
Examiners' Report

NEBOSH NATIONAL DIPLOMA IN OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY

UNIT A: MANAGING HEALTH AND SAFETY

JANUARY 2018



CONTENTS

Introduction	2
General comments	3
Comments on individual questions	4
Examination technique	13
Command words	17

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.

© NEBOSH 2018

Any enquiries about this report publication should be addressed to:

NEBOSH
Dominus Way
Meridian Business Park
Leicester
LE19 1QW

tel: 0116 263 4700
fax: 0116 282 4000
email: info@nebosh.org.uk

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 January 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 **Outline** reasons for introducing health and safety management systems. **(10)**

This question assessed candidates' knowledge and understanding of learning outcome 1.3: Outline the uses of, and reasons for, introducing a health and safety management system.

Overall, responses to this question did not gain high marks. The topic is one that most employers would expect their safety practitioner to be familiar with and to be able to outline or 'sell' the reasons for introducing a system.

Quite a number of responses adopted the 'moral, legal, financial' route to frame their answers that did not lend itself to fully answering the question. Candidates were able to gain marks for points about legal compliance and costs, but missed the opportunity to consider issues associated with corporate governance, insurance or alignment with wider business objectives.

Question 2 **Distinguish** between:

(a) common law and statute law; **(4)**

(b) civil law and criminal law. **(6)**

This question assessed candidates' knowledge and understanding of learning outcome 2.1: Explain the sources and types of law in force in the UK relevant to health and safety.

Overall, responses to this question were able to gain some reasonably good marks, with the average being well over half marks.

A safety practitioner needs to be able to distinguish between legal principles and how they are preserved. Candidates who did well presented answers by logically distinguishing between common and statute law, and then how these are acted out as civil rights and criminal duties. Other candidates gained marks by outlining key features of the different types of law. However, some candidates also included content that indicated they did not fully understand the legal system.

In part (a) many candidates were able to distinguish between legal precedent, judge-made law and law that is drawn up by parliament, consisting of acts. However, most candidates stopped at this point and did not expand further.

Candidates achieved most marks for part (b), demonstrating a good understanding of the difference between civil and criminal law. The majority of candidates detailed which courts related to which law and the difference between balance of probabilities and beyond reasonable doubt. Few candidates were able to go further and recognise the availability or otherwise of insurance.

-
- Question 3**
- (a) **Outline** how task analysis may be used to help with hazard identification as part of a risk assessment process. (4)
- (b) **Explain** why the number of people exposed to a hazard could affect **BOTH** the probability and severity components of risk. (2)
- (c) Employers may consult external UK publications when deciding whether the level of risk associated with a specific hazard has been reduced to an acceptable level.
- Identify** types of external UK publication that an employer may choose to consult **AND**, in **EACH** case, **outline** how that publication may assist in deciding on acceptable levels of risk. (4)
-

This question assessed candidates' knowledge and understanding of learning outcomes 7.1: Explain how to use internal and external information sources in identifying hazards and assessing risks; 7.2: Outline the use of a range of hazard identification techniques; and 7.3: Explain how to assess and evaluate risk and to implement a risk assessment programme.

In part (a) many candidates were able to outline the purpose of a task analysis to breakdown a task into smaller steps to make identifying hazards easier. Although very few could provide further insight into a task analysis, missing key points such as unforeseen hazards or scope for identifying human error.

In part (b) candidates had difficulty with the concept that the more people that were exposed to a hazard, the greater chance there is of someone being harmed. Similarly, with the severity, the more people exposed to a hazard, the more people will be affected by the hazardous event.

Many responses alluded to an increase in the probability of harm occurring as the number exposed increased, with some offering suitable examples to aid their explanation but some had difficulty articulating it. Many candidates focused on the accident triangle to explain the potential severity of harm, rather than being able to explain that a single incident may result in a greater number of people harmed, thus increasing the overall severity/categorisation of incident.

In part (c) many candidates identified a good range of sources of external publications and reasons outlining how the publication may assist in deciding acceptable levels of risk. Some candidates correctly identified a source but did not sufficiently outline how it could be used, limiting marks that could be awarded. A few candidates also misread the question and included publications external to the UK.

-
- Question 4** **Outline** information that should be included in written safe systems of work. (10)
- Details of any specific risk controls are **not** required.*
-

This question assessed candidates' knowledge and understanding of learning outcome 8.3: Explain the development, main features and operation of safe systems of work and permit-to-work systems.

This question was well answered by the majority of candidates showing a good depth of knowledge and understanding of this topic and on average gaining over half marks.

Reasonable answers were able to point to a description of the activity, identification of risks or hazards, specification of PPE, emergency procedures and, sometimes, to the review date for inclusion in a written safe system of work.

Marks could have been gained for outlining information concerned with the authorisation, communication and safe completion procedures and linkages with a permit-to-work.

Some candidates listed the components as opposed to outlining them, thus limiting marks that could be awarded. Others gave specific risk controls, which the question stated was **not** required. Candidates are reminded to read and re-read a question carefully, to take note of the command word and any instructions that will instruct them what is or is not required.

Question 5	(a)	Outline:	
	(i)	the purpose of regulatory enforcement;	(2)
	(ii)	the principles of regulatory enforcement activities.	(4)
	(b)	A fatal accident has happened at a workplace. An enforcing agency inspector decides to make a visit to the site to take statements from witnesses, including the managing director. The managing director has refused the visit.	
		Outline possible courses of action that the inspector may pursue.	(4)

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.

This question was not well answered, with the majority of candidates gaining less than half marks.

Answers to part (a) demonstrated little knowledge of the purpose and principles of enforcement activities. In part (a) (i) few candidates outlined that the purpose of regulatory enforcement is to take action to deal with serious risks and promote compliance with health and safety law and ensure that those who break the law are held to account.

In part (a) (ii) few candidates recognised that this question was about the Enforcement Policy Statement HSE41; proportionality of how the law is applied; targeting of enforcement action and transparency in enforcement.

In part (b) most candidates stated that the inspector could be accompanied by a police officer. However, they did not seem to comprehend the serious nature of a manager refusing to co-operate with the HSE and missed the opportunity to gain further marks by stating that the manager could be prosecuted for obstructing the inspector or attempting to prevent someone appearing before an inspector. Instead, candidates talked about Improvement and Prohibition notices and seemed to be answering an entirely different question.

Question 6	(a)	Outline the behavioural attributes of the following types of leadership:	
	(i)	transformational;	(4)
	(ii)	transactional.	(4)
	(b)	Explain why leadership styles need to vary in practice.	(2)

This question assessed candidates' knowledge and understanding of learning outcome 9.1: Explain the types of health and safety leadership, their advantages, disadvantages and likely impact on safety performance.

Overall, this question was not well answered and candidates demonstrated a lack of understanding of the behavioural attributes of both types of leadership.

In part (a) several candidates appeared to acknowledge and understand that there were differences in behavioural attributes but were unable to articulate this, sometimes mixing up the two types and limiting their marks. Additionally, some candidates gave outcomes of the leadership types rather than the attributes. Some confusion in respect of transformational leadership was also observed, with candidates attempting to position it as an inferior leadership style that organisations should avoid.

Some candidates were able to outline that being inspirational and a good communicator were attributes of the transformational style, and being authoritative and rewarding or punishing were attributes of the transactional style.

In part (b) many candidates explained that leadership style needs to change depending on different groups and situations. However, they did not develop this further into an explanation with reference to situational and contextual leadership frameworks, limiting marks that could be awarded.

Question 7 An organisation operating in the oil and gas sector employed 5 000 people in 2015. The number of employees has reduced to 4 000 in 2016 and 3 000 in 2017. The table below shows the accident history of the organisation over the past 3 years.

Year	2015	2016	2017
Number of accidents	15	16	15
Number of hours worked	8 000 000	6 400 000	4 800 000
Days lost due to accidents	75	85	100

- (a) **Calculate** the accident frequency rate for **EACH** of the years. **(6)**
Show your calculations at EACH step.
- (b) **Comment** on why the organisation should be concerned about the accident frequency rate. **(2)**
- (c) Human reliability can impact accident rates.
- Outline** ways in which:
- (i) organisational factors can contribute to improving human reliability; **(6)**
- (ii) job factors can contribute to improving human reliability. **(6)**
-

This question assessed candidates' knowledge and understanding of learning outcomes 5.2: Explain the use of quantitative methods in analysing loss data; 10.5: Explain how organisational factors can contribute to improving human reliability; and 10.6: Explain how job factors can contribute to improving human reliability.

Many candidates attempted this question, and most gained just under half-marks.

In part (a) most candidates gave good answers, manipulating the data in the table to produce the correct accident frequency rate, thereby achieving full marks.

In part (b) candidates had difficulty interpreting the results. Although many candidates were able to make a link between an increase in accident rate with reduced hours worked, they were not able to develop this further; for example, to recognise that increase in days lost with fewer workers indicated increased severity of the accidents occurring.

In part (c) several candidates had difficulty in focusing on and distinguishing between organisational and job factors and linking these to human reliability. In many cases, job factors were discussed in part (c) (i) leaving few matters to be discussed in part (c) (ii), limiting candidates' marks. Some candidates approached this part of the question negatively, for example outlining ways in which weaknesses in organisational and job factors could impact human reliability, which was not what was asked in the question.

Question 8 A control panel aimed at reducing the likelihood of human error is installed.

Outline the desirable design features of:

(a) controls; (12)

(b) displays (8)

for this control panel.

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

This question was attempted by around half of the candidates and on average gained less than half marks.

In part (a) in terms of controls, most candidates stated that controls should be kept to a minimum; they should be visible and easily reachable. Candidates must be able to recognise that the number of marks in a section, along with the command word, should signpost them to the number of points that should be made. Many candidates missed the opportunity to develop their answers further to consider issues such as protection against inadvertent operation or that the stop function should override the start and adjust functions.

In part (b) candidates specified that displays should be clearly visible, shielded from glare and strong ambient light, and that there should be a minimum number of displays. Outlines of further issues such as consideration of appropriate sense or redundancy of message were absent, limiting marks that could be awarded.

Answers were often given in the wrong section (part (a) instead of part (b)) and sometimes in both, indicating some confusion between controls and displays.

Adopting the basic examination technique of 'make a point to earn a point' would have resulted in improved answers and marks.

Question 9

A castle, surrounded by a dry moat, is open to the public. Access to the castle ticket office is gained via a bridge across the moat. While crossing the bridge, a visitor to the castle tripped over a low wall and fell a distance of 5 metres into the moat, sustaining serious injuries.

- (a) With reference to possible breaches of the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 and the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999, **outline** the *specific legal requirements* that may have been breached by the:
- (i) organisation; (6)
 - (ii) managers. (3)
- (b) **Identify** the criminal court that may hear the prosecution. (1)
- (c) **Identify** the possible penalties should the organisation and/or managers be found guilty. (2)
- (d) With reference to relevant civil legislation, **outline** the nature of the duty owed by the occupying organisation to their lawful visitors. (4)
- (e) In its defence, the organisation attempts to rely on a warning notice posted in the ticket office that reads '*The management will accept no liability for loss or injury howsoever caused*'.
Explain why the organisation will be unable to use this statement in its defence. (4)
-

This question assessed candidates' knowledge and understanding of learning outcomes 4.3: Outline the main civil law statutory duties owed by the occupiers of premises to lawful land unlawful visitors; 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 2.5: Outline the structure and functions of courts and related institutions in the UK.

This question was attempted by half the candidates. The average mark was under half marks.

In part (a) candidates demonstrated varying degrees of understanding of the possible breaches. Many answers showed little understanding of the terminology required to outline the breaches, with some candidates only quoting the section number/regulation number with no more information supplied. This may indicate that candidates had memorised the acts/regulations without gaining a full understanding of them.

Some candidates confused managers' duties with those of the employer; for example, claiming that managers have a duty to ensure risk assessments are conducted and to provide a safe system of work.

Better answers to (a) (i) were able to outline a range of breaches in respect of duties to employees and non-employees, risk assessment, principles of prevention and failure to make effective safety management arrangements.

Part (a) (ii) was not well answered, with many candidates not outlining consent, or connivance, or neglect, or the failure to bring shortcomings to the attention of the organisation.

Part (b) was well answered with the majority getting the mark available for giving a correct criminal court, although a few cited civil courts.

In part (c) there was some confusion over the penalties for the organisation and penalties for managers, with candidates stating that the organisation could receive a custodial sentence. Many answers were vague and did not specify organisation or manager for a particular penalty. Some candidates claimed that fines are set at £50K and that a publicity order could be handed down under HSWA. However, some were able to clearly identify potentially unlimited fines for the organisation, fines for the managers and custodial sentences for managers.

For part (d) many candidates outlined that the castle operator owed a common law duty of care to the lawful visitors and some went on to quote the Occupiers Liability Act 1957. However, several candidates provided an incorrect date for the Act and few could outline that the castle occupier was the 'occupier' within the Act.

Part (e) was not well answered. The majority of candidates had only a vague understanding of the reasons that the sign in the ticket office could not be used in the organisation's defence. Candidates gained marks for explaining that the notice was not brought to the visitor's attention and/or that the notice was not clear regarding the hazard. However, few candidates recognised that the issue was covered by the Unfair Contract Terms Act 1977.

Question 10	(a)	Outline the purpose of health and safety management auditing.	(4)
	(b)	Describe factors that should be considered when planning an audit programme. <i>You do not need to consider specific factors to be audited.</i>	(12)
	(c)	Outline how senior managers can assist in the auditing process.	(4)

This question assessed candidates' knowledge and understanding of learning outcomes 6.3: Describe the variety of health and safety monitoring and measurement techniques; and 9.2: Explain the organisational benefits of effective health and safety leadership.

Three-quarters of candidates attempted this question. The average mark was under half marks.

In part (a) few candidates stated that the purpose of the audit was to obtain independent or objective evidence of good health and safety management. Many gained a couple of marks for outlining purposes such as identifying strengths and weaknesses and evaluating performance against requirements. Limited responses included checking that everything was okay and did not achieve marks.

Part (b) was answered reasonably well with stronger responses achieving more than half marks. Candidates described that when planning an audit, factors that need to be consisted include senior management commitment, logistics, resources, consideration of standards, a scoring system and training of audit personnel.

Few candidates developed their answers further to include wider issues such as communications on the purpose and implications of the audit process and considerations around the independence of auditors.

Some candidates confused audits with inspections and this confusion compromised answers, leading to low marks.

In part (c) most candidates were able to outline that senior managers should participate in the audit and ensure that resources are available. They also stated that senior managers should ensure that the action plans following the audit are implemented. Very few candidates outlined the need to request an action plan or appoint a competent auditing team.

Question 11	(a)	Outline reasons for establishing effective consultation arrangements with employees on health and safety matters in the workplace.	(4)
	(b)	Outline a range of formal and informal consultation arrangements that may contribute to effective consultation on health and safety matters in the workplace.	(6)
	(c)	Outline how the health and safety practitioner can help to develop and support arrangements for consultation with employees on health and safety matters.	(10)

This question assessed candidates' knowledge and understanding of learning outcome 9.6: Explain the role, influences on and procedures for formal and informal consultation with employees in the workplace.

This question was attempted by half the candidates. The average mark was under half marks.

For part (a) some candidates outlined the encouragement of submitting new ideas and that the safety culture would be improved. However, few gave further insight, and many candidates were unable to accurately make reference to the specific statutory requirements for consultation.

Part (b) was answered most successfully although few candidates were able to offer enough examples of arrangements that would contribute to effective consultation. Few candidates outlined the need for staff appraisals, union-appointed safety reps and questionnaires/suggestion schemes.

Part (c) was not well answered as the majority of candidates confused this part of the question. Many candidates answered the question as if the practitioner was responsible for ensuring adequate consultation and as such the suggested approach was very practical. Other candidates missed the relevance of consultation altogether and focused on the overall role of the practitioner.

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.