

**Updated Revised Common Descriptors for  
Associate Degree and Higher Diploma Programmes  
under the New Academic Structure**

(Version as at February 2017)

**Preamble**

Associate Degree (AD) and Higher Diploma (HD) are worthwhile standalone sub-degree qualifications. They prepare students for further studies and initial employment at the para-professional level. While AD and HD are of equal standing in terms of level, (i.e. Level 4 of the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework), their curricula are characterized by different proportions of generic and specialized content.

As far as admission requirements are concerned, this set of revised Common Descriptors relates mainly to the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (HKDSE) available from 2012 onwards. But this is not to the exclusion of the Hong Kong Advanced Level Examination, the Pre-AD or other pre-existing equivalent qualifications, which can be considered with reference to the admission requirements prevailing at the time when the qualifications were granted. Furthermore, mature students are eligible for consideration.

<b>AD Common Descriptors</b>	<b>HD Common Descriptors</b>
<p><b><i>Programme Objectives</i></b></p> <p>Through the rich generic content of its curriculum, an AD should equip students with a broad knowledge base and a solid foundation of generic skills, as well as the specialist knowledge and skills required for further study in a chosen discipline. It should also cultivate a spirit of lifelong learning, develop the ability to learn how to learn, and encourage the pursuit of active citizenship.</p> <p>The AD should also enable students to acquire the necessary attitude, knowledge and skills that facilitate them to join the workforce at the para-professional level, if they choose to do so.</p>	<p><b><i>Programme Objectives</i></b></p> <p>Through the rich specialized content of its curriculum, an HD should enable students to acquire the appropriate attitude, knowledge and skills to support their initial employment at the para-professional level. Blending theoretical knowledge and practical application, it should also enable students to pursue a career in a specific field.</p> <p>The HD should also provide students with the necessary generic skills for further study and active citizenship. It should also cultivate a spirit of lifelong learning and develop the students' ability to learn how to learn.</p>

AD Common Descriptors	HD Common Descriptors
<p><i>Learning Outcomes</i></p> <p>At the end of the programme, the student should demonstrate:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A solid foundation of generic skills, including languages, IT, interpersonal communication, quantitative and analytical skills, skills in evaluating information for planning and investigative purposes, critical thinking and problem solving skills, as well as skills in the ability to learn how to learn.</li> <li>- A broad theoretical understanding of the chosen discipline and its application.</li> <li>- An appreciation and basic understanding of the skills and knowledge of various disciplines and areas of study through general education, including studies in the liberal arts and sciences.</li> <li>- A theoretical foundation upon which further study in the discipline at the degree level, or professional level, can be built.</li> <li>- A stronger self-awareness and understanding of one's aptitudes, abilities, orientations and inclinations.</li> <li>- An appreciation of the major socio-political, cultural and economic issues in the local, national, regional and international contexts.</li> <li>- A strong sense of social responsibility and civic values, a passion in pursuing creativity and innovativeness, and the spirit of lifelong learning.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Learning Outcomes</i></p> <p>At the end of the programme, the student should demonstrate:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- An acquisition of the attitude, theoretical knowledge and practical skills at the para-professional level of a certain discipline, and integration of theory with practice, so as to apply these principles more widely especially in an employment context.</li> <li>- A solid foundation of generic skills, including languages, IT, interpersonal communication, quantitative and analytical skills, the ability to learn how to learn, and skills of presenting and evaluating information, for planning and investigative purposes.</li> <li>- An ability to evaluate critically the appropriateness of different approaches to solving problems in the field of study or employment, and to propose appropriate solution.</li> <li>- The ability to perform skilled tasks, requiring some discretion and judgment, and undertaking a supervisory role.</li> <li>- A theoretical foundation upon which further study in the discipline at the degree level, or professional level, can be built.</li> <li>- An appreciation of the major socio-political, cultural and economic issues in the local, national, regional and international contexts.</li> <li>- A strong sense of social responsibility and civic values, a passion in pursuing creativity and innovativeness, and the spirit of lifelong learning.</li> </ul>

<b>AD Common Descriptors</b>	<b>HD Common Descriptors</b>
<p><b><i>Curriculum</i></b></p> <p>At least 60% of curriculum consists of generic contents (e.g. language, IT, general education, etc).</p>	<p><b><i>Curriculum</i></b></p> <p>At least 60% of curriculum consists of specialized contents (e.g. learning related to concentrations, disciplines and professions, vocational skills, etc).</p>
<p><b><i>Minimum Entrance Requirements</i></b></p> <p>In the spirit of life-long learning, AD programmes should generally adopt the principle of “lenient entry stringent exit”. Applicants are eligible to apply for admission to AD programmes if they meet the minimum entrance requirements of Level 2 in five HKDSE subjects including English and Chinese<sup>1</sup>. Each applicant is allowed to use not more than two Applied Learning subjects in the application<sup>2</sup>.</p>	<p><b><i>Minimum Entrance Requirements</i></b></p> <p>In the spirit of life-long learning, HD programmes should generally adopt the principle of “lenient entry stringent exit”. Applicants are eligible to apply for admission to HD programmes if they meet the minimum entrance requirements of Level 2 in five HKDSE subjects including English and Chinese<sup>1</sup>. Each applicant is allowed to use not more than two Applied Learning subjects in the application<sup>2</sup>.</p>
<p><b><i>Other Acceptable Equivalent Qualifications</i></b></p> <p>Applicants who possess other acceptable equivalent qualifications, including non-local qualifications obtained in or outside Hong Kong, or other qualifications/experience</p>	<p><b><i>Other Acceptable Equivalent Qualifications</i></b></p> <p>Applicants who possess other acceptable equivalent qualifications, including non-local qualifications obtained in or outside Hong Kong, or other qualifications/experience</p>

<sup>1</sup> For non-Chinese-speaking students, institutions will continue to accept alternative Chinese Language qualifications for students who have met the specified conditions: (a) students who have learned Chinese Language for less than 6 years while receiving primary and secondary education; (b) 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. Applied Learning Chinese (for non-Chinese speaking students) should, in general, be accepted as an alternative Chinese Language qualification, among other acceptable alternative Chinese Language qualifications.

<sup>2</sup> The two Applied Learning subjects do not include Applied Learning Chinese (for non-Chinese speaking students) as this subject is introduced to provide an additional channel exclusively for non-Chinese speaking students to obtain an alternative Chinese language qualification. For the 2012-2017 HKDSE Examinations, students attaining the results of “Attained” and “Attained with Distinction” in the Applied Learning courses are accepted as attaining the competencies required at Level 2 and Level 3 or above of Category A subjects of the HKDSE Examination respectively for the purposes of further studies and work. Effective from the 2018 HKDSE Examination, the reporting of 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.

<b>AD Common Descriptors</b>	<b>HD Common Descriptors</b>
deemed to be equivalent, are eligible to apply for admission to AD programmes.	deemed to be equivalent, are eligible to apply for admission to HD programmes.
<p><b><i>Special Admission Quota</i></b></p> <p>Applicants falling short of the minimum entrance requirements or other acceptable equivalent qualifications can be admitted on special considerations but should not account for more than 5% of the total intake on a programme basis, and not more than 3% on an institutional basis.</p>	<p><b><i>Special Admission Quota</i></b></p> <p>Applicants falling short of the minimum entrance requirements or other acceptable equivalent qualifications can be admitted on special considerations but should not account for more than 5% of the total intake on a programme basis, and not more than 3% on an institutional basis.</p>
<p><b><i>Quality Assurance</i></b></p> <p>For self-accrediting institutions, AD programmes must undergo their own internal quality assurance mechanism.</p> <p>For non-self-accrediting institutions, their AD programmes should be accredited by the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic &amp; Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ).</p> <p>Institutions are required to submit annual returns on quality-related matters to the Education Bureau.</p>	<p><b><i>Quality Assurance</i></b></p> <p>For self-accrediting institutions, HD programmes must undergo their own internal quality assurance mechanism.</p> <p>For non-self-accrediting institutions, their HD programmes should be accredited by the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic &amp; Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ).</p> <p>Institutions are required to submit annual returns on quality-related matters to the Education Bureau.</p>
<p><b><i>Exit Qualifications</i></b></p> <p>AD is a worthwhile standalone exit qualification for further studies and initial employment at the para-professional level.</p> <p>As an exit qualification for further studies, an AD award is normally equivalent to 50% of a university degree. In other words, AD graduates may apply for articulation to Year 3 of a 4-year university degree or Year 2 of a 3-year university degree. However, it should be stressed that student admission is a matter within the autonomy of the institutions, which</p>	<p><b><i>Exit Qualifications</i></b></p> <p>HD is a worthwhile standalone exit qualification for initial employment at the para-professional level and further studies.</p> <p>As an exit qualification for further studies, an HD award is normally equivalent to 50% of a university degree. In other words, HD graduates may apply for articulation to Year 3 of a 4-year university degree or Year 2 of a 3-year university degree. However, it should be stressed that student admission is a matter within the autonomy of the institutions, which</p>

<b>AD Common Descriptors</b>	<b>HD Common Descriptors</b>
<p>may exercise discretion in granting advance standing in accordance with its established policies.</p> <p>AD qualification is benchmarked at Level 4 of the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF). Each level of the HKQF is characterized by the Generic Level Descriptors (GLD), which sets out the generic learning outcomes of the qualifications located at that level.</p>	<p>may exercise discretion in granting advance standing in accordance with its established policies.</p> <p>HD qualification is benchmarked at Level 4 of the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF). Each level of the HKQF is characterized by the Generic Level Descriptors (GLD), which sets out the generic learning outcomes of the qualifications located at that level.</p>