
Examiners' Report

NEBOSH NATIONAL DIPLOMA IN OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY

UNIT A: MANAGING HEALTH AND SAFETY

JANUARY 2020



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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 learners annually and are offered by over 600 Learning Partners, 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 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, which is an essential requirement at Diploma level.

This report has been prepared to provide feedback on the standard date examination sitting in January 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 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.

Unit A

Managing health and safety

Question 1 Organisations are subjected to many influences in health and safety.

Identify influential parties **AND outline** how they can affect health and safety performance in an organisation. **(10)**

This question assessed learners' knowledge and understanding of learning outcome 9.3: Explain the internal and external influences on health and safety in an organisation.

This question allowed learners to explore a broad range of influential parties and to outline how they affect health and safety performance within an organisation. Better answers typically included a sufficient range of influences and, importantly, went on to outline how that party was influential.

Limited answers either lacked sufficiency in numbers of separate influential parties or concentrated in too much detail on only two or three parties. Equally, limited answers may not have provided a relevant outline which was necessary (eg just listed a range of bodies) or simply did not state 'how' they influence; for example a typical response may have stated that the public customer will either purchase a product or not, but did not link this to the reasoning of public image of safety and the need to demonstrate good corporate practice in the organisation.

Some learners may have had difficulty with the term 'influential parties', as more general societal influences were also given.

Question 2 **Distinguish** between:

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

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

This question assessed learners' 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.

Most learners gained good marks for this question, with some being awarded full marks.

In part (a) the question asked to distinguish between common and statute law. Better answers were able to identify the main principles of each with clear, succinct and unambiguous answers being stated. They sometimes used a relevant legal example, or indeed even a past case, to illustrate the point made.

Where answers were limited, there was confusion over each type of law. For example, learners translated common and statute law into civil and criminal and then responded to this incorrectly. Equally limited answers may only have given one relevant point when distinguishing the types of law.

In part (b), the same approach was required for civil and criminal law. For many learners this was well attempted and there was good evidence of general legal system knowledge and understanding.

Limited answers used insufficient information to cover a point; for example, stating words such as 'used to sue a company' without any other detail or technical inaccuracy such as stating imprisonment under civil law. At Diploma level the learner should be able to provide some reasoning.

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- Question 5**
- (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 learners' 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.

Part (a) required working knowledge on CMCHA. Many learners appeared to not be familiar with the concept or criteria. Answers often referred to irrelevant or incorrect terms such as a 'controlling mind' and that serious injury may occur. Often, learners considered the general court procedure rather than due legal process; for example, stating that a jury has to find the defendant guilty and to show they had not done all that was reasonably practicable. This style of answer omitted many of the legal criteria that must be satisfied and the terms of relevant duty of care or gross breach.

Better answers were able to articulate the criteria and the key terms and therefore gained marks.

For part (b) learners often adopted a scattergun approach giving long lists of all bodies without distinguishing if they investigated or prosecuted. Other answers incorrectly identified the Health and Safety Executive as the prosecutor or omitted the Crown Prosecution Service.

In part (c) the penalties given were also variable. Many learners incorreced stated imprisonment. Likewise, stating fines without showing they are unlimited is insufficient for an outline answer. Better answers clearly broke the penalties into categories and provided the necessary outline to gain the marks.

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- Question 6** **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 learners' 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.

Many learners were able to provide good answers covering a range of information that should be considered in a written safe system of work. However, learners should be reminded that a comprehensive outline is necessary in order to be awarded good marks.

Some learners used up valuable writing time by giving details of risk control options, which was not required, and a few learners solely explored risk assessment and the hierarchy of control.

Better answers considered a wide range of information such as communication, competence, control and co-ordination with a reasoned argument among issues.

Question 7

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

(a) **Outline** why the accident should be investigated. (4)

(b) The initial responses of reporting and securing the scene of the accident have been carried out.

Outline what actions should be taken in order to collect evidence for the investigation. (8)

(c) The investigation reveals that there have been previous skidding incidents that had not been reported. The organisation therefore decides to introduce a formal system for reporting near miss incidents.

Outline what should be considered when developing and implementing such a system. (8)

This question assessed learners' knowledge and understanding of learning outcomes 5.4: Explain the reasons for loss and near miss investigations and the procedures to be followed; and 5.3: Explain the significance and use of statutory and internal reporting of loss events.

Part (a) required consideration of the reasons as to why accidents should be investigated. Many learners gave good outlines covering a broad number of reasons considering legal, moral and economic factors. In many instances learners also applied the scenario back into the reasoning and therefore illustrated wider thinking and knowledge. Limited answers typically lacked depth, or relied on simple statements without sufficiently outlining as required.

In part (b) the actions to collect evidence was also reasonably well attempted by most learners. Better answers clearly explored documentation and safe system of work failings, with reference back to the scenario to establish spill issues and pedestrian safety procedures. Limited answers overly concentrated on the initial stages of the investigation, for example securing the scene, which was not required. Many learners also provided too much emphasis on the witness statements and interviews, often using over half the answer to explore one factor among many other possible answers.

In part (c), the discussion on a near miss system was variable. Too often learners concentrated on the contents of the system rather than the process itself; for example, giving discussion on the form, headings and who would fill it in. Many learners did not consider the process chronologically, which would have significantly assisted with providing a comprehensive response. There was also a lack of review and cost implications noted in the process, while some responses omitted the action stage once a report has been made and the responsibilities attached to this.

Question 8 The management of an organisation intends to introduce new, safer working procedures.

(a) **Outline** practical measures that management could take to communicate effectively when managing this change. (10)

(b) *Other than* effective communication, **outline** additional ways in which management could gain the support and commitment of employees when managing this change. (10)

This question assessed learners' 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.

Part (a) required a discussion on practical measures to communicate in managing change. Learners needed to outline a balanced number of types of communication and in many instances this was relatively well completed. A broad range of physical methods such as IT, posters and noticeboards were given. Limited answers did not explore enough communication methods with over analysis of meetings and training and thus omitting other options. Some answers also omitted the necessary detail required for an outline; for example, simply stating that the organisation could 'have regular meetings' without considering who might be involved in such meetings or did not focus on practical measures.

Part (b) required learners to consider methods other than communication that could be used when managing the change. Many answers often lacked depth and relied upon communication methods only, rather than giving a range of additional ways such as trials and active involvement. Better answers had a more logical and chronological structure with several different options outlined and with an appropriate amount of detail, giving scope for higher marks.

Some learners mixed their responses to parts (a) and (b).

Question 9

A 13-year-old boy was riding on the back of a milk delivery van when he fell and was injured. The boy had been helping the milkman to deliver milk, even though doing this was forbidden by the dairy that employs the milkman.

- (a) **Explain** which of the parties concerned may have civil liability at common law for the injury. Use case law to support your answer where appropriate. (5)
- (b) An action alleging negligence by the milkman is brought on behalf of the injured boy.
Outline possible defences against such an action, relating **EACH** answer to the scenario given. (6)
- (c) **Identify** company documents that would be useful in defending the case **OR** that the defendant may have to send to the claimant. (5)
- (d) Following this accident the milkman was dismissed for gross misconduct for a serious breach of safety rules. The milkman considers this to be unfair and brings an action for unfair dismissal to an Employment Tribunal.
(i) **Outline** the orders that the Employment Tribunal may make if they find in the milkman's favour. (3)
(ii) **Identify** the body that would hear any appeal from the decision of the Employment Tribunal. (1)
-

This question assessed learners' knowledge and understanding of learning outcomes 4.1: Explain the principles of common law; 4.2: Explain the criteria required to establish a successful civil action for breach of statutory duty and negligence, the main defences available and the procedure for assessment of damages under civil law; and 2.5: Outline the structure and functions of courts and related institutions in the UK.

Part (a) asked learners to explain the possible parties liable in relation to the given scenario. Most answers identified the main parties of liability but often these were given as a list rather than explaining as necessary and limiting marks. Vicarious liability was often overlooked in the answers provided. Limited answers did not consider the full range of liabilities and did not use relevant case law to support. Better answers used relevant case law and gave the legal point and explained the potential liabilities.

In part (b) many learners were able to outline the defences available and their answers covered the core civil law tests. However, many answers did not consider the foreseeability or practicability tests. Some learners were unable to use correct legal terminology such as *volenti* and tried to explain this in their own words. These principles are unique and should be accurately referred to at Diploma level. Limited answers often gave a general discussion on basic legal principles rather than specific defences or did not relate the defences to the scenario.

In part (c), documents to be provided defending the case were often limited by the range offered or the repetition of the answer.

In part (d) (i) many learners were able to outline the orders to gain marks. However, some did not give an adequate outline by simply listing the orders and missed out on marks. For part (ii) many learners correctly identified the body that would hear the appeal.

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- Question 10**
- (a) **Explain** the objectives of:
 - (i) active health and safety monitoring; (5)
 - (ii) reactive health and safety monitoring. (4)
 - (b) **Outline** a range of *active* health and safety monitoring methods. (5)
 - (c) **Outline** examples of *reactive* performance data that could be used to benchmark health and safety performance. (6)
-

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

For part (a) answers were variable, with many learners unable to explain the objectives of the two types of monitoring beyond basic statements such as 'before the accident' and 'after the accident'. Many learners also used valuable writing time on listing or explaining different methods of active and reactive, which was separately asked for elsewhere. Some also appeared to have mis-read the question as being about health and safety objectives generally, rather than the objectives of health and safety monitoring. Better answers were able to explain a range of objectives of each type of monitoring and give tangible benefits and the reasoning behind each one. A few answers included the continual improvement basis or to demonstrate commitment.

In part (b) many learners were able to state many useful options, but could not explain how these work in practice, or mixed up active and reactive incorrectly. Learners need to understand the physical process under each type of method; for example, many learners were unable to show that a safety survey is targeted at an activity. As such, many opportunities to gain marks were lost as while the monitoring method was correctly listed, the explanation did not warrant marks as it was too little, inaccurate or too generic. Other learners provided an outline focused more on the reason for carrying it out. However, within this there was mark worthy content.

In part (c) many learners were able to give a reasonable outline of reactive data measures, but some did not make the connection with benchmarking. Some learners listed reactive data measures but did not provide an outline and could not be awarded marks.

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. **(8)**
- (b) **Outline** actions that could be taken in order to help reduce the likelihood of a recurrence of this incident. **(12)**
-

This question assessed learners' 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.

Part (a) required evaluation of the given scenario and to explore why the driver did not perceive the signal correctly. Many learners were able to give reasonable explanations. Good answers included a broad range of human errors, physical design issues and environmental concerns. Limited answers often did not accurately relate to perception or ignored the scenario. Some learners did not take on board the information provided in the question stem, ie the driver had seen the signal and had not received training or route information, and then provided reasons based on lack of training, lack of route knowledge and training.

In part (b) most learners outlined a range of actions to reduce the likelihood of a recurrence, covering job, individual and environmental concerns. Answers also balanced driver training issues and physical cab and signal issues. Limited answers concentrated on the train, track and signal without regard to the human element and lacked depth for each issue identified.

Examination technique

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

Learners 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 learners to be sufficiently prepared to provide the relevant depth of answer across a broad range of topic 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 topic to which the question relates.

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 topic 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 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 learners 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 learners were instructed that there was no need to make reference to specific control measures and yet did so. In another example learners wrote about selection of PPE when the question wording had clearly stated that this had already been undertaken. Another example was where learners wrote about barriers to rehabilitation without relating them to the bio-psychosocial model, even though the question specifically asked them to do this.

Some learners wrote large amounts of text on a single topic where only one mark could be awarded. Learners 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 learners misread some of the questions, to their disadvantage. This should be a relatively easy pitfall to overcome; learners should ensure that they make full use of the 10 minutes reading time to understand what each question requires. Learners 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. Learners 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, learners 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.

Learning Partners and learners 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 learner'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**....

Learners 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 learners for examination, or offering advice on examination technique, Learning Partners 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 learners' minds to the wider (and usually correct) possibilities.

Learners repeated the same point but in different ways

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. In some cases, particularly where questions had more than one part, learners 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 learners 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, learners 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 learners 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. Learners 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.

Learners 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 learners 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 learners who did not impose a structure on their answers. Starting each new point on a new line would assist in preventing learners 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 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. Learning Partners are encouraged to set written work and to provide feedback on written answers, looking to see that learners are able to come up with a broad range of relevant and accurate points; they should point out to learners where the same point is being made more than once.

Learners 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, learners will know more and be able to produce a broader and more detailed answer in the examination. Learners may also find it helpful to read through their answers as they write them in order to avoid repetition of points.

Learning Partners 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 learners may not have taken formal examinations for some years.

Learners produced an incoherent answer

Learners 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 learners 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 learners 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. Learners 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 learners 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.

Learners 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 learner.

Generally, there has been an improvement in response to command words, but a number of learners 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 learners 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.

Learner's handwriting was illegible

It is unusual to have to comment on this aspect of learner 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 learners 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 learners 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. Learning Partners should encourage and give opportunities for learners 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. Learners 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 Learning Partners that learners 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>

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

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

Learners did not answer all the questions

It has been noted that a number of learners do not attempt all of the questions on the examination and of course where a learner 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 learner'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 learners have a total lack of awareness that the topic covered in certain questions is even in the syllabus.

If learners 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 learner can do to address this point. Responsibility for delivering and studying the full breadth of the syllabus rests with both the Learning Partner and the individual learners and both must play their part to ensure learners 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, learners 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, learners 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 learners 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.

Learners 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 learners' 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 learner's **understanding** of the topic 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 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 learners:

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, learners are occasionally able to outline a legal breach but do not always explain why it had been breached. A number of instances of learners simply providing a list of information suggests that while learners probably have the correct understanding, they cannot properly express it. Whether this is a reflection of the learner'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. Learners 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.

Learners 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 learners 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. Learners 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. Learners should aim to achieve a level of understanding that enables them to describe key concepts.

Some learners 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. Learners 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 learners 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 learners will be expected to give more detail in their answers. 'Outline' requires a learner 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 learners should also be guided by the number of marks available. Those learners 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.

Learners 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 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.

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'. Learners tend to answer such questions satisfactorily, especially where a question might ask to 'identify' something and then 'give' an example. The learner 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 learners 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 learners 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 learners comment with justification on each of these areas they would gain good marks in that part of question.

Few learners are able to respond appropriately to this command word. At Diploma level, learners 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: <https://www.nebosh.org.uk/i-am/a-learner/> - from this page the document can be found by clicking on the relevant Qualification link, then on the 'Resources' tab.