
Examiners' Report

NEBOSH NATIONAL DIPLOMA IN OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY

UNIT C: WORKPLACE AND WORK EQUIPMENT

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 C 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 C 'Example question paper and Examiners' feedback on expected answers' which provides example questions and details Examiners' expectations and typical areas of underperformance.

Unit C

Workplace and work equipment

Question 1 **Outline** what a competent person would need to take into account when deciding the frequency of examination for items of lifting equipment. **(10)**

This question assessed candidates' knowledge and understanding of learning outcome 7.2: Outline the main hazards and control measures associated with lifting equipment.

The question was generally well answered with the majority of candidates focusing on legislative requirements and the condition and usage factors for the equipment. This might include the working environment, types of loads lifted, etc. Most candidates omitted to mention the age and date of manufacture of the equipment or its design criteria and manufacturing standards, and so limited their marks.

Some candidates misunderstood the question and limited their answers by discussing whether the equipment was lifting people or what the statutory testing intervals were.

Question 2 (a) **Outline** *structural features* that protect a building from the spread of fire. **(8)**

 (b) **Outline** the behaviour of *plastics* in the event of a fire. **(2)**

This question assessed candidates' knowledge and understanding of learning outcomes 2.2: Outline the behaviour of structural materials, buildings and building contents in a fire; and 2.3: Outline the main principles and practices of prevention and protection against fire and explosion.

For part (a) answers should have focused on the structural features of a building and marks were available for such items as compartmentation, prevention of fire spread by use of fire doors, fire stopping, etc. A lack of an outline of these points caused some marks to be limited with answers simply stating concrete or brick walls without further information. Some answers only covered such items as sprinklers, alarms, training, fire drills and fire extinguishers, which although valid for a general overview, did not address the specific requirement of *structural features*. This part of the question was on the whole well answered.

Part (b) was not generally well answered. Although some answers correctly mentioned that some plastics melted at low temperatures, they did not differentiate between thermoplastics and thermosetting plastics.

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- Question 3** Large diameter concrete water pipes are being installed in a trench 2.5 metres deep during excavation works. Temporary shoring is provided by the use of drag boxes.
- (a) **Outline** workplace control measures that are necessary when drag boxes are used to provide temporary shoring. (4)
- (b) *Other than* temporary shoring, **explain** workplace control measures that could help reduce the risk of collapse of the trench. (6)
-

This question assessed candidates' knowledge and understanding of learning outcomes 9.5: Explain the hazards associated with excavation work and the necessary precautions and safe working practices (in the 2010 syllabus); and in the 2015 syllabus 9.6: Explain the hazards and control measures associated with excavation work; and 5.1: Outline the criteria for the selection of suitable work equipment for particular tasks and processes to eliminate or reduce risks.

For part (a) good answers would have included control measures specific to the use of drag boxes in excavations. However, answers were limited and addressed other issues such as safe systems of work, risk assessments, method statements, etc. This suggested that the function and use of a drag box was not generally well understood by candidates. Correct answers included the method of construction of the drag box and periodic inspection, for example.

Answers were better for part (b) where most candidates were able to explain appropriate control measures such as avoidance of soil loading, proximity of plant movement which might cause localised loading of the soil, and increase the risk of collapse. More comprehensive answers also covered the effects of weather, inspection and the use of pumping systems to remove water.

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- Question 4** The control of risk when using work equipment relies on having trained and competent workers who are appropriately supervised.
- (a) **Explain** the differences between training and competence. (4)
- (b) A worker is being transferred to an unfamiliar machine.
- Outline** the training that might be required. (3)
- (c) **Explain** the relationship between competence and supervision. (3)
-

This question assessed candidates' knowledge and understanding of learning outcome 5.4: Explain the role of competence, training, information and supervision in the control of risks arising from the installation, operation, maintenance and use of work equipment.

Part (a) brought many good answers with the majority of candidates able to display an understanding of 'competence'. However, some candidates did not display an understanding of the meaning of 'training' and were unable to explain that training enhances knowledge.

Part (b) was not generally well answered. Many candidates answered generally about the need for training rather than the specific point about a new machine, which was required by the question. Although marks were available for mentioning familiarisation with the risk assessment for the new machine and new technology, there were few answers that managed to gain marks on these topics.

Part (c) was also not well answered. A number of candidates gave answers concerned with the competence of the supervisor which was not required. Few candidates explained that as competence increased less supervision was required.

Question 5 A lone worker is using a pallet truck to move pallets of frozen food products in a low temperature store. The temperature of the store is controlled at -5° Celsius.

Outline control measures to help the worker escape if they are accidentally locked into this low temperature store. (10)

This question assessed candidates' knowledge and understanding of learning outcome 1.5: Explain the hazards, risks and controls for lone working (this is the same in the 2010 syllabus but as 1.6)

A generally well answered question with most candidates able to offer a range of measures to help a trapped worker escape. These may include alternative escape routes, communication methods and alarms. Some candidates did not fully understand the question and referred to methods to keep warm and switching off the cooling system, which were not relevant to the main point of the question that was about methods of escape.

Question 6	(a)	Explain the purpose of emergency escape lighting.	(2)
	(b)	Outline the recommended testing regime for an emergency escape lighting installation.	(2)
	(c)	Outline locations where emergency escape lighting should be provided.	(6)

This question assessed candidates' knowledge and understanding of learning outcome 3.5: Outline the factors to be considered in providing and maintaining the means of escape.

This question aimed at assessing candidates' knowledge of emergency escape lighting requirements. Part (a) was generally well answered with candidates knowing that the lighting should activate automatically in the event of a power failure. However, some answers lacked sufficient details to obtain high marks for an 'explain' question.

Part (b) of the question about testing regimes was not well answered. Many answers were limited with incorrect testing intervals being quoted and insufficient detail as to how the test was to be carried out and what it was meant to determine. A correct answer would have been, annual tests to determine whether the standby power source (usually a battery) could provide sufficient illumination for a specified time period.

Part (c) was well answered with most candidates able to provide lighting locations such as changes in, directions, at exits, near call points, etc.

Question 7	Following a number of driving at work incidents, an organisation decides to implement driver assessment and training.	
(a)	Outline factors that may help determine which employees need training.	(8)
(b)	Outline contents of a typical driver training programme.	(12)

This question assessed candidates' knowledge and understanding of learning outcome 10.2: Outline the role and purpose of a work-related road risk policy and the key components of a work-related road traffic safety management system.

A fairly popular question with slightly more than half of the candidates choosing to attempt an answer. However, a number of answers focused on forklift truck training rather than general driving at work.

Although a popular question, part (a) was not generally well answered. Some answers incorrectly focused on age groups and vehicle types. Some candidates considered the training requirements for **all** drivers rather than the factors determining **which** employees needed training. Correct factors included miles driven, medical issues, following a complaint, and periodic driver assessment.

Part (b) was generally well answered with more comprehensive answers including company policies, procedures for incident reporting, first aid arrangements, journey planning, vehicle checks and carriage of emergency equipment such as telephones, torches, etc.

Question 8	A retail stockist is considering storing liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) cylinders on the premises.	
	Outline control measures that could help ensure safe storage of LPG cylinders.	(20)

This question assessed candidates' knowledge and understanding of learning outcome 4.3: Outline the main principles of the design and use of electrical systems and equipment in adverse or hazardous environments.

Just under half of candidates attempted this question in this sitting. A number of candidates answered as though they were bulk storing LPG and missed the opportunity to gain high marks.

Many candidates gained good marks on this question but there were also many who missed the opportunity to gain further marks by not mentioning the need for a DSEAR assessment and the control of ignition sources. Correct answers included the use of separation, security, barriers to prevent vehicle impact, signage, storage at or above ground level, clearance of vegetation and drivers switching off engines in the vicinity. Other topics such as bunding and spill kits did not gain marks.

Question 9	Workers in a furniture manufacturer use a bench-mounted circular saw to cut pieces of timber to length.	
(a)	Outline <i>mechanical</i> hazards when carrying out this activity.	(5)
(b)	Identify <i>non-mechanical</i> hazards and corresponding risks when carrying out this activity.	(5)
(c)	Outline control measures that should be considered to help reduce risks to workers.	(10)

This question assessed candidates' knowledge and understanding of learning outcome 6.2: Outline the principal generic mechanical and non-mechanical hazards of general workplace machinery; and 6.3: Outline the main types of protective devices found on general workplace machinery.

A very popular question that also gained high marks from the majority of candidates.

Part (a) asked for *mechanical* hazards associated with the use of a bench-mounted circular saw and was well answered by many candidates. However, there were a number of candidates who could not differentiate between *mechanical* and *non-mechanical* hazards and so did not gain all available marks. Topics that would have attracted marks included cutting hazards from the rotating blades and friction hazards from the rotating motor or spindle.

Those candidates who were able to separate *mechanical* and *non-mechanical* hazards also generally gained good marks on part (b) and could have identified noise and wood dust as non-mechanical hazards. However, candidates who did not link the hazard to its corresponding risk did not gain the full marks available.

For part (c) general control measures were requested and this was generally well answered by candidates. Having answered parts (a) and (b) some candidates could have gained more marks by referring to the hazards previously identified. Other controls included operator training, supervision, space and lighting around the machine, guarding of blades and danger zones, etc.

Question 10	(a) Outline what should be included in a <i>user check</i> for portable electrical equipment.	(10)
	(b) Outline what should be included in a <i>formal visual inspection</i> for portable electrical equipment.	(6)
	(c) Outline considerations when planning a portable appliance test.	(4)

This question assessed candidates' knowledge and understanding of learning outcome 8.5: Outline the main hazards, risks and controls associated with the use of portable electrical equipment.

This was a reasonably popular question but not always well answered. The main problem area appeared to be that the *user checks* asked for in part (a) were often confused with the *formal visual checks* asked for in part (b).

Part (a) was well answered by candidates who outlined the mainly clearly visible defects to be found such as damage to the cable or plug, visible primary wiring, cables pulled out of plugs, etc. Few candidates mentioned that some instruction might be necessary for these checks.

Part (b), asking for the *formal visual checks*, was not well answered with many candidates repeating their answers for part (a). Correct answers outlined that this type of check would require some disassembly of the plug and covers on the equipment to check the correct fuse was fitted, tightness of wiring fixings and afterwards a completion of a record of the check.

Part (c) was not generally well answered. Competency of the tester, and records of tests would have gained marks.

Question 11	A retail store has noticed a high level of slips and trips in its cafeteria and kitchen area.	
(a)	Outline what may have led to this high level of incidents.	(10)
(b)	Outline control measures to help reduce the number of slips and trips.	(10)

This question assessed candidates' knowledge and understanding of learning outcome 1.1: Explain the need for, and factors involved in, the provision and maintenance of a safe working environment.

A very popular question and one that was generally well answered. A general understanding of the issues of slips and trips and their control measures and also some knowledge of the scientific and technical reasons behind the conditions in the workplace was required.

In part (a) candidates correctly outlined that factors may include floor conditions (this may be due to initial design, wear or contamination), how the floor was maintained (polishes, repairs) and individual issues such as footwear, etc.

For part (b) the initial design of the floor and in particular its suitability for the environment such as the micro-roughness of the surface were rarely mentioned. Candidates concentrated on control measures linked to their answers in part (a) and outlined administrative and managerial controls such as cleaning, repairing and limiting carrying out these tasks when the store was open to emergency actions only. Cleaning spillages promptly was mentioned and was worthy of marks. This section was generally well answered.

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: <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.