
Examiners' Report

NEBOSH NATIONAL DIPLOMA IN OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY

UNIT A: MANAGING HEALTH AND SAFETY

JULY 2017



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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) Accreditation regulatory requirements.

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

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General comments

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 2017. This report covers both the 2010 and 2015 specifications.

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

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

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

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

Unit A

Managing health and safety

Question 1 Accidents and incidents disrupt an organisation's normal operations, adding to the organisation's operating costs.

- (a) **Outline** potential sources of financial loss arising from accidents and incidents. (5)
- (b) **Outline** benefits to the organisation of effective health and safety management. (5)

This question assessed candidates' knowledge and understanding of learning outcome 1.1: Explain the moral, legal and economic reasons for the effective management of health and safety.

The majority of candidates gained good marks on this question.

In part (a) most candidates were able to outline a wide range of potential sources of financial loss resulting from accidents and incidents. Several candidates achieved full marks for this part.

For part (b) answers were again well constructed with a good balanced range of benefits to the organisation. However, some answers lacked description and relied too much, for example on stating reputation costs, without further breakdown into investors, suppliers or partners, etc. Some answers outlined the improvements in relation to gaining better accreditations or awards for example, but then did not link this benefit into a financial or productivity enhancement for the organisation.

Some candidates deviated from the point and started outlining how effective health and safety management would lead to benefits for the organisation, rather than outlining the benefits themselves.

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- Question 2**
- (a) **Identify** the legislation that creates civil liability for the occupiers of premises. (1)
- (b) **Outline** the nature of the duties and the key provisions of the legislation. (9)
- Use a relevant case to support your answer.*

This question assessed candidates' knowledge and understanding of learning outcome 4.3: Outline the main civil law statutory duties owed by the occupiers of premises to lawful and unlawful visitors.

Overall, responses to this question did not gain high marks.

Limited answers did not correctly identify the legislation, confusing the Occupiers' Liability Act with the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 (HSWA) and sometimes the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999.

Candidates seemed not to read the question in terms of 'civil liability' and followed the 'criminal liability' route of Section 4 of HSWA. For those candidates who correctly identified the legislation very few managed to outline the nature of the duties and key provisions.

Candidates who identified the legislation incorrectly in part (a) went on to provide incorrect duties and provisions, such as features of the workplace (eg safe access/egress, etc). The use of case law was sporadic. Only the most able candidates were able to identify a relevant case such as British Railways Board v Herrington and outline its relevance.

The Occupiers' Liability Act is an area of the syllabus that candidates need to understand so further study in this area is advisable.

Question 3 Train drivers may spend long periods of time in the cab of a train and may be susceptible to loss of alertness. This can increase the risk of human error.

Outline a range of actions that could reduce loss of alertness in train drivers. (10)

This question assessed candidates' knowledge and understanding of learning outcomes 10.5: Explain how organisational factors can contribute to improving human reliability; and 10.6: Explain how job factors can contribute to improving human reliability.

This question was reasonably well answered and some good answers were provided. Actions that could reduce the loss of alertness in train drivers allowed a range of wider ideas and practical solutions to which many candidates were able to formulate.

However, some candidates offered irrelevant or unworkable 'solutions' such as double manning "to have someone to chat to", having the driver stand up for the entire journey, job rotating with other members of the train crew and to allow the driver to leave his cab for a break and a coffee. Generic content showed a lack of application in many cases.

Limited answers often detoured from the question, for example giving a recital of human error conditions such as lapses and slips, etc that could reduce alertness, without giving practical improvements that are required or giving a list of reasons why train drivers can become fatigued, etc without outlining any actions to improve the situation.

It is important that candidates stay focused on the question and ensure they answer the specific question asked.

Question 4	(a)	Describe the procedures for making regulations under the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974.	(6)
	(b)	(i) Outline the <i>purpose</i> of cost benefit analysis as it applies to proposed regulations.	(1)
		(ii) Outline the <i>principles</i> of cost benefit analysis as it applies to proposed regulations.	(3)

This question assessed candidates' knowledge and understanding of learning outcome 2.4: Outline the status and procedure for the creation of UK Acts, Regulations and Orders.

Overall this question did not gain high marks, with candidates demonstrating confusion over the process for making regulations under HSWA and a lack of understanding of cost benefit analysis, as applied to the making of Regulations.

In part (a) candidates who had a reasonable understanding of this process recognised the role of the secretary of state, the need for consultation and the requirements for proposals to go before both Houses of Parliament 40-day period and so were able to gain reasonable marks. However, some candidates went down the route of making Acts of Parliament rather than Regulations and described green and white papers, the EU or other incorrect matters.

Part (b) was not well answered with most candidates being unable to succinctly state the purpose of CBA. Those candidates who attempted part (b) (ii) were unable to give more information than that CBA compares costs with benefits. There was also confusion with 'so far as is reasonably practicable'.

Those candidates who broke the procedure down into its separate stages gave better answers, which resulted in higher marks being awarded.

Question 5 **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 and understanding of learning outcome 8.3: Explain the development, main features and operation of safe systems of work and permit-to-work systems.

Overall, candidates had difficulty with this question.

Many candidates did not note that the question was looking for essential features of the 'system' and not the content of the permit form, which many candidates then went on to outline. A clear prompt was provided in italics and candidates must ensure that they read and re-read the question carefully.

Candidates also often relied on generic non-specific descriptions of the permit form such as supervisor or manager, rather than considering the issuing authority and, as a consequence, the system outlined often did not give a wider array of features.

Good answers looked at the system holistically considering matters from communication, training, supervision, competency, record and review. Where candidates had experience in developing or using a permit system, they were able to draw on this. However, candidates should be careful when using their own experiences as points raised may be outside the scope of the question.

Question 6 (a) **Give** the meaning of the term '*motivation*'. **(2)**

(b) **Outline** Maslow's model of the hierarchy of human needs **AND**
give a suitable example within **EACH** stage of the model. **(8)**

This question assessed candidates' knowledge and understanding of learning outcome 10.1: Outline psychological and sociological factors which may give rise to specific patterns of safe and unsafe patterns of behaviour in the working environment.

In part (a), the answers given to describe motivation were variable. Better answers recognised that motivation meant drive or force to behave, although few were able to expand further on this to gain further marks. However, several candidates missed the key requirements of stating the drive or force to behave, giving subjective or hypothetical answers, including the need to earn more, or the incentive of motivation, and using the word 'motivation' within their definition.

In part (b) Maslow's triangle was outlined by most candidates, although the level of detail and accuracy was variable. Good answers included all five levels and used the correct descriptors, often accompanying the answer with a diagram. Limited answers usually missed out one or more stages, often not in any logical order. Many candidates relied only on an example rather than linking it to a clear stage and thus missed opportunities to gain marks. Examples provided were not always relevant, for example, under self-actualisation, candidates outlined the need to have a high-level job or earn the most money, which was incorrect.

Question 7

A forklift truck is used to move loaded pallets in a large distribution warehouse. On one particular occasion the truck skidded on a patch of oil. As a consequence, the truck collided with an unaccompanied visitor and crushed the visitor's leg.

- (a) **Outline** why the accident should be investigated. (4)
 - (b) The initial responses of reporting and securing the scene of the accident have been carried out.
Outline actions that should be taken in order to collect evidence for an investigation of the accident. (8)
 - (c) The investigation reveals that there have been previous skidding incidents that had not been reported and the organisation therefore decides to introduce a formal system for reporting near miss incidents.
Outline factors that should be considered when developing and implementing such a system. (8)
-

This question assessed candidates' knowledge and understanding of learning outcomes 5.1: Outline theories/models and use of loss causation techniques; 5.2: Explain the use of quantitative methods in analysing loss data; 5.3: Explain the significance and use of statutory and internal reporting of loss events; and 5.4: Explain the reasons for loss and near miss investigations and the procedures to be followed.

A popular and overall well answered question.

For part (a) candidates were required to outline why an accident should be investigated. Most answers were very well approached outlining a wide range of reasonable and accurate responses and overall the majority of candidates gained most or all marks available. Those candidates who gained few marks often approached the answer from a legal viewpoint only or did not consider management and morale-based requirements.

In part (b), the range of answers was very good, often outlining a broad and chronological approach to the investigation requirements.

However, too many candidates detoured from the question, for example giving a detailed account of what should be said or done during a witness interview. Candidates also need to structure their answers more logically and stick to the point. Some candidates did not read the question thoroughly and included the initial responses of reporting and securing the scene. Also, where candidates listed documents that would need to be looked at, they limited the breadth and depth of the response required for an 'outline' question.

In part (c), the responses were not as strong as for the other parts of the question. Good answers identified four or five separate issues such as management requirements, review and feedback, but most candidates relied too heavily on training of staff and carrying out the remedial action. The question allowed for a whole consideration of the system and as such the wider the answer the more mark opportunities available. Many candidates also omitted what the organisation defines as a near miss.

Question 8

The management of a chemical store with major on-site and off-site hazard potential is analysing the risks and controls associated with a particular storage facility and potential containment failure. Following containment failure ($f=0.5$ per year), an automatic failure detection mechanism should detect the release. Once detected, an alarm sounds followed by a suppressant being dispersed. Finally, in order to reduce the consequences of the event an operator is required to take manual control measures following the release of the suppressant. As part of the analysis, the organisation has decided to quantify the risks from the containment failure and develop a quantified event tree from the data.

Activity	Frequency / reliability
Process containment failure	0.5 per year
Failure detection	0.98
Alarm sounders	0.99
Release suppression	0.8
Manual control measures activated	0.7

- (a) Using the data provided, **construct** an event tree that shows the sequence of events following process containment failure. (6)
- (b) **Calculate** the frequency of an uncontrolled release resulting from process containment failure. (6)
- (c) **Outline** factors that should be considered when determining whether the frequency of the uncontrolled risk is tolerable or not. (5)
- (d) **Outline** a methodology for cost benefit analysis with regard to the process described. (3)
-

This question assessed candidates' knowledge and understanding of learning outcome 7.5: Explain the principles and techniques of failure tracing methodologies with the use of calculations.

This was the least popular long-answer question. Those candidates who attempted it provided some good answers.

In part (a) most candidates were able to gain good marks for the correct design and labelling of the event tree showing they had studied the mechanics of producing an event tree.

In part (b) calculations were generally good, but some candidates gave incorrect workings, normally multiplying instead of adding, or vice versa. Most candidates calculated correct answers for release, but some did not calculate the frequency of uncontrolled release correctly. Not all answers showed workings for each stage, which is a requirement.

Answers to part (c) were limited and candidates missed the opportunity to gain marks. Limited knowledge of the practical application of an event tree and the issues associated with determining whether risks are tolerable was displayed. Many responses looked at the cost implications from a monetary perspective only, omitting societal and legal/best practice issues. Also, the number of separate factors outlined was below the allocated marks available and candidates must heed the requirement of the command word for maximum marks.

In part (d) candidates had difficulty gaining marks. The cost benefit methodology provided missed many key parts, for example calculating payback periods. Candidates need to have a clear understanding on the technical features of a cost benefit analysis.

Question 9	(a)	Explain the objectives of:	
	(i)	<i>active</i> health and safety monitoring;	(5)
	(ii)	<i>reactive</i> health and safety monitoring.	(4)
	(b)	Outline a range of active health and safety monitoring methods.	(5)
	(c)	Outline examples of reactive performance data that could be used to benchmark health and safety performance.	(6)

This question assessed candidates' knowledge and understanding of learning outcomes 6.2: Explain the need for, and objectives and limitations of, health and safety monitoring; and 6.3: Describe the variety of health and safety monitoring and measurement techniques.

This was a popular question with variable answers.

In part (a), many candidates provided active and reactive monitoring methods rather than the objectives. There was a general lack of detail in relation to the 'explain' command word and also confusion between the two headings. The range of active and reactive was not always balanced and candidates often gave much greater emphasis on reactive measures for less mark availability.

In part (b) the range of active methods and level of detail was variable. Better answers provided a good range of methods supplemented with a suitably accurate outline. However, many candidates provided little more than slightly expanded bullet point answers with a lack of specific detail or incorrect detail. For example, saying that a safety sample was to take one machine and inspect it. Many active measures given were not specific enough.

In part (c) many candidates gave a range of reactive data without outlining how they could be used to benchmark. Too many candidates only considered accident-based data instead of giving a wider range of indicators. Often, the answer combined multiple methods into a sentence without necessary description and as such mark opportunities were lost. Candidates should be aware of the need to articulate and accurately outline each example to the necessary degree.

Question 10 Organisations are said to have **BOTH** formal and informal structures and groups.

- (a) **Outline** the difference between formal and informal in this context. (4)

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) publication 'Managing for health and safety' (HSG65) describes a model of safety management in which the 'Do' element requires 'Organising for health and safety'. This covers the four key areas of control, co-operation, communication and competence.

- (b) **Outline** what *co-operation* means in this context. (8)

- (c) **Outline** why a negative health and safety culture may result if organisational change is not managed. (8)
-

This question assessed candidates' knowledge and understanding of learning outcomes 9.4: Outline the different types of organisation, their structure, function and the concept of an organisation as a system; and 9.7: Explain health and safety culture and climate.

This question was not popular. For those candidates who did attempt it the responses were varied. Overall, many were unable to differentiate with much detail between formal and informal structures, or provide little more than very limited outlines for 'co-operation' or provide the breadth and depth required on the cultural implications of un-managed change.

In part (a) where candidates were able to outline the differences correctly, they sometimes lacked breadth to gain full marks available. For example, giving just one example under formal and one for informal. Candidates had difficulty with the detail of formal and informal structures/groups.

In part (b), although it was evident from the nature of the responses that candidates understood the gist of co-operation, few candidates gave outlines of what co-operation means. Often, a range of subjective workplace examples such as tool box talks to agreement on a safety issue were given. Better answers recognised the need for joint problem-solving, joint training or joint initiatives. Many answers were skewed towards the worker and did not include the management within the process.

In part (c) several candidates missed the opportunity to gain marks by outlining the consequences of a negative/declining safety culture such as decrease in productivity and higher staff turnover resulting from poor management of organisational change, and **not** why a negative health and safety culture may result.

Some answers gave a subjective range of examples of change but did not reflect on the wider meaning of change at an organisational level, or the challenges this can present for health and safety culture.

Candidates need to have good understanding of the contents of HSG65 and the elements within it.

Question 11	An employer engaged a contractor to design, build and install a passenger lift for use by employees and customers. Shortly after the lift was commissioned it failed in service injuring a number of customers who were using it at the time. Investigation revealed that the lift had not been designed to recognised standards and the contractor was not competent to design or install such equipment.	
(a)	Outline the general types of health and safety related information that the employer should have obtained from the contractor (prior to appointment) to ensure that the contractor was competent to safely design and install the lift.	(12)
(b)	As a result of the failure of the lift and the injuries caused, both the employer and the contractor were prosecuted. It was decided to prosecute the contractor under section 6 of the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974.	
(i)	Explain why this section of the Act is relevant to this scenario.	(2)
(ii)	Describe the requirements of the section that would be relevant to the design and installation of the lift.	(6)

This question assessed candidates' knowledge and understanding of learning outcomes 3.1: 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; and 9.5: Explain the requirements for managing third parties in the workplace.

A popular question with variable answers.

In part (a) many candidates provided good answers outlining a broad range of information to check and ensure competencies. Many candidates also included separate design issues to a high level and gained further marks. Limited answers gave a basic range of typical safe system of work documents and training issues. Some candidates missed the signposting to competency in the question, outlining general information for contractor selection.

In part (b) (i) most candidates were aware of Section 6 and recognised that this applies to manufacturers, suppliers, etc although several candidates did not explicitly say that the contractor is one of these.

In part (b) (ii) some candidates were able to show that they understood the requirements and relevance of Section 6 to the scenario given. However, several answers did not reflect sufficient knowledge of Section 6 and provided responses covering the requirements of Section 2.1. Answers referencing quality control and LOLER or PUWER requirements were also given, missing the requirements of the question.

Candidates need a good knowledge of the principles and application of Section 6 of the HSWA.

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 scattergun 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: <https://www.ielts.org/about-the-test/test-format>

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

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 subject. 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 subject 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.