

Frequently asked questions (FAQs) on Applied Learning (ApL)

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Curriculum Design

Q1 What is ApL? What are the course features?

- A1 ApL is a valued senior secondary elective subject which complements other senior secondary subjects to form a flexible subject combination that helps enrich students' subject choices. The courses focus on practical learning elements linked to broad professional and vocational fields with dual emphasis on theory and practice. It develops students' knowledge, generic skills, proper values and attitudes through providing simulated or authentic contexts, as well as enhances students' understanding of vocational and professional education and training (VPET), preparing them for further studies and work in future.

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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 Chinese (for non-Chinese speaking students) [ApL(C)] is provided exclusively for non-Chinese speaking (NCS) students fulfilling the specified circumstances¹.

Same as other school subjects, ApL focuses on developing knowledge, skills, proper 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.

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Course Arrangements

Q3 How many ApL courses can each senior secondary student take?

- A3 Each senior secondary student can take a maximum of TWO ApL courses as elective subjects (NCS students meeting specified circumstances¹ can also take one ApL(C) course).

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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 level²; 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, with a quality assurance mechanism put in place to ensure the quality of the courses. In general, course providers are responsible for deploying tutors with the relevant qualifications and experience to teach ApL courses.

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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 Students can start taking the courses at S4 and complete them at S5, or start taking the courses at S5 and complete them at S6.

Q5 What is the medium of instruction for ApL courses?

A5 Most ApL courses offer classes using English and Chinese respectively as the medium of instruction for students to choose from, while some courses only provide classes using either language as the medium of instruction.. Course Providers will determine whether they can offer classes with different languages of instruction depending on the circumstances (e.g. the number of student applicants for individual courses).

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Q6 How are lessons arranged for ApL courses? What are the considerations for implementation?

A6 ApL courses can be conducted under two modes. For Mode 1, lessons are in general held at the venues of the course providers on Saturdays; for Mode 2 (schools offering ApL courses on their own), lessons can be held on the school campus and / or at the venues of the course providers. Schools offering courses in Mode 2 have to reach an initial agreement on the teaching and timetabling arrangements with the course providers.

Schools can offer ApL courses to suit the school context (such as their whole-school curriculum planning, students' interests, aspirations, abilities, needs, etc.). Schools can arrange students of the same cohort to start the course at Secondary 4 (complete at Secondary 5) and / or Secondary 5 (complete at Secondary 6). If schools intend to offer ApL courses, they should provide sufficient support and guidance to their students to enable them to make informed choices according to their abilities, interests and aspirations, and apply for suitable ApL courses.

Schools are reminded that if they adopt Mode 2 (schools offering ApL courses on their own), given that Secondary 4 and Secondary 5 students of the same school year belong to two different cohorts, they should attend ApL classes separately (each with their own cohorts) and register to sit the HKDSE Examination for the ApL subjects in different years.

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Q7 How can students apply for ApL courses?

A7 All students must apply for ApL courses through their schools. Whether or not their applications are successful is subject to the student selection by course providers.

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

A8 All students in aided, government and secondary schools under the Direct Subsidy Scheme (DSS), caput schools and special schools with senior secondary classes studying the senior secondary curriculum prepared by the Curriculum Development Council and published for use in schools by the EDB and studying ApL courses will be fully subsidised by the EDB to pay their ApL course fees. Each student is entitled to funding for a maximum of two ApL courses³.

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Q9 How can schools, teachers, students or parents obtain ApL course information?

A9 Course information of ApL is uploaded to the EDB website (www.edb.gov.hk/apl/en). Besides, course information will also be provided in the "Prospectus for Applied Learning" published

³ Excluding Applied Learning Chinese (for non-Chinese speaking students)

annually by the EDB and accessible on the EDB website. Other information in the EDB website will also be updated regularly. Schools, teachers, students and parents may also obtain course information from individual course providers.

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Q10 What are the Pilot Applied Learning Courses?

A10 To explore the future development of Applied Learning (including greater engagement of industries), the EDB had approved the offer of two Pilot Applied Learning Courses: “Tech Basics” and “Multimedia Storytelling”. The organisations participating in the pilot courses include the course provider (School of Continuing Education, Hong Kong Baptist University (HKBU(SCE))) and all participating schools. The pilot Applied Learning courses are part of the CLAP-TECH project that aims to develop a learning pathway with the engagement of industries. The learning pathway starts with students taking the Pilot Applied Learning course “Tech Basics” or “Multimedia Storytelling”, and provides an opportunity for those with HKDSE results meeting the minimum entry requirements for sub-degree programmes to articulate to a related Higher Diploma programme. For details, please contact the course provider, HKBU(SCE).

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Q11 What is Applied Learning (Vocational English) [ApL(VocE)]? Can a student taking ApL(VocE) opt not to study the senior secondary core subject English Language?

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. **English Language is a core subject under the local senior secondary curriculum⁴; all students studying the local senior secondary curriculum are required to study English Language. Senior secondary students with an interest in VPET may consider taking ApL(VocE) as an elective subject** to prepare themselves for further studies or career pursuits. For details, please refer to the webpage of ApL(VocE) (www.edb.gov.hk/Apl/ApL_Eng).

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Q12 If students repeat in schools after completing Year 1 of an ApL course, can they continue to Year 2 of the ApL course?

A12 If a student has completed Year 1 of an ApL course but repeats a year level, the student may continue to study Year 2 or choose to repeat Year 1 of the course (if the course is still provided and available) with the agreement of the school principal and course provider.

For the arrangement about students who repeat a year level or defer taking Applied Learning courses due to special circumstances, please refer to the HKEAA website (https://www.hkeaa.edu.hk/en/HKDSE/assessment/subject_information/category_b_subjects/faq_index/faq_01.html#3) or contact the Applied Learning Section of the EDB at 3698 3186.

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⁴ Under the adapted curriculum for students with intellectual disabilities, English Language is not a core subject.

Q13 If students take ApL courses at Secondary 4, when should they register to sit the HKDSE Examination of the ApL subjects?

A13 In general, students should register for the ApL subjects in HKDSE in September/October of the year preceding the examination year. If students take ApL courses at Secondary 4, they should register at Secondary 6 to sit the HKDSE Examination on the Category B ApL subjects together with Category A and C subjects. For example, if students take ApL courses (2023-25 cohort; 2025 HKDSE) at Secondary 4 in the 2022/23 school year, they should register at Secondary 6 (around September/October 2024) to sit the 2025 HKDSE Examination of the ApL subjects together with Category A and C subjects.

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Funding Arrangement

Q14 Do schools need to share part of the ApL course fees?

A14 The Diversity Learning Grant (DLG) is disbursed by the EDB to aided, government and secondary schools under the DSS, caput schools and special schools operating senior secondary classes, with full subsidy provided for students to take ApL courses. Each eligible student is entitled to funding for a maximum of TWO ApL courses (excluding ApL(C))⁵. Starting from the 2020/21 school year, students will also be subsidised by the DLG to take ApL as the 4th elective subject to encourage them to take ApL to broaden their learning experiences.

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Q15 How should schools top up the deficit in Diversity Learning Grant (DLG) in the support for ApL courses?

A15 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 following resources to top up the deficit:

School Type	Resources to be Deployed by Schools
Aided Secondary Schools, special schools operating senior secondary classes	<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)● Schools' own funds
Government Secondary Schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Expanded Subject and Curriculum Block Grant● TRG
Caput Schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● CEG● Fee Subsidy● Schools' own funds
DSS Secondary Schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● CEG● DSS Subsidy● Schools' own funds

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⁵ 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), the course fee will be fully subsidised by the Student Grant for ApL(C).

Q16 Will the subsidy be adjusted if students withdraw from the ApL courses after a few months or in the second year of study?

A16 DLG is calculated based on the actual number of enrolments in ApL courses in September/October of each school year. There will not be further adjustments afterwards.

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Reporting of Performance, Recognition and Quality Assurance
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Q17 How are students assessed in ApL courses?

A17 ApL courses are Category B subjects of the HKDSE, 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 the assessments of their 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.

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Q18 How will the performance of students in ApL courses be reported?

A18 The reporting of students' performance in ApL subjects (except for ApL(C)) is by three levels, namely, "Attained", "Attained with Distinction (I)" and "Attained with Distinction (II)". Performance of "Attained with Distinction (I)" and "Attained with Distinction (II)" are deemed comparable to Level 3 and Level 4 or above of Category A subjects of the HKDSE respectively. As for ApL(C), students' performance is reported as "Attained" and "Attained with Distinction".

For all ApL courses, candidates with performance below the standard of "Attained", or whose attendance rates are below 80%, will be designated as "Unattained" and the results will not be reported on the certificate.

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Q19 Will the qualification of ApL courses be recognised for further studies and work?

A19 Student admission in post-secondary institutions has followed the principle of institutional autonomy. For further studies in undergraduate programmes – Institutions value the learning experiences that students acquire in ApL. ApL subjects are recognised 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 minimum entrance requirements for Associate Degree or Higher Diploma Programmes are Level 2 in five HKDSE subjects (including Chinese Language and English Language). Applicants are allowed to use ApL subjects. Please refer to the websites of individual institutions for details.

For work – The Civil Service Bureau (CSB) accepts students' ApL results in the HKDSE (including "Attained" and "Attained with Distinction", up to a maximum of two ApL subjects) in civil service appointments. Details are available at the CSB website (www.csb.gov.hk/english/info/2170.html).

In addition to the HKDSE qualification, students who have successfully completed ApL courses that are registered in the Qualifications Register as certificate programmes at Qualifications Framework (QF) Level 3 will obtain a QF Level 3 certificate issued by the course providers. Details are available at the Qualifications Register website (www.hkqr.gov.hk).

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Q20 How does the Education Bureau assure the quality of ApL courses?

A20 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.

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Catering for Students' Diverse Learning Needs
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Q21 Can students with Special Educational Needs (SEN) take ApL courses?

A21 Same as other senior secondary subjects, students with SEN can take ApL courses. Course providers will adapt the teaching strategies as appropriate according to the learning needs of these students. Schools may opt to submit supplementary information for students with SEN in submitting application for ApL courses (<https://www.edb.gov.hk/en/curriculum-development/cross-kla-studies/applied-learning/forms-download/index.html>) for the reference of the course provider(s) so as to support the students in 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 SEN. 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:

<https://www.edb.gov.hk/en/curriculum-development/curriculum-area/special-educational-needs/adapted-applied-learning/index.html>

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Applied Learning Chinese (for non-Chinese speaking students) (ApL(C))
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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 meeting the specified circumstances⁶ to obtain an alternative Chinese language qualification to prepare them for further studies and career pursuits.

⁶ Students who have learned Chinese Language for less than six years while receiving primary and secondary education; or students have learned Chinese Language for six 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.

ApL(C), which is designed from the perspective of second language learners, enables students to learn Chinese through different modes of activities in a simulated applied learning context. ApL(C) consists of ApL(C) I, ApL(C) II and ApL(C) III, which are pegged at the Qualifications Framework (QF) Level 1, QF Level 2 and 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 Secondary 6.

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Q23 Who can take ApL(C)?

A23 Students meeting the specified circumstances can take ApL(C). Specified circumstances refer to students who have learned Chinese Language for less than six years while receiving primary and secondary education; or students have learned Chinese Language for six 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 intend to apply for and take ApL(C) should have basic language competency to enable them to learn the Chinese language through different modes of activities in a simulated applied learning context. At the point of entry for the study of ApL(C) courses, 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 ApL(C) 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).

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

A24 Currently, all students (including local and NCS students) could study the senior secondary core subject Chinese Language and register to sit the HKDSE Chinese Language (Category A) examination, and NCS students fulfilling the specified circumstances could also 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. Under special circumstances, students taking ApL(C) (Category B) may consider registering for both Chinese subjects in the HKDSE with the support of their schools.

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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 whose attendance rates are below 80%, will be designated as “Unattained” and the results will not be reported on the certificate.

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

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

ApL(C) provides NCS students with an additional channel to obtain an alternative Chinese Language qualification. For the purpose of admission to post-secondary education programmes, ApL(C) is in general accepted as an alternative Chinese Language qualification, but it is not considered an elective subject. Currently, University Grants Committee-funded universities and most post-secondary institutions accept ApL(C) as an alternative qualification in Chinese Language for the admission of NCS students with “Attained” as the minimum grade required.

The 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.

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

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