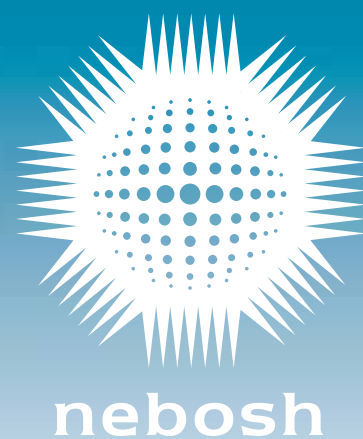


January 2017

# Examiners' Report

## NEBOSH National Diploma in Occupational Health and Safety - Unit A



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# **Examiners' Report**

## **NEBOSH NATIONAL DIPLOMA IN OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY**

### **UNIT A: MANAGING HEALTH AND SAFETY**

**JANUARY 2017**

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## **CONTENTS**

Introduction	2
General comments	3
Comments on individual questions	4
Examination technique	13
Command words	17

# Introduction

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NEBOSH (The National Examination Board in Occupational Safety and Health) was formed in 1979 as an independent examining board and awarding body with charitable status. We offer a comprehensive range of globally-recognised, vocationally-related qualifications designed to meet the health, safety, environmental and risk management needs of all places of work in both the private and public sectors.

Courses leading to NEBOSH qualifications attract around 50,000 candidates annually and are offered by over 600 course providers, with examinations taken in over 120 countries around the world. Our qualifications are recognised by the relevant professional membership bodies including the Institution of Occupational Safety and Health (IOSH) and the International Institute of Risk and Safety Management (IIRSM).

NEBOSH is an awarding body that applies best practice setting, assessment and marking and applies to Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) Accreditation regulatory requirements.

This report provides guidance for candidates and course providers for use in preparation for future examinations. It is intended to be constructive and informative and to promote better understanding of the syllabus content and the application of assessment criteria.

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## General comments

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Many candidates are well prepared for this unit assessment and provide comprehensive and relevant answers in response to the demands of the question paper. This includes the ability to demonstrate understanding of knowledge by applying it to workplace situations.

There are other candidates, however, who appear to be unprepared for the unit assessment and who show both a lack of knowledge of the syllabus content and a lack of understanding of how key concepts should be applied to workplace situations, which is an essential requirement at Diploma level.

This report has been prepared to provide feedback on the standard date examination sitting in January 2017. This report cover both the 2010 and 2015 specifications.

Feedback is presented in these key areas: responses to questions, examination technique and command words and is designed to assist candidates and course providers prepare for future assessments in this unit.

Candidates and course providers will also benefit from use of the 'Guide to the NEBOSH National Diploma in Occupational Health and Safety' which is available via the NEBOSH website. In particular, the guide sets out in detail the syllabus content for Unit A and tutor reference documents for each Element.

Additional guidance on command words is provided in 'Guidance on command words used in learning outcomes and question papers' which is also available via the NEBOSH website.

Candidates and course providers should also make reference to the Unit A 'Example question paper and Examiners' feedback on expected answers' which provides example questions and details Examiners' expectations and typical areas of underperformance.

## Unit A

### Managing health and safety

- 
- Question 1**
- (a) **Outline** key principles of the following risk management strategies **AND give** an example of **EACH**:
- (i) risk transfer; (3)
- (ii) risk reduction. (3)
- (b) When applying a risk reduction strategy, **outline** factors that affect the choice of risk control measures. (4)
- 

This question assessed candidates' knowledge and understanding of learning outcomes 5.1: Outline common risk management strategies (equivalent to 8.1: Explain common risk management strategies, in the 2015 specification); and 5.2: Outline factors to be taken into account when selecting risk controls (equivalent to 8.2 in the 2015 specification).

The vast majority of candidates successfully outlined the principles of both risk transfer and risk reduction.

In part (a) (i) most candidates could outline that risk transfer involved transferring responsibility to a third party. Only a small number of candidates mentioned paying a premium or similar. The most commonly cited examples were outsourcing a high risk activity to a contractor and of transferring risk to an insurance company.

Part (a) (ii) was less well answered. Few candidates were able to outline that risk reduction involved evaluating risks and developing risk reduction strategies or defining acceptable levels of risk to be achieved. They merely said that it was about reducing risk. Most candidates gave practical examples but the question asked for strategies, eg using the hierarchy of controls.

In part (b) a common error was to focus on considerations such as the job, organisation and individual; the hierarchy of controls rather than the factors relevant to the choice of suitable controls.

Where candidates did focus on the factors, many gained marks for correctly outlining cost and several candidates gained marks for legal requirements and employee competence requirements.

Most candidates did not consider the time the control measure would be required for as a factor. This type of error in the examination suggests that there is a lack of examination technique that may be due to a lack of instruction by course providers or a lack of examination practice for candidates.

- 
- Question 2** **Outline** societal factors that influence health and safety standards. (10)
- 

This question assessed candidates' knowledge and understanding of learning outcome 1.2: Outline the societal factors which influence and organisation's health and safety standards and priorities.

Overall this question was not well answered. Candidates who gained good marks clearly outlined several of the key areas as identified in the syllabus: economic climate, government policy, Union representation, effect of media, risk profile of business/industry, globalisation, migrant worker awareness, equality expectations and corporate social responsibility. Fewer candidates mentioned many of the other factors that were worth marks, such as aging workforces, level of fatalities and an individual's readiness to litigate.

Candidates who had difficulty missed the significance of the reference to ‘societal factors’ and focused on all factors that can affect health and safety standards with emphasis on organisational (in-company) factors such as culture, or job, organisation or task specific issues. Some candidates chose to frame their answer around moral, legal and economic imperatives.

Some candidates missed the opportunity to gain higher marks by providing too much discussion on a limited number of factors. They would have fared better ‘outlining’ a wider range of factors.

Candidates who referenced the syllabus during their studies, had read about *societal factors* and followed the command word fared the best in this question.

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<b>Question 3</b>	(a) <b>Give</b> the meaning of the term ‘contract’. (1)
	(b) <b>Outline</b> elements required for a contract to be legally enforceable. (4)
	(c) <b>Outline</b> factors that make a contract potentially unenforceable. (3)
	(d) <b>Outline</b> actions taken by the contracted parties that make a contract completed. (2)

---

This question assessed candidates’ knowledge and understanding of learning outcome 8.6: Outline the principles of the law of contract and its application to health and safety issues (equivalent to 2.6 in the 2015 specification).

With a very small number of exceptions this question gained very few marks for candidates.

In part (a), most candidates were able to give the meaning of the term contract. However, a significant number did not mention its legal significance and so missed out on marks.

In part (b) the majority of candidates understood the need for both parties to have capacity for a contract to be enforceable, but omitted other points such as communication and acceptance by the respective parties, intention to form an enforceable relationship and the legality of the contract’s purpose. A large number of candidates focused on the content of the contract document rather than the contract itself and on terms and conditions.

In part (c) some candidates were able to recognise the issue of capacity and duress or undue influence. However, many answers included that the contract was not signed or that it was unfair.

In part (d) several candidates related their discussions about the contract being ‘complete’ to the contract document itself. Of those candidates who were able to outline that one way of completing a contract is for both parties to complete their obligations, very few were able to make mention of other actions such as the contract being cancelled by mutual agreement.

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**Question 4**

*A young employee of Company A suffered a broken back when they fell down a flight of steps when leaving work. At the time of the incident, they had been taking a shortcut using an emergency exit to reach the car park to get away quickly to meet friends. An investigation has revealed that the fall was caused when the employee tripped on a damaged stair tread. Senior managers at Company A had been aware for some time that there was a custom and practice of employees using this route as a shortcut and that the staircase was in poor condition.*

- (a) **Outline** possible breaches of the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 **AND explain** their relevance to this situation. (6)
- (b) **Identify** the two main types of damages that the injured employee may claim **AND give** an example of what may be claimed under **EACH** type. (4)
- 

This question assessed candidates' knowledge and understanding of learning outcomes 9.1: Explain the key requirements of the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 and the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 (equivalent to 3.1 in the 2015 specification); and 10.2: Explain the criteria required to establish a successful civil action for breach of statutory duty, the main defences available and the procedure for assessment of damages under civil law (equivalent to 4.2: Explain the criteria required to establish a successful civil action for breach of statutory duty and negligence, the main defences available and the procedure for assessment of damages under civil law, in the 2015 specification).

Some very good marks were attained for this questions, although there was a wide range of marks from very low to almost full marks.

Within part (a) good knowledge of the Act was shown and generally the correct section/subsection numbers were provided. Where candidates were able to explain the linkage to the scenario further marks were gained. Limited answers did not go further than the outlining of the breaches and focused on Section 2, sometimes confusing the relevant subsection, missing the opportunity to consider the scenario more fully and consider the role of the employee and the organisation's leadership.

Within part (b), candidates who were able to identify general and special damages and provide a correct example of each gained good marks. Those candidates who did not perform as well mixed up the two types of damages and the examples, so that their answer was not accurate or were unable to provide types of damages.

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**Question 5**

*For a range of internal information sources:*

- (a) **outline** how **EACH** source contributes to risk assessment; (7)
- (b) **outline** limitations of internal information sources. (3)
- 

This question assessed candidates' knowledge and understanding of learning outcome 4.1: Describe how to use internal and external sources of information in the identification of hazards and the assessment of risk (equivalent to 7.1 Explain how to use internal and external information sources in identifying hazards and assessing risks, in the 2015 specification).

Within part (a) some good marks were gained for this question where candidates identified relevant internal source and *outlined how* they contributed to risk assessment. Frequently cited sources were accident reports, ill-health data, maintenance records, employee knowledge and training records. Few candidates offered epidemiological and trend analysis of data and active monitoring data. Limited answers provided a source but did not outline the contribution it made to risk assessment, or tended to devote too much content to audit and inspection data at the expense of outlining a wider range of information sources.

Within part (b) answers were less well answered with candidates only able to offer one or two limitations. Many candidates recognised bias as a limitation; others mentioned incomplete or out of date information. Few candidates demonstrated broader thinking to the information's applicability to the circumstances and the absence of external data.

Limited answers relied upon subjective descriptive prose to discuss the pros and cons of specific sources, rather than a succinct outline of limitation.

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**Question 6**     *An employee has fallen down a flight of stairs while carrying a box of chemicals between two laboratories. As a consequence they have suffered life-changing injuries. The accident has been reported and the scene of the accident has been secured.*

***Explain*** the key steps in the accident investigation process within:

- |     |   |            |
|-----|---|------------|
| (a) | <i>setting up the investigation team;</i> | <b>(2)</b> |
| (b) | <i>gathering information;</i>             | <b>(4)</b> |
| (c) | <i>analysing information;</i>             | <b>(2)</b> |
| (d) | <i>reviewing risk control measures.</i>   | <b>(2)</b> |
- 

This question assessed candidates' knowledge and understanding of learning outcome 2.4: Explain loss investigations; the requirements, benefits, the procedures, the documentation, and the involvement of and communication with relevant staff and representatives (equivalent to 5.4: Explain the reasons for loss and near miss investigations and the procedures to be followed, in the 2015 specification).

Although some reasonable marks were gained on this question many candidates did not provide the level of detail required for a command word 'explain'.

In part (a) candidates recognised the types of people who should be involved, such as management and OSH professionals and mentioned competence and experience of team and/or people involved. However, the opportunity was missed to explain the importance of the qualities of the person leading the investigation and the level of investigation required and how that would be determined.

In part (b) many candidates identified the types of information to be gathered and the activities that would typically take place to gather information but many did not offer the necessary explanation to gain marks. For example, interviews with witnesses and/or injured party were mentioned but few candidates explained that the interview would need to be conducted using a suitable technique and in a suitable environment. Limited answers merely listed some of the information that needed to be gathered.

In part (c) most candidates identified the need to establish causation but few could explain that it needed to be systematic, or to use FTA or similar and lead to an understanding of why the accident had occurred.



In part (d) few candidates could explain adequately what was involved in reviewing the risk control measures. The most common mark-worthy answer related to identifying where changes needed to be made to prevent the accident happening again. There was little evidence of broader thinking to suggest that changes to controls may be needed elsewhere in the organisation.

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**Question 7**      **Outline** content of typical behavioural change programmes. **(20)**

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This question assessed candidates' knowledge and understanding of learning outcome 7.7: Outline the principles, conditions and typical content of behavioural change programmes designed to improve safe behavior in the workplace (equivalent to 10.7 in the 2015 specification).

This question proved unpopular with only 16% of the candidates attempting it. Most who did attempt were unable to demonstrate the broad range of content in a typical programme. Candidates had an insufficient range of separate points for marks to be awarded. It appeared that some candidates did not understand the basis of such a programme, or what was meant by it and those candidates who did were unable to discuss the content with any authority.

A broad overview was required ranging from the key parties involved, training of key stakeholders, management inputs and resources, behavioural identification and analysis, observation, feedback, data monitoring and trend analysis. As the 20 marks were not sub-divided, candidates would need to appreciate that a wide number of points were needed and would therefore need to plan their answer accordingly.

Given that 'content of typical behavioural change programmes' is explicitly stated in the learning outcomes, the performance may indicate that more study emphasis is required in this area.

- 
- Question 8**      *A large public limited company (PLC) providing transport services has recently suffered an incident in which several passengers died.*
- (a)      **Outline** how the consequences of this incident may affect the PLC. **(5)**
  - (b)      *Shareholders have raised concerns over the risk management arrangements in place and the Board's statement in the annual report, provided in accordance with the Financial Reporting Council's (FRC) guidance on 'internal control'.*
    - (i)      **Explain** the purpose of the FRC guidance. **(2)**
    - (ii)      **Explain** the relevance of the FRC guidance to this type of incident. **(3)**
  - (c)      **Outline** how the PLC could raise the profile of health and safety so that it is considered with equal importance to other areas of risk. **(10)**
- 

This question assessed candidates' knowledge and understanding of learning outcome 1.3: Explain the principles and content of effective health and safety, quality, environmental, and integrated management systems with reference to recognised models and standards (equivalent to 9.2: Explain the organisational benefits of effective health and safety leadership, in the 2015 specification).

Only 45% of candidates attempted this question. Part (a) was reasonably well answered. There was good consideration of the costs of the accident and limited answers solely concentrated on the financial costs and legal punishments, only without due consideration of the indirect secondary costs that apply. Most candidates only looked at reputational issues as a single matter rather than discussing the client, investor and industry viewpoint. Having identified the consequence candidates need to meet the 'outline' criteria to get marks.

Part (b) performed less well. There was often a lack of detail and accuracy on the purpose and relevance of the FRC guidance. At most candidates were able to state that the guidelines related to risk management but could not go further to outline the shareholder perspective or legal obligation requirement. The relevance was often not shown, or a subjective brief explanation without accuracy given instead.

In part (c) the answers given often concentrated on physical workplace issues improving health and safety rather than a top board-level approach to safety. It appeared that candidates missed the opportunity to focus on '*so that it is considered with equal importance to other areas of risk*'. As such there were few top level organisational controls or actions suggested with answers focusing on aspects that could generally improve health and safety profile and standards.

Candidate answers suggest that more study emphasis may be needed in relation to this learning outcome.

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**Question 9**

*An organisation is considering assessing its health and safety culture prior to implementing a programme of cultural change.*

- |     |   |      |
|-----|---|------|
| (a) | <b>Outline</b> factors that should be considered when assessing the organisation's current health and safety culture.   | (10) |
| (b) | <b>Outline</b> methods the organisation can use to gather information when assessing current health and safety culture. | (2)  |
| (c) | <b>Outline</b> factors influencing the success of a cultural change programme.  | (8)  |
- 

This question assessed candidates' knowledge and understanding of learning outcomes 6.6: Explain health and safety culture and climate (equivalent to 9.7 in the 2015 specification); and 6.7: Outline the factors which can both positively and negatively affect health and safety culture (equivalent to 9.8: Outline the factors which can positively and negatively affect health and safety culture and climate, in the 2015 specification).

Almost three quarters of candidates attempted this question.

Within part (a) responses were varied. Better answers provided a reasoned and broad view of separate factors typically considered in assessing safety culture. Limited answers focused on reactive data – accidents and incidents, violations. Some candidates missed the significance of the term 'factors', outlining how they would actually go about assessing safety culture.

Part (b) was reasonably well-attempted with most candidates identifying surveys/questionnaires. Many candidates did not recognise interviews or focus groups and the documentation as potential methods.

Within part (c) better answers identified factors from the conception of a cultural change programme through to finish. Overly concentrating on one or two factors – management commitment and resources – meant that some candidates did not provide sufficient separate points. Other limitations were not fulfilling the 'outline' requirement of the question and merely repeating answers given to part (a).

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**Question 10** *An organisation uses accident, incident and ill-health data to assess its health and safety performance. A campaign to raise health and safety awareness has been recently introduced. No change in health and safety performance has been noted.*

- (a) **Outline** why it appears that the campaign is ineffective. (4)
- (b) **Outline** the objectives of active monitoring. (8)
- (c) **Outline** how the following active monitoring techniques can be used to assess the organisation's health and safety performance:
  - (i) safety tours; (2)
  - (ii) safety sampling; (2)
  - (iii) health surveillance; (2)
  - (iv) safety audits. (2)

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This question assessed candidates' knowledge and understanding of learning outcomes 3.2: Explain the need for, and the objectives and limitations of, health and safety monitoring systems (equivalent to 6.2: Explain the need for, and the objectives and limitations of, health and safety monitoring, in the 2015 specification); and 3.3: Describe the variety of monitoring and measurement techniques (equivalent to 6.3: Describe the variety of health and safety monitoring and measurement techniques, in the 2015 specification).

Overall this question was not well answered and demonstrated limited understanding of what was required in part (b), lacking sufficient detail in part (c).

In part (a) candidates gained marks for recognising that there may be a time lag between raised awareness and improved performance and that the campaign may have been badly designed or not understood. However, few candidates were able to outline issues around the reliability of historical data, the sensitivity of accidents as a reliable measure and the causal link between the campaign and cause of the accidents.

In part (b) the range of objectives provided were mainly confined to monitoring compliance with legislation and providing advanced warning of weaknesses before failure occurs. Better responses included recognising the opportunity to monitor effectiveness of risk control systems and checking that plans have been implemented. Some candidates reverted to providing types of active monitoring rather than demonstrating an understanding of purpose.

However, the majority of candidates did not show a deeper understanding of active monitoring; for example, appreciating that its focus is on measuring the inputs to safety management, that there needs to be a causal relationship between the inputs and outputs and that it can compensate for limitation of reactive measures.

In part (c) most candidates were able to recognise to some extent the application of the techniques to assess health and safety performance, although many candidates gained less than half the marks in this section due to not expanding sufficiently on 'how' the technique could be used.

Answers suggest that more study emphasis may be needed in relation to this learning outcome.

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**Question 11**

*A 13 year-old boy was riding on the back of a milk delivery van when he fell and was injured. The boy had been helping the milkman to deliver milk even though doing this was forbidden by the dairy that employs the milkman.*

- (a) **Explain** which of the parties concerned may have civil liability at common law for the injury. Use case law to support your answer where appropriate. (5)
- (b) *An action alleging negligence by the milkman is brought on behalf of the injured boy.*
- Outline** possible defences against such an action, relating each answer to the scenario given. (6)
- (c) *The negligence claim is to be managed in accordance with the relevant pre-action protocol.*
- Identify** possible documents that the defendant may have to send to the claimant under this protocol. (5)
- (d) *Following this accident the milkman was dismissed for gross misconduct for a serious breach of safety rules. The milkman considers this to be unfair and brings an action for unfair dismissal to an Employment Tribunal.*
- (i) **Outline** the orders that the Employment Tribunal may make if they find in the milkman's favour. (3)
- (ii) **Identify** the body that would hear any appeal from the decision of the Employment Tribunal. (1)
- 

This question assessed candidates' knowledge and understanding of learning outcomes 10.1: Explain the duties owed at common law (equivalent to 4.1: Explain the principles of common law, in the 2015 specification); 10.2: Explain the criteria required to establish a successful civil action for breach of statutory duty, the main defences available and the procedure for assessment of damages under civil law (equivalent to 4.2: Explain the criteria to establish a successful civil action for breach of statutory duty and negligence, the main defences available and the procedure for assessment of damages under civil law, in the 2015 specification); and 8.7: Explain the principles of employment and discrimination law as it affects health and safety issues (equivalent to 2.5: Outline the structure and functions of courts and related institutions in the UK, in the 2015 specification).

This was a popular question and some very good marks were achieved.

In part (a) the parties given were usually correct with clear identification of the milkman liability and the organisation being vicariously liable. Case law was used to reasonable effect, although many answers did not state the legal principle or used irrelevant case law. Few answers considered the position that breaking the rules does not remove vicarious liability.

In part (b) the defences outlined were generally good but often candidates did not relate the civil law defences to the context of the scenario. Other candidates often provided a subjective range of possibilities concerning the milkman.

In part (c) candidates provided a range of documents of which some were relevant. Some relevancy was noted in better answers but many candidates gave a list of safety documents such as maintenance manuals and audit reports. Others generalised their response with comments such as 'risk assessment' instead of pre- and post-accident risk assessment, or focused too much on insurance and driving documentation.

In part (d) (i) better answers recognised the options of reinstatement, reengagement and compensation. Compensation was usually identified. However, several candidates confused re-instatement and re-engagement as well as the purpose of compensation. In (d) (ii) some candidates recognised the Employment Appeal Tribunal. However, there was confusion with common answers stating the crown or civil court to this effect.

## Examination technique

The following issues are consistently identified as the main areas in need of improvement for candidates undertaking Diploma level qualifications:

### Candidates misread/misinterpreted the question

NEBOSH questions are systematically and carefully prepared and are subject to a number of checks and balances prior to being authorised for use in question papers. These checks include ensuring that questions set for the Diploma level qualifications relate directly to the learning outcomes contained within the associated syllabus guides. The learning outcomes require candidates to be sufficiently prepared to provide the relevant depth of answer across a broad range of topic areas. For example, a candidate could be asked about the causes of stress, or could be asked about the effects of stress, a question could require a response relating to the principles of fire initiation, or a question could require a response relating to the spread of fire. Therefore, a candidate should focus not only on the general topic area (eg stress, fire), but also the specific aspect of that topic to which the question relates.

Examiners suggest that while many candidates do begin their answer satisfactorily and perhaps gain one or two marks, they then lose sight of the question and include irrelevant information. Although further points included in an answer can relate to the general topic area, these points are not focused on the specific learning outcome and marks cannot be awarded. However, some candidates appear to misread or misinterpret several questions. This situation is more likely due to candidates preparing for the examination with a number of stock answers obtained through rote-learning, that again can provide answers that are loosely associated with the topic matter but do not provide answers specific to the question. Such an approach is clearly evident to an Examiner and demonstrates little understanding of the topic matter and marks are not awarded.

Examiners noted a tendency on the part of many candidates to write about things that were not asked for, despite the fact that guidance as to what to cover had been given in the question. An example is a question where candidates were instructed that there was no need to make reference to specific control measures and yet did so. In another example candidates wrote about selection of PPE when the question wording had clearly stated that this had already been undertaken. Another example was where candidates wrote about barriers to rehabilitation without relating them to the bio-psychosocial model, even though the question specifically asked them to do this.

Some candidates wrote large amounts of text on a single topic where only one mark could be awarded. Candidates did not recognise that the amount of marks awarded to each section gives an indication of the depth of the answer required.

It would therefore appear that a sizeable number of candidates misread some of the questions, to their disadvantage. This should be a relatively easy pitfall to overcome; candidates should ensure that they make full use of the 10 minutes reading time to understand what each question requires. Candidates are advised to allow sufficient time to read and re-read the question in order to determine the key requirements. Underlining or highlighting key words can assist in keeping focused and simple mind maps or answer plans can also be useful. An answer plan will often be helpful in ensuring that all aspects of the question are attended to; maps and plans should be kept simple so as not to use up too much examination time; if all aspects are not dealt with it will be difficult to gain a high mark. Candidates should not assume when they see a question that it is exactly the same as one that they may have seen in the past; new questions are introduced and old questions are amended. It is therefore of the utmost importance that questions are read carefully and the instructions that they give are followed.

It may help if, when preparing for the examinations, candidates write out their answers in full and ask a tutor or other knowledgeable third party to mark their work. In so doing, issues with understanding can be noted and remedial action taken.

Course providers and candidates should note that various means are used to draw attention to keywords in examination questions. These means include emboldened and italicised text and the use of words in capitals. These means are intended to draw the candidate's attention to these words and this emphasis should then be acted upon when making a response. These devices can often assist in giving guidance on how to set out an answer to maximise the marks gained. For example: **Identify THREE** things to be considered **AND** for **EACH**.....

Candidates often have a reasonable body of knowledge and understanding on the topic covered by a question, but they have not been able to apply this to the examination question being asked. This could be because sufficient time has not been taken to read the question, noting the words being emphasised.

When preparing candidates for examination, or offering advice on examination technique, accredited course providers should stress that understanding the question requirements and the sub-structure of the response to the question is the fundamental step to providing a correct answer. Rather than learning the 'ideal answer' to certain questions effort would be better spent in guided analysis on what a question requires. The rote learning of answers appears to close the candidates' minds to the wider (and usually correct) possibilities.

### **Candidates repeated the same point but in different ways**

There are instances where candidates repeat very similar points in their answers, sometimes a number of times. This is easily done in the stressful environment of the examination. However, once a point has been successfully made and a mark awarded for it, that mark cannot be awarded again for similar points made later in the answer. In some cases, particularly where questions had more than one part, candidates gave an answer to, say, part (b) of a question in part (a), meaning that they needed to repeat themselves in part (b) thus wasting time.

One possible reason for this might be that candidates have relatively superficial knowledge of the topic - a view supported by the low marks evident in some answers. It appears that, faced with a certain number of marks to achieve and knowing that more needs to be written, but without detailed knowledge, candidates appear to opt to rephrase that which they have already written in the hope that it may gain further marks. Another possible reason is a failure to properly plan answers, especially to the Section B questions - it would appear that candidates sometimes become 'lost' in their answers, forgetting what has already been written. It may be due either to a lack of knowledge (so having no more to say) or to limited answer planning, or to a combination of the two. When a valid point has been made it will be credited, but repetition of that point will receive no further marks. Candidates may have left the examination room feeling that they had written plenty when in fact they had repeated themselves on multiple occasions, therefore gaining fewer marks than they assumed.

Candidates sometimes think they have written a lengthy answer to a question and are therefore deserving of a good proportion of the marks. Unfortunately, quantity is not necessarily an indicator of quality and sometimes candidates make the same point several times in different ways. Examiners are not able to award this same mark in the mark scheme a second time. The chance of repetition increases when all marks for a question (eg 10 or 20) are available in one block. It can also happen when a significant proportion of the marks are allocated to one part of a question.

This issue is most frequently demonstrated by candidates who did not impose a structure on their answers. Starting each new point on a new line would assist in preventing candidates from repeating a basic concept previously covered, as well as helping them assess whether they have covered enough information for the available marks.

As with the previous area for improvement ('misreading the question') writing an answer plan where points can be ticked off when made, or structuring an answer so that each point made is clearly shown, for example by underlining key points, can be of great use. This technique aids candidates and makes it much clearer in the stress of the examination for candidates to see which points have been made and reduce the chances of the same point being made several times. Course providers are encouraged to set written work and to provide feedback on written answers, looking to see that candidates are able to come up with a broad range of relevant and accurate points; they should point out to candidates where the same point is being made more than once.

Candidates are advised to read widely. This means reading beyond course notes in order to gain a fuller understanding of the topic being studied. In that way, candidates will know more and be able to produce a broader and more detailed answer in the examination. Candidates may also find it helpful to read through their answers as they write them in order to avoid repetition of points.

Course providers should provide examination technique pointers and practice as an integral part of the course exercises. Technique as much as knowledge uptake should be developed, particularly as many candidates may not have taken formal examinations for some years.

### **Candidates produced an incoherent answer**

Candidates produced answers that lacked structure, digressed from the question asked and were often incoherent as a result. In many cases, there seemed to be a scatter gun approach to assembling an answer, which made that answer difficult to follow. Answers that lack structure and logic are inevitably more difficult to follow than those that are well structured and follow a logical approach. Those candidates who prepare well for the unit examination and who therefore have a good and detailed knowledge commensurate with that expected at Diploma level, invariably supply structured, coherent answers that gain good marks; those candidates who are less well prepared tend not to do so.

Having good written communication skills and the ability to articulate ideas and concepts clearly and concisely are important aspects of the health and safety practitioner's wider competence. Candidates should be given as much opportunity as possible to practice their writing skills and are advised to practice writing out answers in full during the revision phase. This will enable them to develop their knowledge and to demonstrate it to better effect during the examination. It may help if candidates ask a person with no health and safety knowledge to review their answers and to see whether the reviewer can understand the points being made.

### **Candidates did not respond effectively to the command word**

A key indicator in an examination question will be the command word, which is always given in **bold** typeface. The command word will indicate the depth of answer that is expected by the candidate.

Generally, there has been an improvement in response to command words, but a number of candidates continue to produce answers that are little more than a list even when the command word requires a more detailed level of response, such as 'outline' or 'explain'. This is specifically addressed in the following section dealing with command words, most commonly failure to provide sufficient content to constitute an 'outline' was noted. Failure to respond to the relevant command word in context was also a frequent problem hence information inappropriate to the question was often given.

Course exercises should guide candidates to assessing the relevant points in any given scenario such that they are able to apply the relevant syllabus elements within the command word remit.

### **Candidate's handwriting was illegible**

It is unusual to have to comment on this aspect of candidate answers, as experienced Examiners rarely have difficulties when reading examination scripts. However, Examiners have independently identified and commented on this as an area of concern. While it is understood that candidates feel under pressure in an examination and are unlikely to produce examination scripts in a handwriting style that is representative of their usual written standards; it is still necessary for candidates to produce a script that gives them the best chance of gaining marks. This means that the Examiners must be able to read all the written content.

Some simple things may help to overcome handwriting issues. Using answer planning and thinking time, writing double-line spaced, writing in larger text size than usual, using a suitable type of pen, perhaps trying out some different types of pens, prior to the examination. In addition, it is important to practise hand writing answers in the allocated time, as part of the examination preparation and revision. Today, few of us hand-write for extended periods of time on a regular basis, as electronic communication and keyboard skills are so widely used. Accredited course providers should encourage and give opportunities for candidates to practise this hand-writing skill throughout their course of study. They should identify at an early stage if inherent problems exist. These can sometimes be accommodated through reasonable adjustments, eg by the provision of a scribe or the use of a keyboard. Candidates with poorly legible handwriting need to understand this constraint early in their course of studies in order for them to minimise the effect this may have.

NEBOSH recommends to accredited course providers that candidates undertaking this qualification should reach a minimum standard of English equivalent to an International English Language Testing System score of 7.0 or higher in IELTS tests in order to be accepted onto a Diploma level programme.



For further information please see the latest version of the IELTS Handbook or consult the IELTS website: [http://www.ielts.org/institutions/test\\_format\\_and\\_results.aspx](http://www.ielts.org/institutions/test_format_and_results.aspx)

Candidates wishing to assess their own language expertise may consult the IELTS website for information on taking the test: <http://www.ielts.org/institutions/faqs.aspx>

Course providers are reminded that they must ensure that these standards are satisfied or additional tuition provided to ensure accessible and inclusive lifelong learning.

### **Candidates did not answer all the questions**

It has been noted that a number of candidates do not attempt all of the questions on the examination and of course where a candidate does not provide an answer to a question, no marks can be awarded. Missing out whole questions immediately reduces the number of possible marks that can be gained and so immediately reduces the candidate's opportunity for success. There can be several reasons for this issue: running out of the allocated time for the examination, a lack of sufficient knowledge necessary to address parts of some questions, or in other cases, some candidates have a total lack of awareness that the topic covered in certain questions is even in the syllabus.

If candidates have not fully studied the breadth of the syllabus they may find they are not then equipped to address some of the questions that are on a question paper. At that late stage there is little a candidate can do to address this point. Responsibility for delivering and studying the full breadth of the syllabus rests with both the course provider and the individual candidates and both must play their part to ensure candidates arrive at the examination with a range of knowledge across all areas of the syllabus.

### **Lack of technical knowledge required at Diploma level**

In Section A, candidates must attempt all questions and it was clear that some struggled with those requiring more detailed and technical knowledge. For example, it is not acceptable that at Diploma level, candidates have no knowledge of the principles of good practice that underpin COSHH. Unfortunately this was often found to be the case in responses to questions.

In Section B, where candidates have a choice of questions, many sought to avoid those questions with a higher technical knowledge content. For example questions on radiation, lighting and vibration. Practitioners operating at Diploma level need to be confident with the technical content of the whole syllabus and this does require a significant amount of private study, particularly in these areas of the syllabus that are perhaps less familiar to them in their own workplace situations.

### **Candidates provided rote-learned responses that did not fit the question**

It was apparent in those questions that were similar to those previously set, that the candidates' thought processes were constrained by attachment to memorised answer schemes that addressed different question demands.

While knowledge of material forms a part of the study for a Diploma-level qualification, a key aspect being assessed is a candidate's **understanding** of the topic and reciting a pre-prepared and memorised answer will not show a candidate's understanding. In fact, if a candidate gives a memorised answer to a question that may look similar, but actually is asking for a different aspect of a topic in the syllabus, it shows a lack of understanding of the topic and will inevitably result in low marks being awarded for that answer.

## Command words

Please note that the examples used here are for the purpose of explanation only.

The following command words are listed in the order identified as being the most challenging for candidates:

### Explain

*Explain: To provide an understanding. To make an idea or relationship clear.*

This command word requires a demonstration of an understanding of the subject matter covered by the question. Superficial answers are frequently given, whereas this command word demands greater detail. For example, candidates are occasionally able to outline a legal breach but do not always explain why it had been breached. A number of instances of candidates simply providing a list of information suggests that while candidates probably have the correct understanding, they cannot properly express it. Whether this is a reflection of the candidate's language abilities, in clearly constructing a written explanation, or if it is an outcome of a limited understanding or recollection of their teaching, is unclear. It may be linked to a general societal decline in the ability to express clearly explained concepts in the written word, but this remains a skill that health and safety professionals are frequently required to demonstrate.

When responding to an 'explain' command word it is helpful to present the response as a logical sequence of steps. Candidates must also be guided by the number of marks available. When asked to '**explain** the purposes of a thorough examination and test of a local exhaust ventilation system' for 5 marks, this should indicate a degree of detail is required and there may be several parts to the explanation.

Candidates are often unable to explain their answers in sufficient detail or appear to become confused about what they want to say as they write their answer. For example, in one question many candidates explained the difference between the types of sign, explaining colours and shapes of signs without explaining how they could be used in the depot, as required by the question.

### Describe

*Describe: To give a detailed written account of the distinctive features of a topic. The account should be factual without any attempt to explain.*

The command word 'describe' clearly requires a description of something. The NEBOSH guidance on command words says that 'describe' requires a detailed written account of the distinctive features of a topic such that another person would be able to visualise what was being described. Candidates have a tendency to confuse 'describe' with 'outline'. This means that less detailed answers are given that inevitably lead to lower marks. This may indicate a significant lack of detailed knowledge and/or a lack of ability to articulate the course concepts clearly. Candidates should aim to achieve a level of understanding that enables them to describe key concepts.

Some candidates see the command word 'describe' as an opportunity to fill out an answer with irrelevant detail. If a person was asked to describe the chair they were sitting on, they would have little difficulty in doing so and would not give general unconnected information about chairs in general, fill a page with everything they know about chairs or explain why they were sitting on the chair. Candidates should consider the general use of the command word when providing examination answers.

### Outline

*Outline: To indicate the principal features or different parts of.*

This is probably the most common command word but most candidates treat it like 'identify' and provide little more than a bullet pointed list. As the NEBOSH guidance on command words makes clear, 'outline' is not the same as 'identify' so candidates will be expected to give more detail in their answers. 'Outline' requires a candidate to indicate '*the principal features or different parts of*' the subject of the question.

An outline is more than a simple list, but does not require an exhaustive description. Instead, the outline requires a brief summary of the major aspects of whatever is stated in the question. 'Outline' questions

usually require a range of features or points to be included and often 'outline' responses can lack sufficient breadth, so candidates should also be guided by the number of marks available. Those candidates who gain better marks in questions featuring this command word give brief summaries to indicate the principal features or different parts of whatever was being questioned. If a question asks for an outline of the precautions when maintaining an item of work equipment, reference to isolation, safe access and personal protective equipment would not be sufficient on their own to gain the marks available. A suitable outline would include the meaning of isolation, how to achieve safe access and the types of protective clothing required.

## Identify

*Identify: To give a reference to an item, which could be its name or title.*

Candidates responding to identify questions usually provide a sufficient answer. Examiners will use the command word 'identify' when they require a brief response and in most cases, one or two words will be sufficient and further detail will not be required to gain the marks. If a question asks '**identify** typical symptoms of visual fatigue', then a response of 'eye irritation' is sufficient to gain 1 mark. If having been asked to identify something and further detail is needed, then a second command word may be used in the question.

However, in contrast to 'outline' answers being too brief, many candidates feel obliged to expand 'identify' answers into too much detail, with the possible perception that more words equals more marks. This is not the case and course providers should use the NEBOSH guidance on command words within their examination preparation sessions in order to prepare candidates for the command words that may arise.

## Give

*Give: To provide short, factual answers.*

'Give' is usually in a question together with a further requirement, such as '**give** the meaning of' or '**give** an example in **EACH** case'. Candidates tend to answer such questions satisfactorily, especially where a question might ask to 'identify' something and then 'give' an example. The candidate who can answer the first part, invariably has little difficulty in giving the example.

## Comment

*Comment: To give opinions (with justification) on an issue or statement by considering the issues relevant to it.*

For example, if candidates have already calculated two levels of the exposure to wood dust and are then asked to comment on this the issues would include the levels of exposure they had found, and candidates would need to give their opinion on these, while considering what is relevant. The question guides on what may be relevant for example, did it meet the legal requirements, did it suggest controls were adequate, so based on that guidance, did exposure need to be reduced further or did anything else need to be measured or considered? If candidates comment with justification on each of these areas they would gain good marks in that part of question.

Few candidates are able to respond appropriately to this command word. At Diploma level, candidates should be able to give a clear, reasoned opinion based on fact.

For additional guidance, please see NEBOSH's '*Guidance on command words used in learning outcomes and question papers*' document, which is available on our website: [www.nebosh.org.uk/students/default.asp?cref=1345&ct=2](http://www.nebosh.org.uk/students/default.asp?cref=1345&ct=2).



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