



BSC Diploma in Environmental Management Assignment

Principal Examiner's Report 2008

The panel of examiners have reported much good work during the marking period and several cases of outstanding work. The majority of candidates have achieved a pass standard at the first attempt. In concentrating primarily on common areas of weakness, this report aims to help new candidates achieve similarly high standards.

General comments

It is obvious to the examiners which candidates have read the assignment guidance (pages 14-24 of the specification). Candidates are strongly advised to adhere to the assessment criteria and make use of the exemplar forms within the guidance.

Candidates should resist the temptation to include a large number of appendices containing organisational policies, procedures, plans or background information. The aim is to produce a clear, concise report that makes a persuasive business case to senior management. Candidates should only include appendices where they are central to the business case being built. Any appendices must be referred to within the main body of the text; otherwise they will not be taken into account by the examiner.

Scope, aim and objectives

Appropriate scope is vital as it provides the framework for the entire project. The study should not focus too narrowly on one particular area, task or process. The candidate who chooses a small engineering firm and then focuses purely on metal pressing will be unable to demonstrate their ability to identify a range of both direct and indirect environmental issues. Conversely, a candidate who analyses a multi-site, multi-tasking organisation that employs thousands of people will find it difficult to conduct an appropriate study given the time and word-count limitations; the project becomes unmanageable.

Although many of the candidates' organisations may already have an environmental management system in place, candidates should select an area where there are opportunities for improvement, as opposed to simply reporting on the existing controls that are in place.

The aim of the assignment must be clearly stated: for example, to improve the overall environmental performance of the organisation and identify specific areas for improvement. This aim should then be broken down into a number of objectives: for example, to identify three priority issues that the company needs to address and to formulate a plan for the implementation of proposed actions. The better candidates provide a very clear rationale for the assignment and a detailed description of both the organisation and the area or task under investigation.

Methodology

Weaker candidates tend to merely list their data collection techniques without any attempt to justify the methods or discuss the limitations of the methods used and the data collected. The weakest candidates fail to conduct any additional research beyond a review of course notes and company documentation.

Better candidates describe their methods clearly and concisely, referring to a broad range of data collection techniques. Such approaches include questionnaires, checklists, interviews, document reviews, inspections and other observations, full evidence of which should be provided through cross-referencing and the use of photographs. Strong candidates consult widely and provide a clear justification of why certain techniques were chosen, and then detail the benefits of using such methodologies. Better candidates also refer to the possible limitations of their methodology and possible shortfalls in the availability or accuracy of their data. The best candidates recognise that they are often having to make assumptions based on less than perfect information. For example, it may be difficult to accurately quantify an organisation's current energy usage and therefore difficult to accurately compile a cost savings analysis. Any limitations need to be clearly stated in the report.

Identification of environmental issues, legal requirements and existing management controls

Better candidates demonstrate knowledge and understanding of a wide range of environmental issues. They look beyond the core activities of their organisations and consider a wider range of environmental issues relevant to the assignment such as transport, energy usage and impacts associated with employees and other third parties. Weaker candidates tend to focus solely on site-based issues and fail to distinguish between direct and indirect impacts.

Better candidates not only identify legislation that is directly applicable to the organisation, but also consider the wider context, for example legislation that may affect suppliers. Candidates who score poorly make no effort to describe how legislation will impact either their organisation or a relevant third party.

Weaker candidates typically list the existing management controls. Better candidates fully describe the existing controls. For example, if the control of hazardous waste is the problem, and bunding is the control measure, an outline of the control measures should identify whether the bund is considered suitable, how is it managed and make reference to inspection, materials, size, maintenance regimes, training and so on. As a rough guide, candidates are recommended to include four different controls.

Evaluation of environmental issues

The most common stumbling block is an inability to clearly identify the three most important issues. Weaker candidates fail to justify their ranking methodology, simply providing a matrix and results chart without any supporting explanation of the evaluation process.

Better candidates develop a clear and comprehensive ranking system which is used to evaluate and prioritise the various environmental issues. Ranking systems most commonly involve the use of numerical scoring or ranking, e.g. 1, 2, 3 or High, Medium, Low. Candidates should take care to define and qualify these various levels of significance; for example, 'high severity' could mean anything from a breach of legislation to irreversible damage to the environment. The best candidates employ both quantitative and qualitative assessment techniques to clearly identify the three priority issues and include a weighting system to fine-tune the ranking system.

Implementation Plan

For each of their proposed actions, candidates are required to provide a clear indication of costs and benefits (financial and non-financial), the extent to which the proposed actions will satisfy legislative requirements, timescales for implementation and the assignment of responsibilities to named individuals. The better candidates collate all of this information in one A4 landscape table, but then provide some supplementary commentary in the main body of text. For example, some proposed controls, usually the more expensive ones, require further discussion and justification.

Weaker candidates tend to couch their proposals in rather general terms, often listing relevant legislation rather than explicitly stating which legal requirements would be met by the proposed measures. Although it is recognised that candidates may not have the authority to allocate resources, the proposals to senior management should be properly costed.

Sources of information used and their relevance

Candidates are reminded that the provision of a comprehensive bibliography is a mandatory requirement carrying equal weight to the other assessment criteria. At Diploma level it is expected that candidates will consult a wide range of relevant and up-to-date sources. The best candidates provide a range of detailed references (sub-sections of manuals, press releases with dates, links to web pages, etc). Weaker candidates often quote repealed standards and fail to provide the full title and date of legislation. Candidates should provide the date for all references.