



# CIEH Annual Moderators' Report

## 2009–2010

### CIEH Level 3 Award in Risk Assessment Principles and Practice

This report covers the period 1 July 2009 to 30 June 2010.

It has been produced on behalf of CIEH moderators by the Curriculum Manager for Health and Safety.

#### Qualification performance

Percentage breakdown of the total number of candidates who completed the following assessment (1 July 2009 to 30 June 2010):

- **CIEH Level 3 Award in Risk Assessment Principles and Practice**

Credit: 22 %

Pass: 67 %

Fail: 10 %

These results show an 89 % success rate in achievement of a pass and above for this award, with a low failure rate of 10 %.

As well as drawing attention to strengths in candidate performance, a key purpose of this report is to highlight areas where candidate performance is weak and to suggest possible causes. It also recommends where improvements might be made, by both trainers and candidates.

#### General comments

The overall standard of candidate performance remains high. However, there are some common and recurrent problems.

On completion of the Level 3 Award in Risk Assessment Principles and Practice, candidates should possess the knowledge and skills to be able to conduct a risk assessment, as well as to plan, organise and implement a risk assessment programme to assist their employer. For this reason, candidates need to demonstrate and provide evidence of their proficiency and competency to achieve this award. However, there are candidates whose basic underpinning knowledge and practical application appear lacking, and they struggle to understand and differentiate between even the most basic terminology, such as 'hazard' and 'risk'.

It is imperative that trainers consult with candidates during the course to understand any difficulties they are experiencing and to establish whether these can be addressed to enable candidates to meet the requirements or whether a decision needs to be made not to continue with the course at that stage.

#### Assignments

Assignments are a method of determining whether candidates have been able to:

- assimilate information in the taught part of the course
- research the given subject
- analyse and evaluate
- present information in a form that demonstrates their understanding of the subject.

In general, candidates perform sufficiently well in assignment work, and some assignments are excellent. Strong assignments are generally well structured, concise and coherent, and it is evident that the candidates have good knowledge and understanding of risk assessment.

There are some assignments where, with a little more thought and structure, candidates would have picked up those few marks that make the difference between pass and fail. There is some consolation in the evidence that those resubmitting the assignment often perform better on the second attempt.

Poor assignments generally reflect a lack of understanding of key concepts, insufficient research into the subject or difficulty in expressing relevant points.

#### Addressing the requirements

It is clear that weaker candidates need guidance on how to prepare a report and on the particular requirements of the assignment as indicated by the marking criteria.

As many candidates will not have undertaken this level of academic study/application since school or college, they will need support in reaching the academic standard required for such coursework (see section 'Trainer support for candidates').

The assignment for the Level 3 Award in Risk Assessment Principles and Practice is designed to test candidates' knowledge, understanding and application of theory in a practical risk assessment. To fulfil this assignment, candidates need to ensure that all the performance criteria stipulated in the candidate assessment record are satisfied and included in their submission. They should be reminded that it is their application to the task, their background knowledge and their methodology/results that are being scrutinised by the assignment activity – *not* the employer's workplace.

The assignment must focus on the entire process of risk assessment and cover all the performance criteria fully – a hazard-spotting exercise, safety inspection or pro-forma questionnaire may be a useful starting point, but does not constitute an assignment for this award.

Candidates must use every opportunity to demonstrate their depth of knowledge and skills of application. Specialised assessments (for example COSHH and manual handling) are limited, and candidates should be advised to choose a more general assessment that will allow them to better display their abilities to analyse risks. Candidates who carry out risk assessments with a specific focus find it difficult to cover a sufficient range of issues and invariably struggle to gain all the available marks.

Highlighted below are key areas that moderators have identified as being in need of improvement in candidates' assignment responses. Trainers must ensure that these recurrent areas of weakness are addressed in their training delivery.

### Fulfilling performance criteria

Candidates must ensure that **all four** performance criteria listed in the candidate guidelines are fulfilled in order to complete the assignment successfully. It is not unusual for some key areas to be poorly addressed or missed entirely.

Trainers need to be aware of the issues below and must advise candidates accordingly.

#### Criterion 1 – knowledge and understanding of the principles of risk assessment

Candidates often fail to provide evidence of their knowledge and understanding of key concepts relating to risk assessment, particularly concerning the process and definitions of fundamental terms.

Not only must candidates carry out and document an actual risk assessment in their assignment report, they must also provide background information and evidence of their understanding of key principles. Candidates must show awareness of:

- why it is necessary to perform a risk assessment
- different options for identifying hazards and evaluating risk
- different methods of recording and presenting findings to ensure effective communication.

#### Criterion 2 – knowledge and understanding of the legal requirements relating to risk assessment

A number of candidates are still citing out-of-date or inappropriate legislation. Often legislation is simply listed rather than being contextualised within the body of the report, and candidates fail to provide appropriate explanations to justify their knowledge.

The criterion specifies what evidence is required, including definitions (not just the overall definitions taken from approved codes of practice). Candidates should include detail, such as background to legislation and common causes of accidents, to support their analysis and review, ensuring relevance to the workplace being studied and the risk assessment being undertaken. It is not necessary to include general health and safety law, but candidates should demonstrate their knowledge of the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations in relation to the risk assessment process and contextualise this to fit with the specific circumstances of their assignment.

Candidates must ensure that they include legal reports relevant to the risk assessment.

#### Criterion 3 – risk assessment in practice

Candidates must be able to apply the principles and legislation identified in the first two criteria to the practical risk assessment and their own workplace.

As this qualification is aimed at supervisors, managers or potential managers, candidates must demonstrate their depth of understanding and knowledge from a management perspective, i.e. what they would do in certain circumstances as the manager and how they would manage a situation and implement appropriate solutions, systems and controls. Many candidates fail to demonstrate how they might use their knowledge to plan and undertake the risk assessment.

Candidates need to identify and describe the key stages.

##### 3a – ability to plan the assessment

It is useful for candidates to include a brief introductory statement about their role in the organisation and the risk assessment itself, in order to contextualise the approach they are taking as well as the type and method of risk assessment being carried out. However, lengthy personal details/CV information should not be included.

Planning necessarily involves others in the organisation and is part of an ongoing process of continuous improvement. Some candidates fail to acknowledge in their planning process other people/colleagues with whom they would consult, as well as in-house records.

##### 3b – analysis of the workplace or work activity(ies) being assessed

Many candidates are still getting confused between the terms 'hazard' and 'risk', including inadequate distinction between hazard and loss. Candidates who are unable to understand and apply the most basic terminology will inevitably struggle to meet the requirements of this award.

The number and range/breadth of hazards provided by candidates are often limited when considering the high mark allocated to this criterion. Candidates should be encouraged to cover health hazards as well as safety hazards, for example dermatitis.

Candidates completing general assessments need to recognise the need to carry out a specialist assessment in certain circumstances, for example when they identify hazards such as legionella, display screen equipment and manual handling. In such cases, the corrective action is to undertake further assessment, and this is a valid outcome.

Candidates do not always demonstrate how they arrived at their risk conclusions/ratings. Those who perform best use simple likelihood and severity scales, and it is not necessary to undertake quantitative risk assessment for each hazard or risk control measure proposed. However, it may be helpful to use the concept of numerical risk when deciding which control is most suitable from a choice of two.

##### 3c – selection of control measures

Candidates should discuss control measures for all the hazards identified in the report. References to the prioritisation of actions are occasionally overlooked by some candidates in the non-compulsory assignments.

**3d – completion of the assessment**

In many cases, candidates failed to address the performance criteria relating to monitoring/review recommendations.

**Criterion 4: overall approach and presentation of report**

Where candidates use their own company risk assessment templates/forms or those provided by the training centre, it must be ensured that these allow them to cover **all** elements of the risk assessment process stipulated by the award criteria. If these forms are restrictive, candidates should be advised to include an addendum that enables them to fulfil the assessment requirements.

Some candidates place an undue reliance on completed pro-formas when additional marks are available for an explanation as to the decision-making process.

Candidates should check their work thoroughly against the performance criteria before submission – a detailed checklist provided by the trainer may be helpful.

**Candidate self-evaluation**

Self-evaluation is an essential part of this award, to ensure a process of continuous professional development and competency as a risk assessor. Candidates should be encouraged to complete the self-assessment fully.

**Legislative knowledge and accuracy**

Candidates need to research the subject thoroughly and cover the whole range of legislative requirements. This includes quoting the correct UK statutes and regulations, sections etc., and, where appropriate, industry codes of practice and guidelines. It is important to contextualise both the legal framework and any legislation cited and to state how it applies to the practical risk assessment activity.

Trainers could usefully direct candidates to current resources, such as the HSE and UNISON websites, as well as specialist journals and publications.

Candidates lose marks where they cite out-of-date legislation/references. For example, they should be aware of changes in legislation relating to fire, noise and COSHH, as well as new regulations that require specialist risk assessment (such as working at heights and asbestos duty to manage).

**Focus, length and structure**

Candidates must focus on the subject of the assignment. The selection of topic is important, and candidates need to define the scope of their assignment clearly. As well as being clear about the questions they need to address, careful planning and clear structure will help candidates to maintain focus.

Assignments should be within the recommended word length. Comprehensive assignments can be completed within the 2,500 word count plus any appendices. It should be reiterated that quality is better than quantity. The tendency is that longer assignments stray from the subject and candidates include unnecessary/irrelevant material, duplication of points, or information that is not their own work, such as company documents.

Many candidates omit important areas by failing to use headings. They should be encouraged to use headings in their assignments to help them maintain focus, dividing the material according to the sections mentioned in the title and dealing with each area separately. They must identify the key verbs and answer appropriately.

Candidates should note the number of marks available for each section and sub-section, as these are indicative of how much information should be included. For example, they often write copiously for performance criterion 1, where a maximum of 10 marks is available, but then lose momentum as they reach the end of the assignment and write very little for performance criterion 4, where a maximum of 20 marks is available. This poor planning can be the difference between a pass and a fail for the whole assignment.

Reference materials such as HSE reports, reading lists, diagrams and pro-formas should be placed in appendices. It is essential that these are clearly numbered and accurately referenced. Ensure that the size of the appendices does not exceed that of the candidate's script. Items in appendices should be outlined in the main text and not just placed there for markers to read.

**Acknowledging sources**

Candidates must display their own knowledge and understanding in their report, and not just their ability to quote from existing literature.

When including information that is not their own work (for example company charts, plans and flow diagrams), candidates **must** acknowledge and submit this as supportive data and not present it as their own material. Sources must always be acknowledged with a citation.

Markers and moderators are still identifying plagiarism. Some candidates have used content direct from the internet, HSE booklets and company manuals that is clearly not their own work and failed to state the origin of the information. Where this is blatant, candidates will have their assignments referred.

Trainers should remain vigilant for plagiarism and be familiar with key texts and popular websites that are likely to be copied. Action should be taken as soon as plagiarism is identified.

# Notes for trainers

## Marking

### Overgenerous marking

Moderators have found on occasion that trainers are being overgenerous in awarding marks that do not match the standards illustrated in the CIEH marking criteria and exemplar materials. Candidates may therefore be marked down at the moderation stage, or batches where over-marking is evident may be referred for remarking before moderation proceeds.

In some instances, mark allocation has been incorrect, for example awarding 17 marks when the maximum available for a strand was 10.

Trainers must adhere to marking guidelines to assist in placing the candidate's work within a grade band. They must decide to what extent the assignment meets the specific performance criteria in these guidelines and then allocate marks within the range, according to how well the work matches the standard grade descriptors.

### Equity of marking

As assignments are moderated, trainers must be consistent and ensure equity when marking.

Concern has been raised by moderators that there appears to be a lack of evidence of internal standardisation of marking within centres. Internal moderation processes are essential to ensure consistency and equity of marking.

### Required levels of feedback

Trainer feedback is occasionally brief. Clear, detailed comments written on assignments by trainers will help moderators appreciate the rationale behind their marking and speed up the moderation process. Additionally, feedback should be provided on how the candidate could have gained extra marks.

Where feedback is missing or gives no indication as to how marks have been allocated, assignments will be returned and only moderated when acceptable feedback is provided.

### Multiple attempts at assignments

If a candidate makes more than one attempt to complete an assignment, trainers must provide details (on the back page of the candidate assessment record) about the weaknesses identified and the advice given to the candidate.



Chartered  
Institute of  
Environmental  
Health

### Customer Services

Chartered Institute of Environmental Health  
Chadwick Court, 15 Hatfields, London SE1 8DJ

**Telephone** 020 7827 5800 (Option 1)

**Email** customerservices@cieh.org **Web** www.cieh.org/training

## Legislative knowledge and accuracy

While the onus is on candidates to carry out the research, trainers must ensure that they keep up to date with legislative changes and that this is reflected in course materials.

## Trainer support for candidates

It is essential that trainers take candidates through the CIEH candidate guidelines to ensure that they are fully aware of what needs to be addressed in assignments in terms of breadth and depth of information. Some candidates need additional assistance when structuring their assignment; this can be achieved by expanding on the assessment criteria to give detailed requirements.

Trainers are encouraged to mentor and support candidates appropriately in the research and development of coursework and, where necessary, to coach them in the required skills to fulfil their assignment with confidence.

Trainers should help candidates understand the application of risk assessment in a broader context by examining other workplace practices outside their own organisation, for example transport systems, construction sites or large retailers. There are useful DVDs that can support this process.

It would be useful for candidates to look at HSE guidance and the HSE examples of risk assessment in practice in order for them to understand what is expected. Candidates should be reminded that they are being assessed on their knowledge of the risk assessment process as a whole within an organisation and should ensure they give themselves the opportunity to demonstrate the wider concepts of risk assessment.

Candidates should be encouraged to submit draft copies of assignments to enable additional support and guidance to be given. The trainer should offer general comments on strengths and weaknesses and draw attention to any areas of omission. Candidates should then be given enough time to amend their assignments in order to benefit from the comments made by the trainer. This is good practice and will allow less able candidates to learn from experiences and produce assignments of an adequate standard. If a final copy of the assignment is returned to the candidate for improvement, this should be recorded on the candidate assessment record.

Timely and appropriate feedback on each assignment is crucial. It should provide support and guidance to the candidates on their learning shortcomings and offer justification for the marks awarded in each section.

Trainers should consider the support that they will provide to candidates prior to resubmitting an assignment.

### Procedure for reasonable adjustments

Trainers should refer to the 'Procedure for reasonable adjustment' if there are special needs to be accommodated.

## Steve Granger

Curriculum Manager, Health and Safety

September 2010