

CIEH Annual Moderators' Report

2009–2010

CIEH Level 4 Award in Health and Safety in the Workplace

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 qualification (1 July 2009 to 30 June 2010):

- **CIEH Level 4 Award in Health and Safety in the Workplace**

Credit: 9 %

Pass: 30 %

Fail: 61 %

These results show an increase of 19 % in the failure rate for this award, compared with the figure for 2008–2009.

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, in order to increase future pass rates.

General comments

The overall standard of candidate performance has declined, and many of the issues highlighted in last year's report continue to cause problems.

Candidate eligibility for the level 4 award

Candidates and trainers are reminded that the level 4 qualification is aimed at managers/supervisors or potential managers/supervisors, and that the expected competencies for the successful achievement of this award are therefore commensurately challenging.

A number of candidates appear to have been recruited onto the course without sufficient prior knowledge and appreciation of health and safety to meet the exacting demands of a level 4 qualification. Consequently, they struggle with the content, terminology and requirements of the written paper. Indeed, there is some evidence that candidates move straight from level 2 to level 4. This raises concerns about employers placing their employees on a level 4 course in preparation for them to undertake a management role for health and safety at work without assessing or appreciating the employees' capability to undertake the rigours of such a qualification. Candidates should have achieved at least a level 3 award in health and safety in the workplace, or have gained sufficient practical experience in managing workplace health and safety, before undertaking this level 4 qualification.

It should be ensured that candidates are fully aware of the levels of knowledge and understanding they will be expected to demonstrate in both the assignment and examination. Trainers might consider sending the course book to candidates in advance of the training to allow them to appreciate what the course involves.

Trainers should determine candidates' eligibility for the level 4 award at the earliest opportunity, either through some means of initial assessment before they embark on the course (though this may not always be possible) or during the early stages of the course.

Failure to ensure that candidates are up to the expected standard or capable of this level of study will result in residual course dilution and require basics to be re-taught, leaving no time for subject development at this advanced level.

Consequently, able candidates may be disadvantaged if on the same course as those who are ill prepared to undertake the level 4 qualification.

Trainer support during the course

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/examination at that stage.

If candidates are new to the subject or have limited experience of sitting examinations or writing assignments, centres should defer the assessment process rather than risk losing the confidence of candidates or their employers.

Course duration and focus

Trainers are reminded that the duration for delivering the course stated in the training literature is a *minimum* requirement, which assumes that candidates are fully able to undertake the assessment activities and have good command of written communication. The learning needs of candidates should be assessed carefully and taken into account, and it may be necessary to spend longer on areas of difficulty.

On this basis, it may be helpful for trainers to devise a pre-course task that asks candidates to evaluate their existing subject knowledge and to familiarise themselves with the level 4 syllabus. By identifying areas of weakness at this early stage, it may be possible to prioritise learning areas. One successful approach is to issue a case study based on a recent press release and ask questions.

Syllabus areas

There is still great concern among examiners and moderators that some parts of the syllabus are not being taught (for example safety associated with contract relationships) and that other parts are not being covered in sufficient depth (for example the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations risk control strategy or consultation with employees). Consequently, candidates are being 'caught out' when new or revised questions are introduced. These syllabus areas represent the cornerstone of successful safety management in an organisation, and it is extremely troubling that some candidates cannot demonstrate understanding of the principles (as some are merely development of subordinate qualification principles).

Candidates must be fully conversant with the **whole** syllabus and the scope of the subjects within it, rather than only focusing on specific topics. Without this level of knowledge, they will be unable to meet the rigours of the level 4 award.

Requirements

Level 4 questions test knowledge, understanding and application. These elements are incorporated into the questions in order to assess the breadth and depth of the candidates' abilities. They are explained below in light of recurring comments about leading words/verbs and their meanings.

Trainers should provide examples of questions in their training/teaching and not assume that candidates can automatically differentiate between the skills of knowledge, understanding and application.

Knowledge

This aspect tests a candidate's ability to recall facts and information and uses question words such as 'list', 'state' and 'define'. For example:

- '**List** three ways of checking that the safety training given to an employee has been adequate.'
- '**State** the purposes of a fire risk assessment.'
- '**Define...**' (give the exact meaning of).

Key weak subject knowledge areas highlighted by moderators are working at height, radiation, contractor management, CDM duties and general aspects of the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations. Candidates are not expected to cite regulation details or numbers but should understand the key requirements.

Understanding

This aspect tests a candidate's comprehension and uses question words such as 'identify', 'describe', 'explain' and 'outline'.

- **identify** – name or pinpoint something
- **describe** – communicate the key features of something or a process, perhaps using examples
- **explain** – this is different from describe; explanations often have short descriptions but also express the relationships between component parts, for example describe a ladder and then explain how it is used
- **outline** – this involves part description and part explanation, but in a more concise format.

Proficient candidates use examples of good practice to demonstrate their depth of understanding.

Weaker candidates who only make lists are not 'explaining', 'describing' or 'outlining' as specifically requested in the question and fail to provide the relevant detail. This severely limits the number of marks that can be awarded.

Candidates should recognise that at level 4 their understanding will be checked using realistic and relevant examples of the syllabus being applied to the workplace.

Application

Question words such as 'apply', 'demonstrate', 'prepare' and 'solve' are frequently used for application questions.

Candidates are required either to make reasoned arguments for or against a point (or several points) or to find an answer to a problem. For example, after identifying the key points to include in an emergency plan in the event of fire, candidates could be asked to outline how each point could be monitored.

This qualification is aimed at managers or potential managers, and a recurrent weakness is candidates failing to answer questions from a management perspective. They need to address how they would react as a manager in given circumstances, and demonstrate how they would manage a situation and implement a solution. Many candidates appear to have little understanding of how they might use their knowledge to develop health and safety management systems.

Examination technique

High-scoring scripts are generally well structured and coherent, and it is evident that candidates have the required depth and application of knowledge.

There are some scripts where, with a little more thought and structure, candidates would have picked up those few marks that make the difference between pass and fail.

However, many candidates continue to demonstrate poor technique, especially in Part 2. This may be due to their general educational standard, and these candidates may need additional academic support.

The following comments from moderators highlight the key areas in need of improvement in candidates' responses. Trainers should emphasise these matters when providing feedback to candidates.

Think like a manager

Candidates must demonstrate their depth of understanding and knowledge of key concepts, systems and controls from a management perspective. Some candidates answer questions from an employee perspective, when additional marks are often available for reference to management arrangements. For example, an employee would refer to the various controls in place, whereas a manager would plan, prioritise, implement, monitor and review.

Understand the syllabus

Candidates need to be able to answer questions based on any part of the syllabus (as it may be applied generally in a workplace), so it is essential that they address and revise every element in their course programme. Candidates' answers sometimes appear limited and fail to address the full scope of questions or identify wider issues other than subject basics.

Candidates should be made aware that attempting to answer examination questions with reference to what happens in their own workplace has serious limitations. They need to produce answers that are based on the course material and the official guidance applicable to the situation.

Read the question carefully

It is important to emphasise that candidates must read questions carefully to understand what is being asked of them. It is still apparent that some candidates do not read questions properly and as a result waste both time and marks by giving inappropriate answers. In Part 2, they should choose the question that best reflects their knowledge and understanding, but they should be careful to answer the question as set, rather than one that they would like to answer. Note that there is no need for candidates to write out the question in their answer.

Using highlighter pens to pick out key words/verbs in the question can help candidates to ensure that they respond to all the requirements and avoid deviation.

Quality vs quantity

In Part 1, one word answers do not provide sufficient depth or detail.

Candidates are required to give reasoned answers to questions in Part 2, as indicated by the commands to 'outline', 'describe', 'list' or 'explain'. These question words give an indication of the depth of response and essential information required. Bullet-pointed lists do not provide sufficient depth and breadth of information; neither does using vague or generalised statements such as 'following good practice'.

Conversely, in either part of the examination, writing copiously on a subject without considering the finer points of the question is not an effective practice. It leads to digression and unnecessary/irrelevant information, which will not gain any marks.

Some candidates repeat similar points, or the same point by means of an alternative phrase, when additional marks are available for citing different examples. Duplicated material can only be credited once.

Structure, focus and clarity

Questions are specifically worded and written in a format that guides the candidate. Stronger candidates use the structure of the question to plan their answer. Lack of clear structure and focus is a key area where weaker candidates continually let themselves down. Trainers should provide guidance and support to candidates with regard to the length, structure and necessary depth of answers for Part 2 questions.

For Part 2 questions, it is essential that the question number and relevant sections are identified clearly. In order to achieve high scores, candidates should be encouraged to divide their answers according to the requirements of the question by using headings, subheadings and underlining, in order to provide clarity and maintain focus.

The use of a simple essay/answer plan with key headings would help candidates to structure Part 2 responses in a logical and concise manner. This approach allows candidates to focus on the particular demands of the question and to respond to the specific issues. It will also ensure that no salient information is omitted and points are not repeated.

Individual sentences should ideally not exceed 25 words in length, although this can be difficult when working under timed examination conditions.

Time management and planning

Candidates need to prepare thoroughly for the written paper and manage their time across the two parts and six questions. In a paper that lasts for two and a half hours, they need to plan their time carefully.

Candidates have lost most marks by failing to answer all the questions or spending an inordinate amount of time on the first question they answer and rushing the last. This weakness is often as much about candidates failing to plan adequately or pace themselves accordingly as a greater or lesser depth of knowledge informing their application to the question.

Candidates should look at the mark scheme to gauge the amount of information the question is requesting and the comparative amount of time they should afford in answering it. This is particularly important for Part 2 questions.

Candidates who are unsure of how to answer a section of the question should move on; they should leave sufficient time to return to it before the end of the examination when they are checking their work.

Candidates should be advised to allow around 15 minutes at the end of the examination to check through their answers for any gaps or errors – in particular, they should make certain that the key issues have been addressed.

Legibility

On occasion, candidates' handwriting is difficult to read, and sometimes it cannot be deciphered at all – if a candidate's answers are not clear, marks will be limited. If during the training programme this problem is identified by trainers, the candidate should be advised and help should be sought.

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 tend to cover the issues concisely, with enough detail to demonstrate a good understanding.

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 many candidates need guidance on how to prepare a report and on the particular requirements of the assignment as indicated by the marking criteria. It is not unusual for some criteria to be poorly addressed or missed entirely.

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').

Candidates should ensure that **all** sections of the assignment are sufficiently covered. Some candidates neglect to tackle key sections.

References to risk assessment principles and the prioritisation of actions are occasionally overlooked by some candidates in the non-compulsory assignments.

Some candidates place an undue reliance on submitting complex pro-formas when additional marks are available for an explanation as to the decision-making process. Candidates should be reminded that their approach is under scrutiny as well as the product.

Legislative knowledge and accuracy

Candidates may lose marks where they cite out-of-date legislation/references in open-book assessment activities. An assignment that relies on outdated information and does not mention significant and up-to-date legislation will not achieve all available marks.

Candidates need to research the subject thoroughly. This includes quoting the correct UK statutes and supporting regulations, ACOps, GNs, and, where appropriate, industry codes of practice and guidelines.

Focus, length and structure

Candidates must focus on the subject of the assignment. As well as being clear about the questions they need to address, careful planning and a 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. The tendency is that longer assignments stray from the subject and candidates include unnecessary material, duplication of points, or information that is not their own work, such as company documents.

Candidates should be encouraged to use headings in their assignments, clearly 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.

Reading lists, reference lists, floor plans, diagrams, examples of paperwork/pro-formas etc. 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 body of the assignment and not just placed there for markers to read.

Acknowledging sources

When including information that is not their own work (for example diagrams and tables), candidates **must** acknowledge and submit this as supportive data and not present it as their own material. Sources should always be cited carefully. Markers and moderators are still identifying plagiarism, usually of other candidates' work or web-based literature.

Notes for trainers

Marking

Overgenerous marking

Moderators are often finding 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. In some cases, this may mean that they do not satisfy the requirements for the award, even though they have passed the written examination. Trainers are advised to undertake internal cross-marking exercises if possible and to ensure strict application of the marking guide.

Trainers **must** adhere to the 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 descriptors.

Equity of marking

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

Required levels of feedback

Trainer feedback is occasionally brief. Clear, detailed comments written on assignments by trainers are essential to help moderators appreciate the rationale behind their marking and speed up the moderation process. These comments should be specific to individual assignments and not generalised.

There are still instances where the trainer has signed the candidate assessment records on or after the date of the written examination paper. As this could indicate that the candidates were sitting the examination without first receiving feedback on their assignment, this practice is unacceptable. It is imperative to give appropriate and supportive feedback to candidates so that they can learn from their shortcomings. Providing such guidance before candidates sit the written paper will help them to avoid making the same mistakes in the examination and should allow them to achieve a better grade. This means that assignments should be marked well in advance of candidates sitting the written paper.

Note that trainers should not repeat the phraseology of the performance criteria in their feedback, as this is insufficient to guide the candidate.

Further feedback on areas of strengths and weaknesses from the syllabus would be useful.

Trainers must ensure that the correct candidate assessment records are fully and accurately completed and signed by both the candidate and the trainer.

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/technical changes and changes in professional practice, and that this is reflected in course materials.

Training delivery

The complexities of some learning outcomes mean that the trainer needs to teach the material in an instructive manner. The information should be presented clearly and accurately so that candidates appreciate the range and depth of the various topics and apply the acquired knowledge to their own workplaces.

Trainer support for candidates

Pre-course information

It is important that candidates are provided with accurate, comprehensive pre-course information regarding level 4 qualifications and that they are fully advised on the requirements and knowledge/skills/experience needed to cope with the demands of the course and to fulfil the objectives and learning outcomes.

Directing candidates to the HSE website at this stage will alert them to the scope of the subject matter; it is a valuable resource to supplement training notes.

Practice questions

It is recommended that trainers spend time focusing on examination technique and include a session on this within the course scheme of work.

Devising mock examination questions for candidates is good practice. Precise wording is essential, and the syllabus will provide a useful guide to trainers who wish to compile their own bank of mock questions. If necessary, candidates should undertake a timed mock examination, in order to evaluate their time management skills before they sit the examination proper.

Short written exercises in groups with trainer feedback might be another way to increase confidence.

Support in assignments

It is essential that trainers take candidates through the candidate guidelines document to ensure that they are fully aware of what needs to be addressed and how, in both the examination and assignments.

Trainers are encouraged to mentor and support candidates appropriately in the research and development of coursework and, where necessary, coach them in the required skills to fulfil their assignment and tackle the examination with confidence. The ability of candidates to express themselves in writing varies significantly, and it may be necessary to provide assistance with written communication skills.

Trainers should help candidates to understand the principles of health and safety 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.

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. The candidates should then be given enough time to amend their assignments in order to benefit from the comments made by the trainer.

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

Trainers should consider the support that they will provide candidates prior to re-sitting the written paper and/or resubmitting an assignment.

Coverage

As candidates need to be able to cope with questions based on any part of the syllabus, it is essential that trainers cover every element in their course programme.

Candidates should be encouraged and given the opportunity to read around the subject, for example reading other health and safety material such as HSE publications, journals, magazines, prosecution reports and textbooks. Trainers might provide reading lists and webpage references in order to encourage such further study. It would be useful for candidates to subscribe to the free HSE newsletter service.

Procedure for reasonable adjustment

Trainers should refer to the 'Procedure for reasonable adjustment' if there are special needs to be accommodated. This must be done prior to any assessment activity.

Presentation of scripts

Trainers should ensure that scripts are secured with staples or treasury tags; do not use plastic sleeves for each page of text, as this slows down the moderation process.

If writing an assignment by hand, candidates should ensure that they write clearly.

For typed assignments, candidates should be encouraged to use a standard font such as Arial or similar, displayed at size 12.

Other comments

The increase in the failure rate this year is of great concern, but pass rates can be improved through the diligence and approach offered by trainers to their candidates.

Trainers are actively encouraged to provide regular feedback to the CIEH to ensure a process of continual improvement. This may be on any issue, for example administration, course materials, examination questions and assignments.

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September 2010



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