



## British Safety Council

### International Diploma in Occupational Safety and Health Unit 2 Assignment

#### Principal Examiner's Report 2008

The panel of examiners has reported much good work this year. Many candidates have clearly put a lot of effort into their assignments and have demonstrated their ability to manage occupational health issues in their workplaces. In focusing mainly on areas of common weakness, this report aims to help future candidates achieve similarly high standards. The report should be read in conjunction with the Unit 2 Assignment Guidance 2009.

#### General comments

Many assignments have been far too lengthy and candidates have lost marks by masking salient points with superfluous wordage. It should be remembered that this is meant to be a concise and compelling report for a busy (and perhaps demanding) managing director or chief executive. A glance at the assessment criteria (page 7 of the Assignment Guidance document) will reveal that, in order to access the top mark bands, candidates are required to “clearly identify” and “clearly describe”. Candidates will not gain high marks if this clarity is missing. As a guide, the best candidates are presenting a management report of no more than about 5,000 words (excluding appendices).

Better candidates use the assessment criteria as section headings. This not only helps them to present their report in a logical manner, but also makes it easier for the examiner to assess the quality of the submission in relation to each of the criteria. As well as presenting the assignment in clear sections, candidates should also adhere to the principle of one clear theme per paragraph. Weaker candidates are often guilty of lengthy, rambling paragraphs.

A number of candidates submit work containing spelling, punctuation, grammar and syntax errors. Such errors do not give a professional impression. Candidates should proof read their assignment prior to submission and ensure that any scanned documents are legible and properly aligned.

Candidates are strongly advised to take advantage of the British Safety Council's free mentoring service and submit their draft assignment to **L6Support@britsafe.org** and act on any feedback prior to making a formal submission.

## **Topic selection**

The range of topics investigated by good candidates continues to be varied and includes:

- conventional chemical hazards such as solvents and asbestos;
- physical hazards such as noise, vibration, manual handling and ergonomics;
- working conditions such as DSE, outdoor working, driving hours and stress.

The selection of an appropriate topic is paramount. Assignments must address an occupational health hazard. It is not appropriate to consider the potential ill-health effects of a physical hazard such as working at height. An ideal subject is one where some controls are in place but there is scope for improvement. Selecting a hazard for which the organisation already has excellent controls will limit the ability of the candidate to develop an action plan.

## **Executive summary**

Although the executive summary appears at the start of the assignment, it should, of course, be written last. Some candidates appear to be writing their executive summaries before they have actually carried out their investigation and are therefore pre-empting results.

Candidates are reminded that the executive summary should be no more than one side of A4 at font size 11pts and 1.5 line spacing. Blatantly changing the font size or spacing so that the summary fits on to one side will result in loss of marks.

While most candidates provide a brief outline of the organisation and the hazard, a number of candidates are failing to outline the proposed controls and benefits. The summary should also include an indication of costs.

## **Description of workplace and activities**

The workplace description should focus on those activities that are relevant to the occupational health hazard under investigation. Some weaker candidates include superfluous background information which is not directly relevant and cannot therefore gain credit. There should be clear reference to relevant management structures.

## **Identification of hazard**

Better candidates consider a range of hazards (not just physical) and provide a brief description of each hazard, the potential ill-health effects and a brief evaluation of existing controls. Better candidates provide a clear justification for the selection of one hazard that will form the basis of their study.

## **Background research**

Some candidates are failing to undertake the depth or breadth of research that one would expect at this level. Better candidates consider a range of areas including historical aspects, potential ill-health effects (acute and chronic) and relevant legislation including employer and employee duties. It is clear from the quality of the bibliographies which candidates have undertaken the necessary research.

## **Assessment of risks**

Some candidates are failing to undertake a full assessment of the risks. Candidates should include a clear statement of the degree of risk and identify limitations of the risk assessment process. Better candidates consider a wide range of existing controls including physical, managerial and procedural.

## **Proposed controls**

While most candidates identify appropriate practical controls, only the better candidates consider wider management controls. Better candidates comment on the advantages and limitations of these controls and prepare an action plan to show who is responsible for implementing what. The best candidates tabulate their action plans in order to present the information clearly.

## **Bibliography**

Examiners attach a great deal of importance to the bibliography as it is a good indicator of the breadth and depth of research undertaken. Examiners will often follow-up the references cited.

Better candidates include an often impressive list of references. Candidates who have not undertaken the necessary research inevitably submit limited bibliographies. Weaker candidates tend to provide countless references to the BSC course notes (presumably hoping for better marks). Candidates are reminded that the BSC course notes are often not the original source and that the examiners are independent health and safety professionals, not BSC staff !

References should follow a conventional format (e.g. Harvard). Internet references should include the date on which the page was accessed.