Examiners' Report

UNIT GC2: CONTROLLING WORKPLACE HAZARDS





For: NEBOSH National General Certificate in Occupational Health and Safety NEBOSH International General Certificate in Occupational Health and Safety

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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 learners and Learning Partners 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 learners 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 learners, 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.

This report has been prepared to provide feedback on the standard date GC2 examination sat in March 2020.

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

Learners and Learning Partners will also benefit from use of the 'Guide to the NEBOSH National General Certificate in Occupational Health and Safety' and 'Guide to the NEBOSH International General Certificate in Occupational Health and Safety' which are available via the NEBOSH website. In particular, the guides set out in detail the syllabus content for GC2 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.

Question 1 An inefficient local exhaust ventilation (LEV) system has been identified as the main cause of excessive dust levels in a workplace. (a) Identify possible indications of a dust problem that may have alerted workers to the inefficiency of the LEV system. (4) (b) Outline what might have reduced the effectiveness of the LEV system. (8) (c) Other than LEV, outline control measures that might be used to minimise levels of airborne dust. (8)

This question assessed learners' knowledge and understanding of learning outcome 7.4: Outline control measures that should be used to reduce the risk of ill-health from exposure to hazardous substances.

When elimination, then substitution of a hazard is not possible, then the introduction of engineering controls is the next hierarchical control measure. It is essential that such engineering controls operate in an efficient manner. This question focuses on indicators and effectiveness of an inefficient local exhaust ventilation (LEV) system and other dust control methods.

In part (a), many learners gained marks for identifying visible dust in air. However, few learners referred to the results of air monitoring.

In part (b), references to various types of blockages were given by the majority of learners, all of which with suitable outlines would have gained the marks available and the same would be true for learners who made reference to damage to parts of the LEV. Fewer learners included design issues in their answers, but those who gave outlines for example poor airflow and inefficient fans would have gained marks. Very few learners considered the use of the LEV system in their answer, which could have included incorrect placement of the hood, incorrect airflow settings, or not switching it on.

When considering control measures in part (c), many learners who made reference to respiratory protective equipment (RPE) would not have gained marks, as while RPE might reduce exposure to airborne dust it would not minimise levels of airborne dust, as required by the question.

Control measures to minimise levels of airborne dust could include other engineering control measures, such as segregation of activities in enclosures or glove boxes, which were included in many answers and marks were awarded where outlines were sufficient. Fewer learners made reference to elimination of dust through prohibition of the activity that is creating the dust, or made reference to substituting dusty raw materials, but those learners who did would have gained additional marks.

Question 2 Outdoor workers may be required to work in variable weather conditions.

Outline control measures that can be taken to provide protection for workers who:

(a)	are exposed to ultraviolet radiation from sunlight;	(4)
(b)	are exposed to cold temperatures when required to work outdoors.	(4)

This question assessed learners' knowledge and understanding of learning outcome 1.1: Outline common health, welfare and work environment requirements in the workplace.

In part (a) reference to sunscreen and taking shelter during break times were included in many answers and gained marks accordingly. However, many learners provided answers that were more related to protecting workers in a hot environment, which was not the subject of the question and would not have gained any marks.

In part (b) the majority of learners gained at least half of the marks available. Common answers included reference to warm rest facilities and other welfare issues. Few learners made reference to delaying the work until a warmer time, nor to educating workers on cold stress, although marks were available for both of these answers.

Question 3 Outline what could contribute towards the development of work-related upper limb disorders (WRULDs) among workers at a supermarket checkout.

(8)

This question assessed learners' knowledge and understanding of learning outcome 3.1: Explain work processes and practices that may give rise to work-related upper limb disorders and appropriate control measures.

Work-related upper limb disorders (WRULDS) is a generic term for health conditions that affect the body from the fingertips to the neck, and this question focused on these effects specifically on supermarket checkout workers. However, many learners answered this as a manual handling question and concentrated on back problems which was outside of the scope of WRULDs. Other learners answered this as a display screen equipment workstation, limiting the marks that could be awarded to common issues such as repetitive work. Learners who correctly applied WRULDs to a supermarket checkout operator, would have also gained marks for reference to a broader range of factors such as a high work rate or grasping bulky items.

Question 4 A school sports hall is to be used for temporary sleeping accommodation for local residents who have been evacuated from their homes due to an emergency situation.

Outline what should be considered when reviewing the fire risk assessment for this temporary use of the school sports hall.

This question assessed learners' knowledge and understanding of learning outcome 6.2: Outline the principles of fire risk assessment.

(8)

A fire risk assessment should consider the risk of a fire occurring and the risk to persons in a fire. Therefore, fire prevention would identify sources of fuel, ignition and oxygen, while fire precautions would consider the means of raising the alarm, means of fighting fires and means of escape. Many learners answered the question in this manner and while some marks were gained for issues such as travel distances and the presence of vulnerable persons, this question relates to the change of use of premises and the need to review the fire risk assessment.

As such, answers should have considered the introduction of new fuels, such as bedding and increased waste, the presence of new ignition sources including electrical appliances, and the introduction of additional oxygen possibly in the form of bottled gas for people with respiratory needs. When considering the fire precautions, marks were available for outlines that included reference to, for example, whether the assembly points were adequate for the increased number of persons. However, very few learners considered the change of use of the premises and whether the existing fire prevention and fire precautions arrangements were adequate, or whether additional measures were necessary and those learners would have limited their marks.

Question 5	(a)	Outline control measures that would allow a vehicle to reduce speed and stop safely.	(4)
	(b)	<i>Other than</i> reducing speed, outline control measures that would help reduce the risk of vehicles colliding with fixed objects.	(4)

This question assessed learners' knowledge and understanding of learning outcome 2.1: Explain the hazards and control measures for the safe movement of vehicles in the workplace.

In part (a) most learners referred to control measures relating to the vehicle, such as effective brakes and tyres in good condition and these answers, with a suitable outline would have gained the marks available. However, learners need to pay attention to the command word, as several answers consisted of little more than a list of one-word answers. Fewer learners took a broader view and included control measures associated with the workplace, such as suitable road surfaces, although marks were available for this type of answer.

In part (b), many learners included barriers in their answer, which would not have gained a mark as the barrier in itself is a fixed object and would only prevent the vehicle from hitting an object behind it. Preventative control measures were required, which should have included reference to, for example, lighting and the use of a banksman, all of which would have gained marks where sufficient outlines were provided. Question 6 Other than those associated with the physical environment, outline possible work-related causes of increased stress levels among workers associated with:

(a)	demands;	(2)
(b)	control;	(2)
(c)	support;	(2)
(d)	role.	(2)

This question assessed learners' knowledge and understanding of learning outcome 8.4: Outline the meaning, causes and effects of work-related stress and appropriate control measures.

Occupational stress is one of the biggest contributors to workplace ill-health today. However, the majority of learners found this question challenging and did not provide sufficient answers across the four categories of stress management standards.

Some learners based their answer on the category given in the question, such as 'excessive demands', 'no control' and 'lack of support', all of which would not be sufficient answers to gain marks. Learners who included reference to workload in the support category, forced work-pace for control, lack of resources in support and lack of understanding of job requirements for role would have gained marks, with suitable outlines.

Within the support category, a common answer of 'lack of management support' would not have gained marks as management might not realise that mental health support is required until it is requested by the worker. As such, marks would only be given where an answer included reference to requested support being ignored.

Question 7	Portable electrical equipment should be in good condition and free from defect.		
	(a)	Outline features of portable electrical equipment that should be checked by the user before use.	(6)
	(b)	Identify additional features of portable electrical equipment that should be inspected during periodic formal inspection by an appointed person.	(2)

This question assessed learners' knowledge and understanding of learning outcome 5.2: Outline the control measures that should be taken when working with electrical systems or using electrical equipment in all workplace conditions.

When planning to ensure the safety of portable electrical appliances, a schedule of inspections is required. These can include informal pre-user checks and periodic formal inspections by an appointed person which was the subject of this question.

In part (a) the majority of learners did include reference to checking the plug and cable, although outlines were limited to simple one- or two-word answers which would have limited the marks available for such references. Very few learners went beyond these two points, but those who did would have gained marks for answers including joints in cables and cables not secured to plugs.

Part (b) was not well answered with only a minority of learners identifying the need to open the plug and check fuse ratings and terminations, which would have been awarded marks.

Many learners made reference to a wide variety of electrical terms, such as RCDs, earthing, low voltage battery-operated tools and PAT testing. While these are relevant to electrical safety, these were not relevant to this question and marks could not be awarded for such answers.

Question 8 Outline what should be considered so that people with sensory impairments and/or physical disabilities can safely evacuate a workplace in the event of a fire.

(8)

This question assessed learners' knowledge and understanding of learning outcome 6.5: Outline the factors which should be considered when implementing a successful evacuation of a workplace in the event of a fire.

This question addressed a broad range of possible vulnerable people, covering both physical disabilities and those with sensory impairments which may lead to mobility and cognitive issues and what is required to ensure such people can evacuate a workplace safely.

Learners tended to focus on only one aspect, mainly issues associated with physical disabilities. Nevertheless, outlines that included reference to buddy systems, safe refuges, wide doorways and appropriate positioning of such workers would have gained good marks. However, this narrow approach limited marks that could be awarded where the learners did not consider people who have sensory impairments, such as visual impairment or hearing difficulties. Learners who did take a broader view and included reference to different types of alarm systems such as visual and vibration alarms, would have gained the additional marks available.

Question 9 Several large boxes of leaflets have been delivered to the ground floor reception of a workplace. Workers have been requested to move the boxes to the mailing department that is located in the basement.

Outline control measures to help reduce the risk of injury associated with this manual handling activity.

(8)

This question assessed learners' knowledge and understanding of learning outcome 3.2: Explain the hazards and control measures which should be considered when assessing risks from manual handling activities.

The scenario in this question provided signposts to a number of issues with this manual handling activity. Those learners who separated their answer into Task, Individual, Load and Environment (TILE) were awarded good marks. In terms of the task, the use of lifts, others to help with the activity and the use of a trolley were common responses; for individual issues, marks were also available for reference to capability and training along with splitting the load to reduce weight. The majority of learners demonstrated a good level of knowledge and understanding of manual handling control measures and were able to gain most of the marks available.

Question 10	(a)	Outline what should be considered to help ensure that a new item of work equipment is suitable for use.	
	(b)	Outline control measures to help ensure that an item of work equipment remains in a suitable condition.	(3)

This question assessed learners' knowledge and understanding of learning outcome 4.1: Outline general requirements for work equipment.

Few learners were awarded two or more marks for part (a). Where learners have difficulty in recalling taught information, applying the question to a familiar situation can help in gaining marks. Consider buying a new washing machine or a new lawnmower and then consider the expectations of the purchaser. For example, the items of equipment should be suitable for the purpose, suitable for the environment in which they are used, and satisfy national product standards. Marks were available for all of these answers and similar points.

Part (b) was answered more successfully by the majority of learners, with pre-use checks and inspections being referenced in many of the answers. Few learners considered that the condition of the work equipment would also depend on it being used, transported and stored correctly, but most learners gained the three marks available with the other elements of their answers.

Question 11 Identify what may increase the risk of injury to workers who need to walk through a warehouse.

(8)

This question assessed learners' knowledge and understanding of learning outcome 1.4: Explain the hazards and control measures for the safe movement of people in the workplace.

Generally, learners gained four or more marks on this question, relating to injury to workers who walk through a warehouse. A few learners gave examples of injuries, which was not required, and some learners limited their answer by only giving four points. Learners and Learning Partners should be reminded that to gain the breadth of marks available, a sufficient number of points should be included in the answer. In a number of instances this question was not answered and perhaps, as the last question on this examination paper, those learners ran out of time to answer all of the questions.

Learners who visualised how workers could be injured when walking through a warehouse, such as falling over, being struck by a vehicle, being hit by falling objects or by striking fixed objects, were best positioned to give reasons why the risk of such events would be increased. Such reasons would include, obstructions in walkway, poor lighting, and projecting objects, all of which would have gained the marks available.

Examination technique

The following issues are consistently identified as the main areas in need of improvement for learners taking Certificate level qualifications:

Learners misread/misinterpreted the question

Learners misreading or misinterpreting the question is by far the most common cause of learners not gaining the maximum marks available.

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 Certificate level qualifications relate directly to the learning outcomes contained within the associated syllabus guides. The learning outcomes require learners to be sufficiently prepared to provide the relevant depth of answer across a broad range of subject areas. For example, a learner 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 learner should focus not only on the general topic area (eg stress, fire) but also the specific aspect of that subject to which the question relates.

Learners must also pay attention to the command word. For example, a question could ask learners to '**identify** the hazards associated with demolition work', or a question from the same element could ask learners to '**outline** the control measures required during demolition work'. Learners appear to focus solely on the object of the question (demolition) and do not pay sufficient attention to the subject (hazards or control measures in the examples given) or the command word ('identify' or 'outline' in the examples given). There is often some confusion between hazard and risk. If a question requires an outline of hazards for a given situation, learners must be careful not to provide risks, or even in some circumstances precautions, as they will not be able to attract marks.

Examiners suggest that while many learners 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 subject area, these points are not focused on the specific learning outcome and marks cannot be awarded. However, some learners appear to misread or misinterpret several questions. This situation is more likely due to learners preparing for the examination with a number of memorised answers obtained through rote-learning, that again can provide answers that are loosely associated with the subject 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 subject matter and marks are not awarded.

Learners are advised to allow sufficient time to read and re-read the question in order to determine the key requirements prior to committing their answer to paper. Preparing a time plan before the examination will indicate how many minutes are available for each question and then part of this time allocation can be given to reading the question. Underlining or highlighting key words can assist in keeping focused on the salient points and simple mind maps or answer plans can also be useful. Maps and plans should be kept simple so as not to use up too much examination time.

Learners did not respond effectively to the command word

A key indicator a 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 learner and relates to the amount of detail that should be included in each point of the answer.

The learning outcomes in each element of all syllabus guides include the relevant command word that dictates the level of detail that should be covered in a course of study and the depth of answer that a learner would be expected to provide in an answer to an examination question.

Examiners report that learners continue to incorrectly observe the command words and therefore compromise their ability to gain the marks available. The majority of cases where command words are not observed relate to insufficient detail being given by a learner in their examination answer. A significant number of learners, irrespective of the command word given in the question, provide all answers in the form of a brief list of one or two words. This would normally not be sufficient to gain marks where the command word given was 'outline', 'explain' or 'describe', all of which require answers of more than one or two words.

Some learners do provide too much information, which would not be required where a command word limits the expected answer to 'give' or 'identify'. Learners would not be penalised for providing excessive detail but this would not be an efficient use of the time allocated.

Learning Partners should ensure that learning materials complement the command words in the syllabus guide and the NEBOSH guidance on command words and that sufficient time is given to advising learners on suitable examination technique during a course of study.

Learners unnecessarily wrote the question down

Developing a time plan is a key element in preparing for an examination. Advice included on Certificate question papers suggests that 30 minutes should be allocated for the answer to the long 20-mark question, and 90 minutes should be allocated to the answers for the remaining ten, 8-mark short questions. Therefore there are around 9 minutes available to answer an 8-mark question. This time will be required for reading the question properly at least twice, developing an answer plan, and then committing the answer to paper while regularly referring back to the question in order to maintain focus. Therefore any inefficient use of this time should be avoided.

The efficient use of this time is essential in order to ensure that all questions can be answered within the 2 hours available. Many learners feel it necessary to write out the question, in full, prior to providing their answer and although this practice will not lose marks it will lose valuable time. A significant number of learners do not answer all of the questions in the time permitted and do not complete the question paper, some of whom obviously run out of time.

Learners provided rote-learned responses that did not fit the question

It is clear that there are a significant number of learners who seem to recite answers in the examination that have been rote-learned in advance and do not answer the question.

While knowledge of material forms a part of the study for a Certificate-level qualification, a key aspect being assessed is a learner's **understanding** of the subject and reciting a pre-prepared and memorised answer will not show a learner's understanding. In fact, if a learner 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 subject and will inevitably result in low marks being awarded for that answer.

Learners repeated the same points but in different ways / Learners provided the same answer to different questions

There are instances where learners 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.

Learners are advised to practise examination technique in their preparations to avoid this kind of pitfall. 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 learners and makes it much clearer in the stress of the examination for learners to see which points have been made and reduce the chances of the same point being made several times.

Learners did not answer all of the questions

It has been noted that a number of learners do not attempt all of the questions and of course where a learner does not provide an answer to a question, no marks can be awarded. This seriously affects the potential marks available and the possibility of achieving a pass. Learning Partners must emphasise the importance of attempting all questions in order to maximise the opportunity to attract marks.

There can be several reasons for this issue: running out of the allocated time for the examination, not knowing the answer to the question, or forgetting to answer a question.

Questions can be answered in any order and answers can be written in any order in the answer book provided. Learners are advised to clearly keep track of questions they have attempted, such as marking them on the question paper that would minimise the risk of inadvertently missing a question to answer.

If the subject of the question is unfamiliar or the answer is not known, then it will be challenging to provide an answer. This can result from rote-learning and preparing for an examination with a number of memorised answers, or simply not being adequately prepared for the examination across the breadth of the syllabus. There is always the risk of a learner 'going blank' in an examination situation, in which case learners should be prepared with some techniques to help. Rather than trying to remember what was taught or what has been read, ask yourself 'what would I do, in this situation?'. Reference to personal application or experience is sometimes enough to stimulate an answer that otherwise may have been missed. Alternatively, learners can go back to first principles and break a question down into elements such as 'people', 'equipment', 'materials' and the 'working environment'. Approaching a question in small sections can minimise the risk of being overwhelmed by it as a whole.

Running out of time can be avoided by having an examination time plan and working to it. The question paper advises that you should spend 30 minutes on the long answer (question 1) and 90 minutes on the remaining ten short answer questions. This will provide around 9 minutes per short answer, follow the clock and when the time per question has expired, move on. Answering a question partly is better than not answering at all.

Learners did not allocate enough time to the question / Time management

In a number of cases question 1 is left until last or later in the question paper and does not appear to be answered completely. Other learners appear to rush the last one or two questions by providing very brief or bullet point answers, even when these questions require an outline. This indicates a lack of time management. It is advised that Learning Partners and learners spend time developing the skill of writing answers to questions bearing in mind the number of marks and time available. A 20-mark question requires significantly more detail than an 8-mark question.

Learners might benefit from writing abbreviations to save time and to recognise that there is no need to write out the question at the beginning of their answer. Standard abbreviations such as HSE, RIDDOR, COSHH, PPE and DSE are acceptable.

Learners' handwriting was illegible

Sometimes Examiners have difficulty in reading the handwriting of some learners. Although allowances are made for learners under the pressure of an examination, Learning Partners must remind learners that their writing needs to be legible or valuable marks may not be picked up during marking.

There is a minimum literacy requirement for learners on NEBOSH qualifications. As stated in the syllabus guides the standard of English required by learners studying for Certificate level must be such that they can both understand and articulate the concepts contained in the syllabus.

NEBOSH recommends to Learning Partners that learners taking this qualification should reach a minimum standard of English equivalent to an International English Language Testing System score of 6.0 or higher in IELTS tests in order to be accepted onto a Certificate level programme.

For further information please see the latest version of the IELTS Handbook or consult the IELTS website: <u>https://www.ielts.org/about-the-test/test-format</u>

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

Learning Partners are reminded that they must ensure that these standards are satisfied or additional tuition provided to ensure accessible and inclusive lifelong learning.

Command words

Please note that the examples used here are for the purpose of explanation only.

Outline

The command word 'outline' is by far the most challenging for learners. Referring to the NEBOSH guidance on command words available on the NEBOSH website, 'outline' means *"To indicate the principal features or different parts of"*.

Many learners do not give sufficient detail in order to warrant an 'outline' answer. The NEBOSH guidance on command word states that *"an exhaustive description is not required. What is sought is a brief summary of the major aspects of whatever is stated in the question"*.

If the use of the command word in everyday language or conversation is considered it may help the learner understand what is required. If asked to '**outline** the risks to an operator when manually closing a valve' an answer such as 'cuts, bruises, burns and strains' would be insufficient as this represents a listed answer. However, 'cuts from contact with sharp edges of the hand wheel, bruises from impact with adjacent plant items, burns from contact with adjacent uninsulated pipe work and strains from using excessive force' would be sufficient.

Explain

The command word 'explain' requires the learner to provide an understanding of the subject of the question and will usually be used in conjunction with 'why' or 'how'. Such as '**explain** how an interlocked guard operates' or '**explain** why a forklift truck may overturn'.

Some learners approach an 'explain' question the same as an 'outline' and provide a number of individual points rather than providing an explanation as to how something operates or why something occurs. While some learners do answer such questions sufficiently and satisfactorily, other learners have difficulty in explaining in a logical sequence and many repeat the same point.

Identify

'Identify' questions require the name or title of an item, such as, '**identify** the effects of electricity on the human body', or '**identify** the features of a vehicle route'. In most cases one or two words will be sufficient and further detail will not be required to gain the marks.

For example, if asked to '**identify** types of equipment found in an office' appropriate answers could be personal computer, printer, telephone, photocopier, etc. There would be no need to embellish those points with a description of the equipment or its function.

However, in contrast to 'outline' answers being too brief, many learners 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 Learning Partners should use the NEBOSH guidance on command words within their examination preparation sessions in order to prepare learners for the command words that may arise.

Describe

The command word 'describe' clearly requires a description of something. The NEBOSH guidance on command words says that 'describe' requires a detailed written account of the distinctive features of a topic such that another person would be able to visualise what was being described.

If asked to describe the clock in the examination room, a person would have little difficulty in doing so and would most probably refer to its shape, its size, the colour of the clock and the style of numerals. Answers to such a question would almost certainly not result in general unconnected information about clocks, the history of clocks, or an explanation of why the clock is present in the room. Learners should consider the general use of the command word when providing examination answers.

Give

'Give' questions require a statement that is relevant to the subject asked for in the question but additional explanation is not required. Often, 'give' questions ask for the meaning of a particular term. While detailed explanation of the application of the term would not be required, a correct knowledge of the term itself is needed in order for the Examiner to award marks.

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: <u>https://www.nebosh.org.uk/i-am/a-learner/</u> - from this page the document can be found by clicking on the relevant Qualification link, then on the 'Resources' tab.