Chinese language qualification to prepare them for further studies and career pursuits.

ApL(C), which is designed from the perspective of second language learners, is a language course using the vocational field as the context for students to learn Chinese through different modes of activities. ApL(C) consists of ApL(C) I, ApL(C) II and ApL(C) III, which are pegged at the Qualifications Framework (QF) Level 1, the QF Level 2 and the QF Level 3 respectively. Each level consists of three modules: Oral Communication (Cantonese), Reading and Writing. The duration of ApL(C) course is 270 contact hours, spanning Secondary 4 to 6.

* Students who have learned Chinese Language for less than 6 years while receiving primary and secondary education; or students have learned Chinese Language for 6 years or more in schools, but have been taught an adapted and simpler Chinese Language curriculum not normally applicable to the majority of students in local schools.

[Back](#)

Q23 Who can take ApL(C)?
A23 Students fulfilling the specified circumstances can take ApL(C). Specified circumstances refer to students who have learned Chinese Language for less than 6 years while receiving primary and secondary education; or students have learned Chinese Language for 6 years or more in schools, but have been taught an adapted and simpler Chinese Language curriculum not normally applicable to the majority of students in local schools.

NCS students who aspire to study ApL(C) should have basic language competency to enable them to learn Chinese language through different modes of activities in a simulated applied learning context. At the point of entry, they are expected to have achieved most of the learning outcomes of the “Chinese Language Curriculum Second Language Learning Framework” (“Learning Framework”) at level 4 or above. Upon completion of courses, NCS students are expected to have achieved the relevant learning outcomes of the “Learning Framework” at level 6 or above. Details of the “Learning Framework” are available at the website of the EDB www.edb.gov.hk/tc/curriculum-development/kla/chi-edu/second-lang.html.

[Back](#)

Q24 Could NCS students taking ApL(C) (Category B subjects in the HKDSE Examination) also take Chinese Language (Category A) at the same time?

A24 Currently, all students (including local and NCS students) could take and register for HKDSE Examination Chinese Language (Category A), and NCS students fulfilling the specified circumstances could take ApL(C) (Category B) to obtain an alternative Chinese language qualification to prepare them for further studies and career pursuits. In view of the difference of the course design of the two curricula and the time needed to complete the continuous assessment of both subjects, schools are advised to optimise the use of curriculum time to ensure that each student has broad and balanced curriculum for development.

Generally, NCS students only take and register for either Chinese Language (Category A) or ApL(C) (Category B) in the HKDSE Examination. Under special circumstances, students taking ApL(C) (Category B) may consider registering for both subjects in the HKDSE Examination with the support of their schools.

[Back](#)

Q25 How will the performance of students in ApL(C) be reported?

A25 ApL(C) results are reported as “Attained” and “Attained with Distinction” in the HKDSE. Candidates with performances below the standard of “Attained”, or attendance rates below 80%, will be designated as “Unattained”, which will not be reported on the certificate.

Starting from the 2018 HKDSE Examination, the reporting of students’ performance in other ApL subjects is refined to “Attained”, “Attained with Distinction (I)” and “Attained with Distinction (II)”. For ApL(C), “Attained” and “Attained with Distinction” will continue to be used, and refinement of these levels would be considered in future when more data is collected.

[Back](#)

Q26 Will the qualification of ApL(C) be recognised?

A26 ApL(C) results are reported as “Attained” and “Attained with Distinction” in the HKDSE.

By design, ApL(C) is a language course using the vocational field as the context. It differs from other ApL courses which focus on the knowledge and beginners' skill set related to a specific professional/vocational field. Against this background, University Grants Committee (UGC)-funded universities and most post-secondary institutions accept ApL(C) as an alternative qualification in Chinese Language (ACL) for the admission of NCS students with "Attained" as the minimum grade required. In view of this, ApL(C) cannot be treated as an elective subject. Details are as follows:

- For UGC-funded universities, ApL(C) is not accepted as an elective subject.
- For self-financing institutions, ApL(C) cannot be treated as an elective subject for admission. Apart from ApL(C) as ACL, each applicant is allowed to use a maximum of TWO ApL subjects as elective subjects for admission. Institutions may give special consideration to NCS students with ApL(C) when it is not counted as ACL, according to their individual policy. Nonetheless, ApL(C) cannot be regarded as an elective subject for admission.

Civil Service Bureau (CSB) accepts "Attained" and "Attained with Distinction" in ApL(C) as meeting the Chinese language proficiency requirements of relevant civil service ranks. For details, please refer to the CSB website (<https://www.csb.gov.hk/english/admin/appoint/35.html>).

In addition to the HKDSE qualification, ApL(C) is also pegged at the QF Levels 1-3. Students will obtain QF certificate(s) issued by course providers upon meeting the assessment and attendance requirements of different levels of ApL(C). For details, please refer to the Qualifications Register website (www.hkqr.gov.hk).

[Back](#)