



Sword of Honour 2017

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Results

In 2017, 72 submissions were received for the Sword of Honour awards and 56 (78%) of these reached the pass standard.

There is no quota of Swords to be awarded and nor will there be in future years. If every applicant meets the minimum criteria, every applicant will be awarded a Sword of Honour.

General Comments

A maximum of 60 marks are available for the written aspect of the Sword of Honour application. Applicants must score a minimum of 45 marks to remain eligible with a minimum of two individual responses being scored within the top mark band (11-15 marks). Submissions become ineligible for a Sword of Honour should any individual responses be scored within the lower mark band (0-5 marks).

With the pass standard set high (45 out of 60), it is important to score well on each question. One or two weak answers will put the pass standard out of reach. As in previous years, high scoring applicants answered all aspects of each question and adhered closely to the marking scheme. This allowed them to access the top mark band for each question. High scoring applicants also adhered to the requirement that responses to each question must not exceed 750 words (i.e. 3,000 words overall per submission) and provided clear, succinct and well-structured answers.

The Sword of Honour assessment methodology is now more closely linked to the Five Star Occupational Health and Safety Audit Report and its findings. Despite it being an explicit requirement of both the questions and marking scheme, it was regrettable that a significant proportion of applicants failed to develop responses incorporating a clear link to the audit findings. The statement '*By reference to the outcomes from your recent Five Star Audit*', prefixing each individual question, was inconsistently observed by the applicants to these awards and it was notable that only the strongest submissions maintained this important link throughout.

There were a large number of high quality, well written submissions. It was obvious that a considerable amount of preparation, thought, time and effort had been put into these submissions for which the applicants concerned are to be commended. Whilst some submissions did fall short of the standard required for a Sword of Honour, it should be

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acknowledged that these organisations nonetheless have excellent health and safety management systems as recognised by their rating in the Five Star Occupational Health and Safety Audit ('audit').

As noted in previous years there remains some work to be done on the 'health' part of health and safety. Some applicants went into great detail about safety but made little reference to health. Health is an issue that affects us all; personally, collectively and universally. This scheme aims to promote health at work as a key consideration. Applicants are again reminded of the importance of reading each question carefully and in providing a complete response to the whole question. Question Four, for example, required applicants to explain how the organisation's top management lead and promote a positive health and safety culture within the organisation. Regrettably, a number of applicants neglected the health component of this question and then compounded matters by framing their response in generic and insufficiently site-specific terms.

As in previous years, applicants are reminded to study the Chief Adjudicator's Report from the previous year prior to completing the application as this document provides helpful insight, comments and direction on what is required. In addition, applicants are reminded that the mark scheme is made available to applicants to reference when completing their application. The mark scheme should be considered throughout the application process. The Chief Adjudicator is of the belief that these documents are often overlooked by lower scoring applicants - something which needlessly risks their achievement of the award.

Main Business Activities

Whilst marks are not awarded for this section, it is essential that applicants clearly describe the main business activities, the personnel involved and the most significant health and safety risks and issues. Indeed, this section underpins the whole application as it places the remainder into context and provides the adjudicator with a valuable insight into the organisation, its operations and risk profile. It was noted that most applicants this year provided a comprehensive summary of the main business activities. However, some applicants omitted the most significant health and safety risks or issues.

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By reference to the outcomes from your recent Five Star Audit:

1. Explain how the Five Star Audit outcomes and recommendations will be used as an input factor within the planning process when establishing health and safety objectives for the coming year(s)

This question had a number of components to it; outcomes, recommendations, input, planning, health, safety and duration. This structure provided applicants with an opportunity to showcase how the Five Star Audit would be used, post-audit, in practice.

It was notable that only the strongest submissions to these awards addressed the various components of the question in full. These submissions included a clear description of the review mechanisms in place and the methodologies used (together with commentary on why these approaches were regarded as suitable) as well as prioritisation and how it was achieved. A minority of responses, typically from those applicants achieving high or maximum scores across their submission, provided details of the various levels at which audit outcomes and recommendations were evaluated (Board level, Health & Safety committee, regional-level management meetings, site-level performance reviews, etc.). Such responses offered an overview of how the effectiveness review fed-back into high level reviews and future amendments to strategy (thereby 'closing the loop'). These responses also considered stakeholder involvement and how seeking the views of others such as unions or the HSE had provided a more complete evaluation.

Most applicants addressed the 'outcomes' and 'recommendations' components of the question in adequate terms. However, rather frustratingly, only the stronger responses to this question identified the connection between these components and their rather obvious function as input factors for driving continuous improvement and forward-planning.

Applicants are again reminded to answer all parts of the question. Whilst most applicants addressed the safety component of the question in adequate terms, only the stronger responses made appropriate reference to health. Similarly, it was noted that very few applicants expanded their response to address the timescale specified by the question (often limiting it to the forthcoming twelve months only).

A disappointing number of applicants failed to reference the audit findings and tended towards generic and insufficiently site-specific commentary that was lacking in appropriate depth or scope for an award at this level.

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2. Discuss how the organisation has considered internal and external factors which impact upon the effective implementation, maintenance and continual improvement of the OHSMS

As with Question 1, this question incorporated a number of dimensions that each need to be addressed in the response.

Clearly, given the current economic climate and political uncertainty that exists in the world today, there are a number of serious challenges facing businesses and the health and safety profession. Productivity, investment to the OHSMS, investment in employees (numbers and/or competence), legislative change and the United Kingdom's prospective withdrawal from the European Union ('Brexit') are all potentially relevant examples of factors that could be considered here.

Stronger responses included a full discussion of relevant factors (both internal and external), applied these factors carefully to the implementation, maintenance and continual improvement components of the question and then concluded with how this impacts on the OHSMA. The highest scoring responses to this question also presented a clear description of the process used by the organisation for considering internal and external factors - accompanied, typically, by the methodologies used and a suitable justification for their selection.

Weaker responses tended towards a basic discussion or description that neglected the various components of the question or the process involved. Frequently, responses of this nature also lacked balance through their focus on either internal or external factors (the question explicitly requests both).

3. Explain how the effective participation of non-managerial roles in the continual improvement of the OHSMS is ensured

Effective worker engagement and stakeholder management drives participation and it is essential in achieving health and safety objectives and business success. This question was designed to explore the methods employed in involving, communicating and engaging with the non-managerial workforce - leading, in turn, to continual improvement in the OHSMS and consequent improvements in safety and health performance. The question and marking

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scheme makes clear that the response should address the participation of non-managerial roles and therefore presented all applicants with a useful opportunity to cover a broad range of employees relevant to their business.

Stronger responses demonstrated a good understanding of the benefits of effective worker engagement and stakeholder management. These responses were supported by a range of participation and engagement methods (e.g. face-to-face or written) that the applicants had clearly spent time carefully considering and designing.

The best responses also included evidence of how their organisations had 'gone the extra mile' to communicate their strategy (e.g. open days, sub-contracted workshops, away days, seminars, safety days and quizzes/competitions) together with the approach/approaches used and appropriate justification for their use. Responses in this category frequently identified two-way dialogue and the use of more innovative methods of communication - demonstrating, in turn, that they did not rely solely on traditional channels of communication such as newsletters, emails or briefings.

Weaker responses provided limited explanation of the approach to participation (or in some cases, no explanation whatsoever) and in doing so failed to acknowledge its importance.

4. Explain how the organisation's top management lead and promote a positive health and safety culture within the organisation

Taken together, Questions 3 and 4 provided applicants with an opportunity to demonstrate the value of participation, communication, engagement and collaborative working when seeking to improve the OHSMS. Question 4 was designed to explore the commitment that senior management gives to both health and safety.

High scoring responses identified the link with Question 3 and demonstrated the correlation between top management and employee participation in achieving continual improvement. These responses exhibited senior management commitment throughout the process. This included formulating the objectives and identifying resource requirements (typically across a broad range, e.g. financial, human, material) to then ultimately 'walking the talk' by actively supporting the embedding of these objectives into the business. The highest scoring responses utilised data to support any assertions in this regard.

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The highest scoring responses to Question 4 also typically included examples of how the health and safety objectives interfaced with operational objectives (and vice versa) as well as detail on how senior management had supported health and safety messaging through a variety of approaches (roadshows, communication campaigns, etc.).

Weaker responses favoured rather simplistic lists of activities undertaken by senior management, such as site visits or letters to employees. Whilst these efforts may be commendable in practice, further detail is clearly required from applicants for an award at this level and indeed it is required as per the terms of the marking scheme. More generally, weaker responses failed to demonstrate a sufficient understanding of the link between objectives, resource allocation and commitment as part of achieving a high performing health and safety culture and symbiotic OHSMS.