
Examiners' Report

NEBOSH NATIONAL DIPLOMA IN OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY

UNIT C: WORKPLACE AND WORK EQUIPMENT

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 C and tutor reference documents for each Element.

Additional guidance on command words is provided in 'Guidance on command words used in learning outcomes and question papers' which is also available via the NEBOSH website.

Unit C

Workplace and work equipment

Question 1 A fire protection contractor has recommended the provision of portable water and carbon dioxide fire extinguishers to be placed in a multi-storey office block.

- (a) **Identify** the class of fire that the *water* extinguisher is designed for **AND give** an example of a material that is included in this class. (2)
- (b) **Outline** advantages of a *carbon dioxide* extinguisher. (2)
- (c) **Outline** what should be considered in siting the extinguishers. (6)

This question assessed learners' knowledge and understanding of learning outcome 3.4: Outline the factors to be considered when selecting fixed and portable firefighting equipment for the various types of fire.

Part (a) was well answered with the majority of learners able to identify the class of fire and examples of material covered by the class.

Part (b) was less well answered with many learners describing how the extinguisher worked and where it could be used, rather than outlining the advantages. The advantage of 'non-conducting' was not offered by most learners, who instead indicated that they could be used on electrical fires, without an accompanying outline.

For part (c) answers were limited, and only offered a few considerations regarding siting, with many learners missing the 'multi-storey' pointer in the question. Better answers considered height of handles, on escape routes, etc. The question's use of 'siting' is with regard to positioning, but some learners mentioned training and the class of extinguisher which, while always worthy of consideration, was not relevant to siting and so did not attract marks.

Question 2 An organisation can help ensure workplace transport safety by having safe vehicles and a safe site.

- (a) **Outline** control measures that should be considered to help ensure safe *vehicles*. (5)
- (b) **Outline** control measures that should be considered to help ensure a safe *site*. (5)

This question assessed learners' knowledge and understanding of learning outcome 10.1: Outline the factors to be considered in a workplace transport risk assessment and the controls available for managing workplace transport risk.

Control measures in part (a) could have included reversing klaxons and vehicle design to reduce blind spots. Some learners focused predominantly on maintenance or management controls, limiting the marks that could be awarded.

For part (b) an outline of the requirements for a safe site including stable roadways, segregation of pedestrians, etc, would have gained marks. This part was generally well answered.

Some learners included matters concerning 'safe drivers'; while correct, these did not gain any marks because they were not asked for in the question. There was also a tendency to include vehicle items under site, and vice versa, which limited available marks. This reinforces the requirement for learners to read and re-read the question carefully.

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

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

There were many good answers to part (a) with most learners displaying an understanding of 'competence'. However, some learners had difficulty with the meaning of 'training' and were not able to explain that training enhances knowledge. While definitions of both training and competence were offered, many overlooked the point of the question which was the difference between the two.

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

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

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- Question 4** An electrical installation on a dairy farm needs replacing.
- (a) **Outline** what may have caused the deterioration of the existing electrical installation. (5)
- (b) **Outline** what should be considered when designing the replacement electrical installation to help avoid future deterioration. (5)
-

This question assessed learners' knowledge and understanding of learning outcomes 4.3: Outline the main principles of the design and use of electrical systems and equipment in adverse or hazardous environments; and 8.3: Outline the issues relevant to the installation, use, inspection and maintenance of electrical systems.

Many learners did not recognise that the electrical installation was on a dairy farm and therefore did not consider causes of deterioration specific to a farm.

In part (a) very few learners mentioned wear of covers and housings, or corrosion of housings.

Learners found part (b) more challenging in that it required them to consider the design features of a replacement installation. Few learners mentioned electrical designs that addressed suitable supply and distribution systems with appropriate conductors, junction boxes and connections. Again, many learners did not direct their answer to a dairy farm and gave standardised solutions which gave some, but limited, marks.

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- Question 5** The Construction (Design and Management) Regulations 2015 (CDM) apply to all construction projects in Great Britain.
- (a) **Outline** the types of activity that are included in 'construction work' under CDM. **(8)**
- (b) **Outline** the conditions under which a project becomes 'notifiable' under CDM. **(2)**
-

This question assessed learners' knowledge and understanding of learning outcomes 9.1: Outline the scope and nature of construction activities; and 9.2: Explain the scope and application of the Construction (Design and Management) Regulations 2015 and associated guidance.

In part (a) the range of activities listed in Regulation 2 of the Construction Design and Management Regulations 2015 were sought. There were many good answers to this part, but some learners had difficulty with the less well known activities. Answers referring to general activities such as working at height, use of cranes, confined space entry etc, that did not reference that this was applied to the structure, did not gain marks.

For part (b) the conditions under which a project becomes notifiable are covered by Regulation 6 and many learners had difficulty with the definition. Some learners confused 'days' with 'hours', incorrectly citing '500 person hours'.

Overall, there was a mixed response to this question, with some very good answers but others where the learner had difficulty.

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- Question 6** (a) **Outline** *structural features* that protect a building from the spread of fire. **(8)**
- (b) **Outline** the behaviour of *plastics* in the event of a fire. **(2)**
-

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

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

Part (b) was not well answered. The possibility of melting plastic spreading the fire was worthy of marks but not often mentioned.

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- Question 7** A retail store has noticed a high level of slips and trips in its cafeteria and kitchen area.
- (a) **Outline** what may have led to this high level of incidents. (10)
- (b) **Outline** control measures to help reduce the number of slips and trips. (10)
-

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

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

In part (a) learners correctly outlined that factors may include floor conditions (this may be due to initial design, wear or contamination) and individual issues such as footwear, etc.

For part (b) the initial design of the floor, and in particular the micro-roughness of the surface were rarely mentioned. Learners concentrated on control measures linked to their answers in part (a) and outlined administrative and managerial controls such as cleaning, repairing and limiting carrying out these tasks when the store was open to emergency actions only. Cleaning spillages promptly was mentioned and was worthy of marks. This section was generally well answered. However, there was still some confusion among learners who referred to coefficient of friction, which requires two materials in contact with each other, and micro-roughness, which is a measure of the ability of a single surface to prevent slips.

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- Question 8** A mobile elevating work platform (MEWP) is used when erecting a steel-framed building.
- Outline** control measures that should be considered to help minimise risk when using MEWPs. (20)
-

This question assessed learners' knowledge and understanding of learning outcome 7.3: Outline the main hazards and control measures associated with access equipment and equipment for working at height.

Learners were expected to cover a number of topics such as competency, control of access to the MEWP, fall prevention, the working area and flooring conditions, overhead and buried services, and the application of the Lifting Operations and Lifting Equipment Regulations 1998 (LOLER).

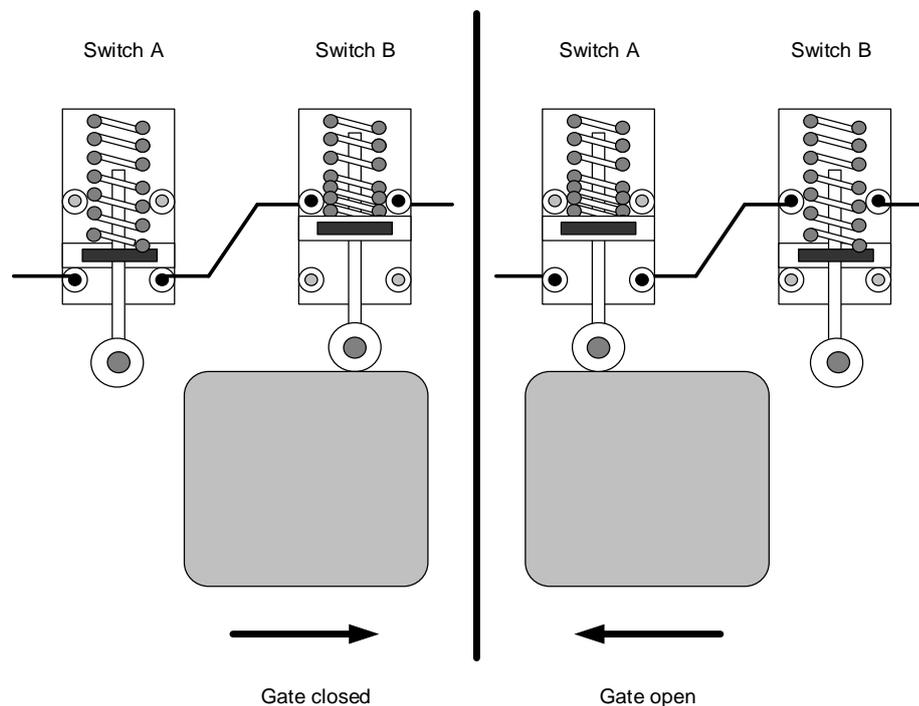
The question also looked at the application of knowledge to a given scenario, ie the use of MEWPS in this scenario to lift operatives to a position where they can attach steel joists to frames, usually by bolts, the joists being lifted by a separate crane. While this is a common fabrication process, many learners were not familiar with the system of work and some referred to the MEWP lifting the steel joists.

Overall, this was well answered. Some learners did not gain high marks because they limited the number of topics they covered and did not achieve the breadth of response required.

Question 9

An external lift on a construction site has an interlocked guard to prevent the lift operating when the gate is open. With reference to the diagram:

- (a) **identify** the **TWO** types of switch shown (Switch A and Switch B); (2)
- (b) **identify** the functional components associated with **BOTH** switches; (4)
- (c) **outline** the normal sequence of operation for the electrically-operated, cam-activated switch assembly when the gate opens and closes; (6)
- (d) **outline** ways in which electrically-operated, cam-activated switches may fail to operate as intended. (8)



This question assessed learners' knowledge and understanding of learning outcome 6.3: Outline the main types of protective devices found on general workplace machinery.

In part (a) learners were asked to identify the types of switch shown. For example, Switch A was wired as normally closed, positively operated. Most learners were able to identify this and the type of switch in (b) correctly.

For part (b) learners were able to identify the components of the switches by mentioning the cam follower and contacts.

Some learners found part (c) challenging and had difficulty correctly outlining the sequence of operation as the gate opens and closes. The main point being that as the gate closes it releases Switch A and depresses Switch B and vice versa when opening.

Those learners who had some practical experience of these types of switch were able to provide better answers. Topics sought included deliberate interference by the operator, wear, failure of components or environmental issues. A generally well answered question.

Question 10 Construction work is to take place in a rural area where electrical power for the site is to be gained from an existing 11kV overhead supply that cuts across the site on wooden poles.

Outline control measures that should be taken to help reduce risks associated with the:

- (a) overhead supply; (8)
 - (b) supply of electricity on the site. (12)
-

This question assessed learners' knowledge and understanding of learning outcomes 8.3: Outline the issues relevant to the installation, use, inspection and maintenance of electrical systems; and 8.4: Outline the main principles for safe working in the vicinity of high voltage systems.

Part (a) was generally well answered with better answers including reference to consulting the electrical supply company regarding possible re-routing, separation from the electrical systems by barriers, height restrictions on plant and equipment and safe systems of work.

For part (b) most learners were able to provide good answers, although some limited their marks by answering generic electrical installations without focusing on the fact that it was a construction site. Better answers included competency of testers and installers, protective devices, low voltage alternatives, and planning and marking of supplies. Those learners who also covered portable electrical equipment and reference to standards and guidance were able to gain higher marks. Overall, a well answered question.

Question 11 An old building is due to be demolished to make way for a new development. A contractor has submitted a demolition health and safety plan to cover the work.

Outline control measures to help reduce risks to health and safety from demolition activities. (20)

This question assessed learners' knowledge and understanding of learning outcome 9.5: Explain the hazards and control measures, associated with demolition work.

Those learners who adopted the construction health and safety plan approach and structured their answers on the many topics to consider gained higher marks. Some learners gave a range of hazards without outlining the controls necessary and so limited their marks. Topics that should have been covered included prevention of uncontrolled collapse, avoidance of falls from height and falling objects, hazardous material handling, vehicle movements, competency and training, site services such as electricity, and provision of emergency response including first aid.

Most learners were able to gain good marks. Better answers came from those learners who planned their answer and followed a structured layout.

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.