

July 2016

Examiners' Report

NEBOSH National
Diploma in
Occupational Health
and Safety - Unit A



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NEBOSH NATIONAL DIPLOMA IN OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY

UNIT A: MANAGING HEALTH AND SAFETY

JULY 2016



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Introduction

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) 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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Any enquiries about this report publication should be addressed to:

NEBOSH
Dominus Way
Meridian Business Park
Leicester
LE19 1QW

tel: 0116 263 4700
fax: 0116 282 4000
email: info@nebosh.org.uk

General comments

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 July 2016.

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 *The senior managers at a workplace participate in formal annual reviews of health and safety performance as part of the health and safety management system.*

Outline types of information that should form the inputs to this review process.

(10)

This question assessed candidates' knowledge of learning outcome 3.4: Explain the requirements for reviewing health and safety performance.

Candidates performed relatively well on this question with many giving a suitable outline of types of information that can form part of a review process. Candidates who set out their answer using 'Reactive performance measures' and 'Active performance measures' as headings generally fared better than those who did not.

Many responses concentrated too much on reactive measures (notably accident statistics), thereby limiting opportunities to detail other relevant matters and gain further marks.

Discussion on the merits of techniques such as auditing, or of the management system as whole, was not required.

A number of candidates provided simple lists without providing suitable quantification or detail as indicated by the command word. Such answers did not gain many marks.

Question 2 (a) **Outline** how task analysis may be used to help with hazard identification as part of a risk assessment process.

(2)

(b) **Explain** why the number of people exposed to a hazard could affect **BOTH** the probability and severity components of risk **AND**, in **EACH** case, **give** a practical example.

(4)

(c) *Employers may consult external UK publications when deciding whether the level of risk associated with a specific hazard has been reduced to an acceptable level.*

Identify types of external UK publications that an employer may choose to consult **AND**, in **EACH** case, **outline** how that publication may assist in deciding on acceptable levels of risk.

(4)

This question assessed candidates' knowledge of learning outcomes 4.1: Describe how to use internal and external sources of information in the identification of hazards and the assessment of risk; 4.2: Outline a range of hazard identification techniques; and 4.3: Explain how to assess and evaluate risk and to implement a risk assessment programme.

Part (a) was generally answered fairly well, with most candidates making the point that task analysis involves breaking a task down into steps, although many candidates missed that task analysis can be used to identify potential for human error.

Answers to part (b) were limited. There seems to be a lack of appreciation of how the number of people exposed to a hazard might affect the probability and the severity components of risk (some candidates stated that there was no effect on severity), which may in turn indicate a weakness in the teaching of risk assessment.

Answers to part (c) were of a mixed standard, with some candidates referencing international publications despite the clear wording of the question that directed candidates to identify 'UK publications'. It would suggest that many candidates consider publications from organisations such as the ILO and WHO to be 'UK publications'. General discussions about statistics were given in some cases but could not gain marks, as such answers did not answer the question.

A number of candidates were unable to say how the publications they identified might help in deciding on acceptable levels of risk. This may indicate a lack of appreciation of how the publications identified might be used in practice.

Question 3 *A poor organisational safety culture is said to lead to higher levels of violation by employees.*

- (a) **Give the meaning of the term 'violation' AND outline the classification of violation as 'routine', 'situational' or 'exceptional'.** (6)
- (b) **Outline why a poor organisational safety culture might lead to higher levels of violation by employees.** (4)
-

This question assessed candidates' knowledge of learning outcome 7.3: Explain the classification of human failure.

Part (a) was answered well with candidates often giving good definitions and examples. Good answers were able to get across the idea that violations are deliberate deviations from rules or procedures. Most candidates provided reasonable detail on the three classifications of violation, although there were those who confused violations with errors. Some answers were very limited, especially with regard to the 'exceptional' violation.

Answers to part (b) were not as well answered and often did not show why it was that a poor organisational safety culture might lead to high levels of violation. While some candidates were able to point to issues surrounding safety leadership, few were able to progress much further.

Candidates may be assisted by reading HSG 48 'Reducing error and influencing behaviour'.

Question 4 *A vehicle driven by an employee of a delivery company was in a collision with another vehicle driven by a member of the public. The member of the public was injured but the driver of the delivery vehicle was unharmed.*

- (a) **Explain why the delivery company may have civil liability at common law for the injury.** (2)
- (b) **Outline the legal action available to the injured party in a claim for compensation and the tests that would have to be satisfied for the action to succeed. Use case law to support your answer.** (8)
-

This question assessed candidates' knowledge of learning outcome 10.1: Explain the duties owed at common law.

In answer to part (a) most candidates were able to explain that the delivery company may be vicariously liable for the negligence of their driver. However, few candidates pointed out that the negligent act needed to be performed during the course of employment. A few candidates referred to criminal law, with a few references to the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 and the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999, which caused those candidates to become quite confused.

In answer to part (b), many candidates were aware of the basic tests for negligence, although not all were able to continue with sufficient depth on each point to gain all the marks for this 'outline' question. Some candidates appeared to be confused between the tort of negligence and the now largely defunct tort of 'Breach of statutory duty', the latter being irrelevant. A few candidates went off track and discussed vehicle testing. The most relevant case for the question was *Caparo v Dickman* but this was seldom referenced, which may indicate a lack of appreciation of the importance of this leading case.

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- Question 5** (a) ***Explain the difference between accident incidence rate and accident frequency rate.*** **(2)**
- (b) *A site is divided into a small number of large departments and the number of employees in each department is variable. The health and safety manager has been asked to collate data about first-aid treatment cases for the site. The data will need to be presented to site and departmental management on a monthly basis in graphical and/or numerical format.*
- Describe how the health and safety manager could present this data, indicating clearly the types of graphical presentation that could be used AND, in EACH case, the data it would contain.*** **(8)**
-

This question assessed candidates' knowledge of learning outcome 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.

For part (a), most candidates clearly indicated the difference between the two rates and so gained both marks available.

Part (b) was a practical application question, the answers to which tended to illustrate that candidates have a mixed appreciation of how to present data in practice. This may indicate that there is academic knowledge of accident rates and presentation types but, when it comes to applying this knowledge, many candidates become confused.

Good answers to part (b) considered a wide range of graphical presentations and stated clearly the data that such presentations might contain. Establishing that data could be presented for the whole site and then separately for departments provided many candidates with a good starting point to their answer. However, there were some answers that did little more than identify pie charts, line graphs and/or histograms without providing any further information on the data that they would show. Many candidates provided simple sketches, which in many cases gave clarity to limited written answers.

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- Question 6** ***Outline the essential features of permit-to-work systems.*** **(10)**
- Detail of the content of permit forms is **not** required.*
-

This question assessed candidates' knowledge of learning outcome 5.3: Explain the development, main features and operation of safe systems of work and permit-to-work systems.

Answers to this question showed that many candidates may be unaware of the features of permit-to-work systems, since many candidates chose to only identify those items that make up a permit-to-work form, despite the clear instruction **not** to do so.

Some candidates gave an extended discussion of confined space entry procedures (which is more appropriate as an answer to a Unit C examination question) and did not address the question asked.

Those candidates who did deal with a permit-to-work system were often unable to go much further than outlining the basic process of issue, receipt, clearance and hand back. Very few candidates made detailed reference to the essential features of permit-to-work systems such as the need to co-ordinate, to display copies of the permit, to ensure personnel are competent and to keep records, etc.

Question 7 (a) **Outline** the principles of fault tree analysis. (3)

(b) **Outline** a limitation of fault tree analysis. (1)

(c) A chemical reaction vessel is partially filled with a mixture of highly flammable liquids. It is possible that the vessel headspace may contain a concentration of vapour, which in the presence of sufficient oxygen, is capable of being ignited.

A powder is then automatically fed into the vessel. Adding the powder may sometimes cause an electrostatic spark to occur with enough energy to ignite flammable vapour. Therefore it is possible that an ignition may take place during addition of the powder.

In order to reduce the risk of ignition, an inert gas blanket system is used within the vessel headspace in order to keep oxygen levels below those required to support combustion. In addition, an oxygen sensor system is used to monitor vessel oxygen levels. Either system may fail. If the inert gas blanketing and oxygen sensor systems fail simultaneously, oxygen levels could be high enough to support combustion. Probability and frequency data for these systems are given below.

Failure type/event	Probability
Vessel headspace contains concentration of vapour capable of being ignited	0.5
Addition of powder produces spark with enough energy to ignite vapour	0.5
Inert gas blanketing system fails	0.1 per year
Oxygen sensor system fails	0.1

Demonstrate the probability of failure using a simple fault tree **AND**, using the data above, **calculate** the frequency of an ignition. Show calculations to support your answers.

(16)

This question assessed candidates' knowledge of learning outcome 4.4: Explain the principles and techniques of failure tracing methodologies with the use of calculations.

Those candidates who tackled this question often gained very good marks. A good level of understanding of how to construct a fault tree was evident. However, some candidates produced an event tree, in which case no marks could be awarded.

The principles of fault tree analysis were usually outlined reasonably well and so good marks were gained for part (a). Similarly, most candidates were able to identify a single limitation of a fault tree and were therefore able to pick up the mark for part (b).

The majority of answers to part (c) showed well-developed, accurate fault trees. For this question, those candidates who understood how fault trees work and how to do the calculations often gained very good marks, this frequently making the difference between a pass and a referral in the examination as a whole.

Question 8 *In relation to European Union (EU) law:*

- (a) ***distinguish*** between EU Directives and EU Regulations; (4)
 - (b) ***outline*** the 'Co-decision' (or 'Ordinary') procedure for making EU legal instruments concerning health and safety matters; (10)
 - (c) ***outline*** the key functions of the European Court of Justice. (6)
-

This question assessed candidates' knowledge of learning outcome 8.1: Explain the sources and types of law in force in the UK relevant to health and safety.

Most candidates were able to distinguish between Directives and Regulations, although there were those candidates who confused EU Regulations with UK Regulations.

Answers to part (b) were generally limited, with few candidates showing evidence of having studied this aspect of the syllabus.

Answers to part (c) showed a variable level of knowledge of the key functions of the European Court of Justice. Only a few candidates made reference to hearing direct actions or giving preliminary rulings in response to requests from national courts.

Question 9 ***Outline*** the benefits of:

- (a) *an integrated health and safety, environmental, and quality management system;* (10)
 - (b) *separate health and safety, environmental, and quality management systems.* (10)
-

This question assessed candidates' knowledge 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.

This question reflects a long-standing debate in the health and safety profession about the advisability and benefits of integrating health, safety, environmental and quality management systems. While there were some good answers that showed a clear understanding of the issues, there were many answers that did not. Some candidates stated that OHSAS 18001 is an integrated management system, thereby showing a fundamental lack of understanding of this topic. Other candidates stated that if management systems were accredited they would automatically be integrated, which shows a lack of understanding of these terms.

Although there were some good answers, the majority gave relatively few points in answer to each part. This had the effect of keeping marks to the minimum. Some answers were rather vague, eg “business benefits” and did not elaborate as to what these benefits might really be. In some cases, candidates resorted to providing lists rather than outlining as required by the question and marks could not be awarded in such instances.

Based on the evidence provided by answers to this question, it would seem that candidates are generally unable to properly advise their employers on the benefits of integration or of keeping separate management systems.

Question 10 *The case of R v Swan Hunter Shipbuilders Ltd and Another [1982] arose from a serious fire during a ship repair at Swan Hunter's shipyard. Swan Hunter was convicted in the Court of Appeal.*

(a) **Identify** the specific provisions of the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 under which Swan Hunter Shipbuilders Ltd (Swan Hunter) was prosecuted **AND**, in **EACH** case, **outline** the reasons why the company was convicted. (6)

(b) The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 (MHSWR) were not in force at the time of this case. Had MHSWR been in force, **identify** the requirements of MHSWR under which Swan Hunter could have been prosecuted specifically in connection with the fire incident **AND outline** reasons in **EACH** case. (8)

*You are **not** required to elaborate on the requirements in MHSWR relating to competent health and safety assistance and emergency procedures.*

(c) In criminal proceedings, **outline** the legal status of:

(i) an ACOP; (3)

(ii) guidance. (3)

This question assessed candidates' knowledge of learning outcome 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.

The case of R v Swan Hunter has been on the syllabus for a long time, but only a few candidates attempted this question.

Answers to part (a) generally identified the correct provisions of the 1974 Act, although the reasons why the company was convicted under those sections were less well outlined.

Part (b) was answered reasonably well with many candidates indicating the relevance of risk assessment, principles of prevention, health and safety arrangements, cooperation and coordination and the provision of information to visiting workers. However, some candidates just identified a number of Regulations that were irrelevant in this case.

Candidates could not explain the status of Approved Codes of Practice and of Guidance. Given that these documents are central to the everyday work of the safety practitioner, the level of misunderstanding of their legal status needs to be addressed by course providers and candidates.

Question 11

A fast-growing manufacturing organisation employs 150 people. Health and safety standards at the organisation are poor as arrangements have developed in an unplanned way without professional advice. The organisation has managed to avoid any serious accidents and staff at all levels do not seem particularly concerned. However, two employees have recently experienced near miss incidents and have complained jointly to the Health and Safety Executive (HSE).

A subsequent visit by a HSE inspector in connection with the near miss incidents has resulted in the issue of three improvement notices.

The Managing Director wishes to dismiss the two employees whom he has described as troublemakers.

- (a) **Explain** what advice a health and safety adviser should give to the Managing Director about the proposed disciplinary action against the employees who have complained. (5)
- (b) **Outline** steps that could be taken to gain the support of the workforce in improving the health and safety culture in the organisation. (15)
-

This question assessed candidates' knowledge of learning outcomes 8.7: Explain the principles of employment and discrimination law as it affects health and safety issues; 6.6: Explain health and safety culture and climate; and 6.7: Outline the factors which can both positively and negatively affect health and safety culture.

This practical question was relatively popular and saw some good responses, especially to part (a). However, there were those answers that were limited in scope and that dealt with the issue very narrowly, such as by stating only that civil action could be taken. Only a few candidates mentioned the relevance of the Public Interest Disclosure Act.

Part (b) was also fairly well answered, with many candidates showing a further appreciation of how to gain support of the workforce. Answers that made reference to such things as the need to recognise the need to change perceptions, to analyse current perceptions, to produce a new safety policy statement, to show leadership by example and to allocate responsibilities to encourage 'ownership' of safety issues, tended to gain good marks. Limited answers often gave a list rather than an outline, thereby not providing sufficient information or detail to be awarded marks. Some answers were too vague to gain marks, eg "provide health and safety training" and comments about improving the use of PPE.

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

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.



nebosh

The National Examination
Board in Occupational
Safety and Health

Dominus Way
Meridian Business Park
Leicester LE19 1QW

telephone +44 (0)116 2634700

fax +44 (0)116 2824000

email info@nebosh.org.uk

www.nebosh.org.uk