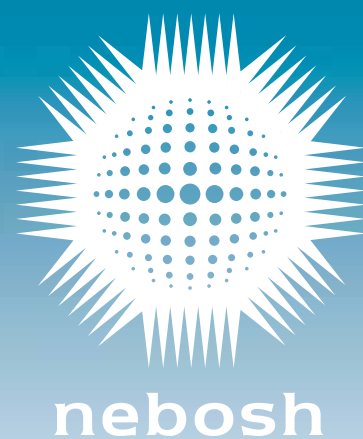


January 2015

# 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 2015**

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# 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 110 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) regulatory requirements.

This report provides guidance for candidates which it is hoped will be useful to candidates and tutors 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 2015.

Feedback is presented in these key areas; examination technique, command words and learning outcomes 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

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#### Candidate performance

This report covers the examination sitting in January 2015.

#### Learning outcomes

##### Question 1

#### 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

Candidates were assessed on their knowledge of the advantages and disadvantages of two well-known safety management system models, namely those set out in HSG65 and BS OHSAS 18001. Candidates needed to demonstrate a clear understanding of the two systems and apply that knowledge in order to be able to advise effectively.

Although candidates did seem to have some knowledge of these two systems, there was a tendency to drift into an inappropriate discussion of the merits and limitations of having an integrated management system (IMS), with some even going so far as to suggest that OHSAS 18001 was an IMS.

One of the most common pitfalls was a failure to elaborate on statements that 'cost' would be a factor. Simply referring to 'cost', without more, was not considered sufficient for marks to be awarded. Candidates should specify what types of cost might be incurred.

Course providers could usefully impress on candidates the difference between a safety management system model, such as HSG65 or OHSAS 18001, and an integrated management system.

##### Question 2

#### 3.4 Explain the requirements for reviewing health and safety performance

Candidates need to be able to demonstrate an understanding of the range and format of information to be placed before senior managers, in order to help senior managers monitor overall health and safety performance. It is necessary to appreciate the practical issues associated with assembling relevant representative information while not overburdening the manager with an excess of detail.

Some candidates failed to heed the clear signpost that a 'set of summary information' was required and opted instead to suggest that senior managers should be given *all* safety-related information, thus demonstrating a lack of understanding of the practicalities.

Although there were many fairly good answers, some candidates placed undue emphasis on reactive indicators, while others moved away from health and safety information to discuss other types of information that were irrelevant. Course providers should focus on the nature and extent of health and safety information that would normally be considered appropriate for submission to an executive meeting.

### **Question 3**

#### **8.2 Explain the concept of absolute and qualified duties in relation to health and safety legislation**

Candidates need to have an understanding of key legal terms and be able to interpret legislative requirements accurately. It is important that prospective practitioners understand these terms so as to ensure that the advice they give results in an appropriate level of action.

There were some good answers in the January 2015 examination, but some candidates did not appreciate the implications of duties qualified by the terms 'practicable' and 'reasonably practicable', with some suggesting that "a practicable duty is an absolute duty" or like comments, thus clearly demonstrating a lack of understanding.

Candidates occasionally confused the terms, although a more frequent problem was a failure to state correct case law. Few candidates were able to give examples of legal duties qualified by these terms.

Course providers should ensure that candidates have a good understanding of such terms and that they are able to cite relevant case law and give appropriate examples.

### **Question 4**

#### **10.1 Explain the duties owed at common law**

Candidates were assessed on their knowledge of the leading case on duty of care (Caparo Industries Plc v Dickman) as well as the basic principles of the tort of negligence and its defences.

Most candidates were able to give the meaning of 'negligence'. However, few were able to identify the three criteria from 'Caparo'. A relatively large percentage of candidates appeared not to have heard of the three defences to claims of negligence given in part (c) of the question – 'no breach of duty', 'breach did not lead to the damage' and 'contributory negligence'.

A common pitfall was to confuse the proximity of the relationship between the parties with proximity to harm; course providers should clarify the position to their candidates. Candidates confused the defence of 'no breach of duty' with the entirely different defence of 'no duty owed'.

Candidates can improve their answers by giving outlines that do not simply repeat the question and also by citing correct case law, in each case clearly linking the legal point made in the case to the principle being assessed.

### **Question 5**

#### **5.1 Outline common risk management strategies**

Candidates were assessed on their knowledge of the key features of four commonly used health and safety management options. Candidates were expected to demonstrate a general knowledge of the meaning of each term and to give examples to demonstrate practical understanding of their application.

The principles of 'reduction' and 'transfer' seemed to be better understood than 'avoidance' and 'retention'. Some candidates confused 'avoidance' with 'substitution' or 'transfer'.

The four terms identified in the question each have specific meanings. Candidates should prepare by learning what each term means and should be ready to give examples of each.

## **Question 6**

### **6.5 Outline the development of a health and safety management information system, the relevant legal requirements, and the data it should contain**

Change management is a key skill for almost all safety practitioners. Candidates therefore need to be able to demonstrate a sound underpinning knowledge of the principles of change management, which it is expected that they will use on a frequent basis.

Generally speaking, answers were fairly good, with a significant proportion of candidates clearly having had personal experience of change management.

Examiners noted that some candidates had a tendency to state what amounted to the same point in a number of different ways. While such candidates may have left the examination room feeling that a full answer had been given, any particular point can only be credited with a mark on one occasion. Higher marks may therefore be achieved by considering a wider range of different actions and avoiding the temptation to repeat points.

## **Question 7**

### **6.3 Identify the various categories of third parties in a workplace – the relevant legislative requirements, responsibilities and controls**

#### **3.3 Describe the variety of monitoring and measurement techniques**

Candidates need to understand the principles of accident incidence rates and their strengths and weaknesses when used to assess safety performance. Candidates were also assessed on their general knowledge of other criteria to be considered when selecting contractors.

There were many reasonably good answers to this question although some candidates appeared to resort to stating the same point in a number of ways. Another weakness was that, while candidates seemed generally able to say what 'AIR' was, fewer could confidently outline strengths and weaknesses.

Contractor selection appears to be reasonably well understood, so course providers might usefully concentrate their efforts on improving candidate understanding of the merits and limitations of accident incidence rates, explaining alternatives to assessing performance that address the shortcomings with AIRs.

## **Question 8**

### **7.1 Outline psychological and sociological factors which may give rise to specific patterns of safe and unsafe behaviour in the working environment**

Candidates are required to show a detailed knowledge of the various levels of human behaviour. Knowledge is also required of practical examples and/or actual incidents where each type of behaviour gave rise to human error. Candidates are also required to show knowledge of a range of techniques that might be employed to prevent human error.

Many answers were limited. A high proportion of candidates confused 'rule-based' and 'skill-based' behaviour and few candidates were able to give a satisfactory description of 'knowledge-based' behaviour. Many candidates opted to write about violations, despite no mention of violations being made in the question.

This was a popular question, but the poor marks obtained indicate that the topic is generally not well understood (the large percentage of candidates who attempted this question suggests that there is a perception that it is well understood, but this proved not to be the case).

In order to improve, candidates must read and understand the content of HSG(48) 'Reducing error and influencing behaviour', that is a key resource for element A7.

## Question 9

### 4.4 Explain the principles and techniques of failure tracing methodologies with the use of calculations

Candidates are required to show basic knowledge of root and immediate causes of accidents, together with knowledge of the ways in which fault tree analysis and event tree analysis might be used respectively in incident investigation and in planning for minimisation of the consequences of undesired events. Knowledge of the relationship between fault tree analysis and event tree analysis is therefore important.

Very few candidates were able to show a full grasp of the application of fault tree and event tree analysis to a scenario, which may indicate a gap in knowledge. Reasonable answers were given although some candidates gave control measures instead of immediate and possible root causes of the incident.

The major shortcoming with answers was the poor level of understanding of how fault trees and event trees are used in practice. While past examinations have shown that candidates have some facility with the mechanics of fault tree and event tree construction (such questions often result in high marks for candidates who know how to construct a tree), this question revealed that understanding of their application appears to be lacking.

Course providers should not just focus on how to construct fault and event trees but should also ensure that candidates are aware of how they might be used in practical ways to assist in incident investigation and to consider measures that might be taken to minimise the likelihood of undesired downstream consequences.

## Question 10

### 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

Candidates should be clear about the requirements of the 1974 Act and the 1999 Regulations and be able to give '*possible* breaches' to scenarios.

Many candidates opted to take a scatter-gun approach to this question and often gained low marks as a result. A common pitfall was the failure to logically consider the breaches in relation to the various parties identified in the scenario and this resulted in inaccurate and disjointed answers. Examiners also noted that candidates had a tendency to refer to Regulations within the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations as 'sections', that shows a fundamental misunderstanding. Some candidates clearly felt that companies can be prosecuted under s37 HSWA, while others discussed unrelated legislation despite the clear direction to consider only the 1974 Act and the 1999 Regulations.

Course providers must try to impress upon candidates the fundamental nature of these two important pieces of legislation. Candidates could usefully adopt a logical approach wherein for each 'actor' in turn they run through the HSWA from s2(1) onwards and the MHSW Regs from Regulation 3 onwards, identifying potentially relevant sections/regulations as they go. In this way, good marks are much more likely to be achieved.

## Question 11

### 2.2 Explain the quantitative analysis of accident/incident and ill-health data, limitations of their application, and their presentation in numerical and graphical form

### 4.1 Describe how to use internal and external sources of information in the identification of hazards and the assessment of risk

The final question on this question paper required candidates to show an ability to use various accident rates to make comparisons of data and reach meaningful conclusions.



Most candidates gained their marks for successfully performing the calculations although interpretation of the data in later parts of the question was less well handled. Of the three 'rates' questioned in part (a), 'accident severity rate' was the least well understood.

Candidates appear most able to perform the calculations, but the evidence from these answers tends to suggest that they may not fully understand the data that is gained from such an exercise. Course providers may therefore wish to assist candidates by explaining the relevance and application of such calculations.

## **Examination technique**

The following examination techniques were identified as the main areas of improvement for candidates:

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

It is difficult to know exactly why this happens but one possible reason 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.

Candidates should prepare well for the Diploma examinations by reading around the topic as well as by reading their course providers' notes. This should increase both breadth and depth of knowledge, thereby providing a broader knowledge base on which to draw when answering questions. As a general rule, the number of relevant, accurate and correct points made by a candidate should equal the number of marks available for a question or part thereof.

### **Candidates misread/misinterpreted the question**

It was evident that some candidates occasionally misread the questions, leading to inappropriate answers being given; the fact that other candidates are able to gain good marks on examination questions tends to rule out a problem with the questions *per se*.

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.

### **Candidates failed to separate their answers into the subsections of the question**

Many of the questions are presented in parts (a), (b), (c), etc. Candidates should present their answers in the same format as the questions. Where this is not done, Examiners are unable to discern which part of the answer relates to which part of the question, the result being that opportunities to gain marks are wasted.

## **Command words**

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

### **Describe**

Responses to 'describe' questions are frequently limited, indicating 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 in simple terms.

### **Explain**

This command word requires the deepest level of knowledge. Poor performance on questions having this command word therefore indicates a lack of detailed knowledge. NEBOSH's guidance on command words, featuring sample answers, is available from the website so the expected standard is presumed to be well known. Candidates therefore need to increase their knowledge base so as to be able to give clear explanations.

### **Outline**

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 a little more detail in their answers.

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).

## **Conclusion**

The feedback from Examiners highlighted that candidates taking the Unit A examinations in January 2015 needed to improve significantly across the entire syllabus, with a particular need to strengthen knowledge of legal concepts, management systems, the application of failure tracing methodologies and the review of performance (learning outcomes 1.3, 3.4, 4.4, 8.2, 9.1 and 10.1).

With regard to examination technique, candidates sitting this examination should ensure that they make full use of the 10 minutes of reading time before the examination and that they produce plans for the Section B questions. Candidates should also read and re-read the questions as they write their answers so as to ensure that they remain on track and do not repeat points.



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