

July 2014

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 2014

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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.

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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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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 2014.

Feedback is presented in these key areas; examination technique, command words and learning outcomes and is designed to assist candidates and course providers to 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

Candidate performance

This report covers the examination sitting in July 2014 which produced an overall pass rate of 42%.

Examination technique

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

Misread or misinterpreted the question

Although many candidates appeared to be able to structure their answers in accordance with the question, there was evidence that many candidates failed to read the question correctly, which led to low marks as some candidates gave an answer that veered away from the question.

In order to reduce the potential for misunderstanding, candidates are also advised to make the best use of the 10 minutes reading time provided before the start of the examination in order to note what is being asked by each question. Candidates should always answer the question that is set and should not write about issues that do not form the focus of the question.

Repeated the same point but in different ways

Whilst there was evidence from a good number of candidates of careful attention to planning (for example through the use of mind maps and bulleted lists used as answer plans), a good proportion of candidates apparently failed to plan with sufficient care, leading to repetition of points. 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. In other cases, the repetition of points appeared to be due to a lack of a broad knowledge and understanding of the topic being questioned. Candidates who repeated the same point in different ways may have left the examination room feeling that they had given an extensive answer. However, marks can only be awarded once for any particular point.

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.

Produced an incoherent answer

There was encouraging evidence that some candidates employed effective techniques to organise their answers, which led to more coherent answers. However, in too many cases a combination of poor handwriting, poor planning and poor depth of knowledge often led to incoherent answers, which had a tendency to drift away from the question that was set. A lack of structure in some answers made them difficult to follow, which inevitably led to low marks.

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 are advised to practice writing out answers in full during the revision phase. 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.

Command words

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

Explain

This command word requires the greatest amount of detail in response. In essence, it requires the candidate to say why something might happen or is as it is. It follows that answers to this type of question require the greatest degree of knowledge.

There appeared to be a reluctance to answer questions with this command word, suggesting that candidates may not understand what is expected. There were also a number of instances of candidates simply providing a list of information.

The attention of both candidates and accredited course providers is drawn to NEBOSH's recently published '*Guidance on command words*' document, which is available on our website and should assist: www.nebosh.org.uk/students/default.asp?cref=1345&ct=2.

Outline

It was noted that there was a tendency to answer nearly all the questions by giving an outline, which in some cases was inappropriate, especially where an explanation or description was required. This may be a further symptom of a lack of detailed knowledge of the subject.

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.

Describe

As with 'Explain', some candidates chose simply to provide lists rather than the fuller description that was expected. Guidance on command words indicates that a 'describe' question requires "a detailed written account of the distinctive features of a subject". Unfortunately, this was not always provided.

Learning outcomes

Question 1 assessed learning outcome:

6.1 Explain the internal and external influences on health and safety in an organisation

Candidates need to be able to demonstrate a good grasp of the strengths and weaknesses of the role of union-appointed safety representatives. Answers that focus on Representatives of Employee Safety or described general rights and/or functions (which are covered in Learning outcome 6.4), fail to gain good marks.

Some candidates gave answers that appeared to be taken from personal experience of dealing with union-appointed safety representatives, which tended to skew answers positively or negatively depending on the nature of the relationship. One or two candidates made inappropriate and / or pejorative observations on why particular representatives may have been ineffective; such views are unacceptable in a professional examination.

Few candidates made reference to such things as involvement with procedural development, or were able to describe how representatives are able to bring influence to bear on management.

Question 2 assessed learning outcome:

5.3 Explain the development, main features and operation of safe systems of work and permit-to-work systems

This practical question focused on the means by which a permit-to-work system can be effectively introduced and then maintained in order to ensure that it continues to provide a degree of control over dangerous work processes. Those candidates who recognised the two elements in this question and broke their answer down into 'introduction' and 'maintenance' aspects tended to achieve better marks.

Some candidates opted to give extended descriptions of disasters such as Piper Alpha, which were not required by the question, or were necessary. Weaker answers were not specific enough, for example giving generic reference to "training of all involved" without indicating the need to train separate roles and what such training might entail. Some candidates focused unduly on the operation of the maintenance and engineering work rather than the permit-to-work system. There was some evidence of candidates confusing permit-to-work with safe systems of work.

Better answers are likely to be forthcoming if candidates learn about and discuss the issues surrounding the practicalities of introduction and maintenance of such a system and go beyond simply recounting the content of a permit-to-work form.

Question 3 assessed learning outcome:

1.4 Outline the role and responsibilities of the health and safety practitioner

This area of the syllabus deals with the role of the health and safety practitioner, attainment and development of competence as well as with ethical issues, all of which are of central importance to those who aspire to give health and safety advice professionally.

The question regarding health and safety practitioner competence proved relatively straightforward to most candidates. The *development* element of the question drew clear responses in terms of gaining a professional qualification or participating in CPD etc, as did the *evaluation* element in terms of such things as annual appraisal and seeking feedback from others. However, a percentage of candidates went little further than mentioning CPD and the need to update training. A weakness under 'evaluation' was that few candidates recognised the importance of the practitioner being able to measure trends, changes and developments that they had a hand in within their organisation and in so doing drawing conclusions about their own effectiveness. Some candidates only dealt with development of competence and failed to recognise that the question also required commentary on evaluation of competence.

Candidates should ensure that they follow all the instructions given in the question and that they cover everything that is asked.

Question 4 assessed learning outcome:

10.3 Outline the main civil law statutory duties owed by the occupiers of premises to lawful and unlawful visitors

This question focused on the duties owed to trespassers and therefore assessed knowledge of the Occupiers' Liability Act 1984/the Occupiers' Liability (Scotland) Act 1960. Candidates were expected to have an appreciation of the nature of the duties owed by occupiers and what the relevant Act of Parliament says.

A number of candidates referred to the Health and Safety at Work Act or to the tort of negligence in answer to this question, neither of which were relevant. In cases where the Occupiers Liability Act was mentioned, several candidates referred to the 1957 Act, which was not relevant, instead of the 1984 Act, which was (candidates from Scotland needed only to refer to the Occupiers' Liability (Scotland) Act 1960).

A further weakness was that some candidates simply stated the general common law provisions instead of the statutory requirements, possibly indicating a lack of knowledge of the latter.

The lack of appreciation of the duties and key provisions contained within the Act indicates a gap in knowledge that accredited course providers may wish to address.

Question 5 assessed learning outcomes:

1.1 Explain the moral, legal and economic reasons for the effective management of health and safety

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

The question required candidates to apply general knowledge of the costs of accidents to a brief scenario where there had been a high degree of loss.

Learning outcome 1.1 was applied well, with most candidates achieving good marks for the first part of the question.

It was apparent that few candidates were familiar with the Financial Reporting Council's (FRC's) guidelines, knowledge of which is a requirement of learning outcome 1.3. There were a number of cases of apparent confusion between the FRC guidelines and the HSE/LoD guidance as published in INDG 417.

Accredited course providers may wish to impress upon candidates the fact that the FRC guidelines cover all areas of risk management, including health and safety, and that knowledge of the guidelines provides health and safety practitioners with an opportunity to explain the need for health and safety management by using concepts with which most Boards should be familiar.

Question 6 assessed learning outcome:

8.4 Describe the status and procedure for the creation of UK Acts, Regulations and Orders

The final question in this section of the question paper focused on the procedures for making Regulations under the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 (HSWA). Candidates therefore needed to appreciate that the process for making a Regulation differs from making an Act of Parliament. Those who did appreciate this difference invariably gained good marks.

Some answers included reference to the Parliamentary process for making an Act of Parliament (green and white papers, various readings, etc). However many candidates had a reasonable understanding of the process for making Regulations and therefore made appropriate reference to HSWA s15, consultation, laying before Parliament, etc.

The second part of the question, around cost benefit analysis (CBA), was less well answered, except around it being a comparison between the costs and benefits of potential new legislation, which was suggested in the question. Some candidates missed the point and talked about CBA being conducted by individual businesses as part of making changes in the way that they worked.

Question 7 assessed 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

This question provided candidates with an opportunity to display an ability to advise their employer on potential breaches of HSWA by applying their knowledge to a realistic scenario.

Given the central importance of the HSWA to the syllabus and to the work of the health and safety practitioner, many candidates appeared unable to cite the correct subsections despite this being clearly signposted in the question.

Part (b) was not well answered, showing a lack of understanding of the provisions of Regulation 21 of The Management of Health and Safety regulations and of relevant case law such as R v British Steel, R v HTM and R v Nelson Group. Many candidates confused criminal and civil law duties, with some even suggesting that cases such as Rose v Plenty might be relevant.

Accredited course providers should be aware that knowledge of sub-sections for HSWA s2 is expected at Diploma level and that candidates are expected to state that there may have been a breach of, say, s2(2)(a) instead of making vague reference to 'Section 2'.

Question 8 assessed learning outcome:

3.2 Explain the need for, and the objectives and limitations of, health and safety monitoring systems

Health and safety practitioners are expected to be able to collate and evaluate accident and incident data and therefore need to be aware of accident and incident ratio studies.

This question was not a popular choice and resulted in few good answers. Although candidates appeared familiar with the principles of the accident triangle, most were unable to say clearly what it demonstrates or how the data is derived. Part (b) was the better answer of the two parts, although several answers failed to try and analyse the data and simply provided commentary on accident prevention.

Learning outcome 3.2 requires candidates to 'explain'. Accredited course providers may therefore wish to cover the implications of accident triangle studies in more detail.

Question 9 assessed learning outcomes:

4.2 Outline a range of hazard identification techniques

4.3 Explain how to assess and evaluate risk and to implement a risk assessment programme

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

This was quite a popular question, with some candidates gaining high marks. One weakness was that candidates confused event trees with fault trees, which was either down to poor reading of the question or was due to a basic misunderstanding of the differences between the two. A lack of care in calculating the frequencies meant that marks were lower than they might otherwise have been in some cases.

Accredited course providers should note that few candidates appeared to be aware of the concept of tolerability of risk and how this impacts on risks to employees and the general public. Answers to part (c), on the topic of control measures, were generally disappointing with elimination or similar being the only real controls proposed by many. This may show a lack of real understanding of how the hierarchy of controls can be applied in practice.

Overall, it would appear that candidates are reasonably confident with the mechanics of drawing event trees but are less competent when it comes to the practical issues of interpreting their significance and offering suggestions as to how risks may be further reduced.

Question 10 assessed learning outcomes:

- 2.1 Explain theories of loss causation**
- 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**
- 2.4 Explain loss investigations; the requirements, benefits, the procedures, the documentation, and the involvement of and communication with relevant staff and representatives**

This was a popular question with a good level of understanding shown for each part. Some answers to part (b) tended to focus on the steps involved in carrying out a witness interview and failed to gain marks for other evidence collection techniques such as examining documentation and gathering physical evidence at the scene. Some candidates made unnecessary reference to initial responses of reporting and securing the scene despite the question saying that this had already been carried out.

Answers to part (c) could have been better had candidates dealt separately with 'developing' and 'implementing' a near miss reporting rather than focusing almost exclusively on the content of the form itself.

Question 11 assessed learning outcomes:

- 7.2 Explain the nature of the perception of risk and its relationship to performance in the Workplace**
- 7.6 Explain how job factors could contribute to improving human reliability**

This was another popular question. The question focused on perception and the ways in which the incident described in the question might be prevented in the future.

Generally speaking candidates gained good marks with this practical question, although some gave lengthy descriptions of the Ladbroke Grove incident rather than focusing on what the question was asking. In part (a) candidates made some good observations when giving practical reasons why the driver may not have perceived the signal correctly. However, most of those candidates who mentioned the Hale and Hale model seemed unable to enlarge upon its principles.

Part (b) was generally well attempted although it was seldom the case that enough points were made to attain the full marks available. Candidates could usefully have arranged this part of their answer under headings of 'the person', 'the task (or equipment)' and 'the organisation', which would have helped stimulate the thought process, thus giving rise to a greater number of steps to prevent recurrence.

A few candidates failed to give an outline answer, instead resorting to providing lists. This may have been due to time limitations or it could have been due to a lack of detailed knowledge of the topic.

Conclusion

The pass rate was similar to other recent examinations, which may indicate issues with examination preparation rather than difficulties with new questions.

The feedback from Examiners highlighted that candidates taking the Unit A examination in July 2014 needed most improvement in the areas of reading the questions and structuring their answers in a clear and coherent manner. It would also appear that depth of knowledge is an issue. Therefore, candidates are advised to read widely around the subject and to prepare diligently for the examination. The syllabus contains numerous references to publications and it is expected that all of these will have been read. Although base levels of knowledge and understanding will vary from candidate to candidate, it is recommended that all candidates should revise for at least 6 and up to 10 weeks before sitting the Unit A examination to help ensure that the required level of understanding is attained.

With regards to examination technique, candidates sitting this examination should use plans for their answers to Section B questions. Planning longer answers will help to avoid repetition of points and will help candidates to identify further points that can be raised in their answers and which may well result in better marks.



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