
Examiners' Report

NEBOSH NATIONAL DIPLOMA IN OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY

UNIT A: MANAGING HEALTH AND SAFETY

JULY 2018



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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 2018.

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** An organisation has introduced management systems for environmental management and quality management. It is now considering implementing a health and safety management system.
- (a) **Outline** the role of the health and safety policy in relation to health and safety management. (4)
- (b) **Outline** the benefits of an *integrated* health and safety, environmental and quality management system. (6)
-

This question assessed candidates' knowledge and understanding of learning outcome 1.4: Explain the principles and content of an effective health and safety management system including the reasons for integration with other management systems.

In part (a) candidates gained marks for outlining the setting of objectives, demonstration of commitment and the creation of responsibilities. However, few answers sufficiently linked health and safety management with policy. Some answers described elements of a health and safety policy in detail rather than outlining its role as the question required.

In part (b) candidates gained marked for outlining benefits such as areas of cost savings and avoiding duplication. Overall, there was quite a limited view of benefits with little mention of spreading a positive culture, business harmonisation and resource utilisation. Many candidates mentioned the benefit of the integrated policy in relation to customers, tenders and customer perception of the organisation. However, in general, there was a very narrow view of benefits with several answers focused on certification.

Overall, candidates gained a few marks in each section of this question. For marks to be awarded candidates need to adhere to the command word – in this question 'outline', which requires more content than 'identify'.

- Question 2**
- (a) **Outline** the legal criteria that must be satisfied to obtain a conviction under the Corporate Manslaughter and Corporate Homicide Act 2007 (CMCHA). (6)
- (b) **Identify** the bodies responsible for investigating and prosecuting offences under the CMCHA. (2)
- (c) **Outline** the penalties that may be imposed following conviction under the CMCHA. (2)
-

This question assessed candidates' knowledge and understanding of learning outcome 3.3: Explain the responsibilities and powers of enforcing agencies and officers and the range of options related to enforcement action, their implications and appeal procedures.

In part (a) there was some confusion in outlining the legal criteria required and many candidates were unable to provide more than a couple of points. Candidates appeared not to start from the way the activities were managed or organised. With the legal criteria quite specific, there was no scope for a wider range of mark-worthy responses. Few candidates mentioned 'gross breach' or senior management level.

Limited answers considered that a 'controlling mind' needs to be identified. Other answers only quoted the three tests for a tort of negligence or breach of statutory duty and others quoted HSWA s37, none of which would obtain marks.

In part (b) too many candidates incorrectly stated that the HSE or local authorities investigate offences under the CMCHA. Many answers focused on the investigation and not the prosecution. Some candidates chose a rather widespread approach by naming multiple bodies perhaps in the hope it might include a correct answer.

In part (c) most candidates were able to gain marks for outlining unlimited fines. Far fewer candidates included publicity orders or remedial orders. Some answers mentioned imprisonment, director disqualification and limited fines, which did not gain marks.

Question 3

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

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

This question assessed candidates' knowledge and understanding of learning outcome 4.1: Explain the principles of common law.

In part (a) most candidates identified vicarious liability as a reason for the delivery organisation having civil liability for the injury and gained a mark. However, few answers elaborated on what vicarious liability is and only offered points such as the organisation is in control of the driver, or that the driver had to be negligent while acting in the course of their employment. This limited marks that could be awarded and few candidates were able to achieve a second mark. This might suggest a general lack of understanding as to the application of the principles of vicarious liability.

In part (b) most candidates could demonstrate the test for liability – duty owed, duty breached and breach led to injury. However, few candidates were able to outline other content worthy of marks such as identification of tort of negligence, or that there was not much point in suing the driver. Several answers noted that proximity is a factor and that the event should be reasonably foreseeable. Some case law was mentioned but not a great deal of detail was included.

Where candidates attempted to use case law examples, these were often in relation to negligence and not in relation to vicarious liability or the legal point was missed, so no marks were awarded.

Question 4

Health and safety performance objectives are being reviewed at an annual senior management meeting.

- Outline** what should be considered when setting health and safety performance objectives. (10)

This question assessed candidates' knowledge and understanding of learning outcome 6.4: Explain the need for and process of reviewing health and safety performance.

Many candidates focused on the sources of information and methods to inform objectives, rather than the wider process of development of a set of objectives which was what the question asked. Most answers did not include the basic responsibilities for setting and achieving the objectives, together with the combination of long and short-term objectives and the prioritisation of key objectives. Some candidates also included how to assess health and safety performance, outlining different reactive/proactive measures. A few answers went into detail of SMART objectives which did gain some marks, but on the whole this appeared to be more by default than design.

For those candidates who appreciated what the question was asking, reasonable marks were awarded. However, this was for a narrow level of response based on responsibilities, resources, consultation, and communication. Few candidates developed the breadth of answers at the strategic level required.

Question 5 A permit-to-work system has been introduced at a factory that operates continuously over three shifts.

An audit takes place a year later. The audit shows many permits-to-work have not been completed correctly or have not been signed back.

Outline possible reasons why the permit-to-work system is not being followed.

(10)

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 demonstrated a reasonable understanding of the key issues of this question gaining just under half marks.

Most candidates gained marks with answers relating to competence, training, lack of monitoring, complexity of the system and poor communication. Although there appeared to be a lack of understanding of the level of detail required about permit issuers and receivers. There was little recognition of identification and understanding of hazards and controls and the practicality of putting controls into place before work starts. Multiple permit issues were mostly overlooked.

Some answers detailed what was required for completion of a permit, rather than why the permit system is not being followed, therefore marks could not be awarded. A limiting factor was the lack of breadth to answers and in some cases a simplistic approach, with some candidates only giving a bullet-pointed list rather than the required outline.

Question 6 **Outline** organisational factors that may act as barriers to the improvement of the health and safety culture of an organisation.

(10)

This question assessed candidates' knowledge and understanding of learning outcomes 9.7: Explain health and safety culture and climate; and 9.8: Outline the factors which can both positively and negatively affect health and safety culture and climate.

Candidates demonstrated a reasonable understanding of the key issues of this question's learning outcomes.

Most candidates identified factors such as lack of commitment, poor communication and consultation. Better answers outlined a wider range of organisational factors such as industrial relations and the impact of change processes.

Candidates who did not achieve high marks focused predominantly on more physical attributes of the workplace, including plant, equipment, welfare or detailed operational matters, which did not attract marks. In some cases, candidates focused on accident rates as a reason for poor safety culture. The breadth of factors outlined was insufficient which limited the number of marks that could be awarded.

Question 7	(a)	Give the meaning of:	
	(i)	qualitative risk assessment;	(3)
	(ii)	quantitative risk assessment;	(2)
	(iii)	dynamic risk assessment.	(2)
	(b)	Identify sources of information that may be used to identify hazards during the risk assessment process.	(4)
	(c)	Outline potential difficulties of carrying out <i>qualitative</i> risk assessments.	(7)
	(d)	<i>Other than</i> significant risks, hazards and record of persons, outline what should be included in the significant findings section of a risk assessment.	(2)

This question assessed candidates' knowledge and understanding of learning outcome 7.3: Explain how to assess and evaluate risk and to implement a risk assessment programme.

Just under half the candidates attempted this question in Section B of the examination

In part (a) there was much confusion between qualitative and quantitative risk assessments with some candidates having difficulty in giving the meaning to these types of risk assessment. Dynamic risk assessment was something that most candidates were able to give meaning to. Although some candidates identified that dynamic risk assessment was used by the emergency services they missed the opportunity to identify that it was used in changing circumstances. Some candidates who correctly gave the meanings missed the opportunity to gain all the marks available by only giving one of the mark-worthy items.

In part (b) most candidates were able to gain a few marks by identifying relevant information sources, however some answers lacked breadth to gain good marks.

In part (c) many candidates found outlining the difficulties involved in carrying out a qualitative risk assessment problematic. Most answers focused on a failure to identify all hazards and the subjective nature of risk perception. Some enterprising candidates turned the question around and outlined the methodology for conducting a qualitative risk assessment and gained a few marks along the way.

In part (d) some candidates were able to identify the protective measures and further actions required to control risks but missed the opportunity to gain a further mark.

Question 8

An employee suffered a fractured skull when he fell 3 metres from storage racking as he was loading cartons on to a pallet held on the forks of a lift truck.

An investigation revealed that a written safe system of work had been provided to employees some months ago. It had become common practice for employees to be lifted up on the forks and climb up the outside of the racking. Employees stated that they could not understand the written safe system of work, but admitted that they had not brought this to their employer's attention.

- (a) **Outline** possible relevant breaches of the:
- (i) Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974; (7)
 - (ii) Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999. (3)
- Section numbers or regulation numbers are **not** required.*
- (b) The injured employee intends to bring a negligence claim (delict in Scotland) against his employer.
- Outline** what the employee will need to show in order for his claim to succeed. Use case law to support your answer. (6)
- (c) Shortly after the injured employee brings his negligence claim, he is dismissed for 'a serious breach of safety rules'. The injured employee considers this to be unfair and decides to bring further proceedings, this time for unfair dismissal.
- (i) **Identify** the body that would hear such a claim. (1)
 - (ii) **Outline** the orders that could be made if the injured employee wins his dismissal case. (3)
-

This question assessed candidates' knowledge and understanding of learning outcomes 2.5: Outline the structure and functions of the courts and related institutions in the UK; 2.7: Explain the principles of employment and discrimination law as it affects health and safety issues; 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 4.1: Explain the principles of common law.

Just over half the candidates attempted this question and overall achieved reasonable marks.

In part (a), while many candidates showed a reasonable understanding of the potential breaches, there was a tendency for candidates to not apply any structure to their answer, often taking a widespread approach that did pick up some marks. Candidates identified the employer breach of duty under the HSAW Act and some included the employee's failure to co-operate with the employer's arrangements. However, there was little mention of the forklift driver or supervisors and rarely any mention of senior management. Overall, some answers lacked sufficient depth for an 'outline' question. Some candidates provided section numbers which did not gain extra marks as the instruction stated these were **not** necessary.

In part (b) several candidates were able to outline the various tests for a negligence claim, although fewer candidates managed to identify any relevant case law and relate it to the scenario. Some candidates gave details of a case without demonstrating understanding of its significance.

Part (c) was mostly well answered with many candidates gaining 3 or 4 marks. However, in part (i) some candidates thought that unfair dismissal cases would be heard by the Magistrates' or County Courts and in part (ii) the command of the specific terms of the remedies was doubtful but most answers outlined the concept well enough to achieve marks.

In many cases depth of knowledge concerning the sections, regulations and tests for a claim for negligence was inadequate. At this level of study candidates should be able to recall detail concerning these fundamentals.

Question 9	An employee was on an elevated working platform when it was struck by a contractor's vehicle. The platform overturned, the employee fell and was seriously injured. An initial report recommends further investigation.	
(a)	Outline steps that should be followed when investigating the accident.	(10)
(b)	Outline the benefits of conducting an accident investigation.	(6)
(c)	Outline the criteria that should be used to determine whether the event and any subsequent injury is reportable under the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations.	(4)

This question assessed candidates' knowledge and understanding of learning outcomes 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.

Most candidates attempted this question.

In part (a) candidates limited their answers to the steps for gathering information, with some going into specific detail on how to carry out interviews for example. As a result, they missed the opportunity to gain more marks for outlining the procedural steps such as setting up an inspection team, inspecting the workplace, analysing the information and producing SMART objectives. Better answers recognised the link to HSG245 and therefore adopted a four-step approach that enabled candidates to provide an answer with structure and consequently were awarded better marks.

In part (b) candidates referred to root causes, preventing further injuries and demonstrating management commitment, but did not usually look at the impact on safety culture or the prevention of other business losses. As the breadth of answer required was lacking the marks that could be awarded were limited.

In part (c) some candidates took the approach of outlining everything they could remember about RIDDOR and gaining marks along the way. Few candidates considered that this was a work-related accident and some veered off course to write at length about dangerous occurrences. Some candidates provided a more succinct answer and obtained marks more efficiently.

In general, far too many candidates attempted to answer this question at a basic level. At diploma level, candidates need to remember to offer the breadth of response for an 'outline' question to gain the marks available.

Question 10 Contractors are due to start work on a project in a large chemical manufacturing site. The work does **not** include any confined space working or work at height.

The organisation has assessed the health and safety implications of the work, level of risk and additional information that has been communicated to the contractor management team. The contractors have been selected based on competence, health and safety policy, risk assessments and method statements.

The organisation and contractor management team have assessed the risks to the organisation's workers, contractor's workers and the public, based on the planned work.

Outline practical ways of managing contractors:

- | | | |
|-----|--|------|
| (a) | in relation to <i>provision of training</i> when they initially arrive on site for work; | (7) |
| (b) | during work; | (10) |
| (c) | on completion of work. | (3) |
-

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

Just under half the candidates attempted this question. It was the least popular of the long questions.

In part (a) most candidates included induction training, site contact arrangements, welfare arrangements and information on specific hazards/risks. Some candidates suggested that this process should include competency checking, which if the question had been read thoroughly would have indicated that the contractors had been selected based on competency. Other candidates also outlined how contractors would be selected, again missing the point that they had already been selected. Some answers lacked any structure and contained significant duplication of answers. Overall, many candidates found it quite difficult to outline the topics that might be included within an induction training programme based on the scenario given. Only half the marks available for this part were awarded.

In part (b) candidates gained marks for sign in/out compliance, ensuring compliance with SSOW and supervision for example, but by concentrating on too few topics they missed the chance to gain better marks.

In part (c) many candidates referred to more operational elements such as discussions with contractors, site inspections to check work and physically escorting off site rather than reviewing and recording of work, performance and standards. Some candidates missed the opportunity to gain marks in the section.

It appears that in this sitting candidates either had little practical experience of managing contractors in the workplace and/or were unaware of HSE guidance on the subject. This was reflected in the insufficient level of responses to this question.

Question 11 An inexperienced train driver has passed a stop signal. An investigation finds that the driver had seen the signal gantry but had not perceived the relevant signal correctly. He was unaware that there had been previous similar incidents at the signal gantry and had received no local route training or information.

The signal was hard to see being partly obscured by a bridge on approach and affected by strong sunlight. The light arrangement on the signal was non-standard. The driver had no expectation from previous signals that it would be on 'stop'.

- (a) **Give** reasons why the driver may not have perceived the signal correctly. (7)
- (b) **Outline** actions that could be taken in order to help reduce the likelihood of a recurrence of this incident. (13)
-

This question assessed candidates' knowledge and understanding of learning outcomes 10.2: Explain the nature of the perception of risk and its relationship to performance in the workplace; 10.4: Explain appropriate methods of improving individual human reliability in the workplace; and 10.6: Explain how job factors can contribute to improving human reliability.

Just over half the candidates attempted this question.

In part (a) most candidates were able to gain reasonable marks with a fair range of points given. Some candidates went into unnecessary detail on the theory behind human failure which did not achieve any extra marks. Some candidates appeared to have misread the question and discussed all sorts of engineering issues as to why the signal was not read correctly rather than driver perception issues.

In part (b) many candidates outlined a good range of actions thereby gaining some good marks. However, some candidates went into too much detail on a few steps and were unable to maximise on the marks available. Other candidates veered off course discussing issues such as violations, management systems and offering actions that were general and not practical or relevant to the scenario.

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.