



Sword of Honour 2018

Chief Adjudicator's Report

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In 2018, 76 submissions were received for the Sword of Honour awards and 61 (80%) of these were adjudged to have 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 essential to score well on each question as one or two weak answers will place the pass standard out of reach. As in previous years, high-scoring applicants answered all components of the questions and adhered closely to the marking scheme. It was also evident that these applicants had, as advised, studied the previous year's Chief Adjudicators Report when completing their application. This is an important stage in the application process as the report offers helpful insight, comments and direction on what is required. These applicants presented a series of comprehensive and focused responses which, in turn, accessed the top mark band for each question.

High scoring applicants also kept 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 that were supported with examples where required.

As previously, a number of applicants neglected appropriate reference to the scheme's documents or submitted responses which were incomplete. The applicants concerned are reminded that the adjudicators will mark each submission by strict reference to the responses provided within each submission and the marking scheme. The Sword of Honour recognises excellence in health and safety and, at this level, submissions completed in a complacent manner risk non-achievement of the award and indeed rather constitute a disservice to the safety, health and wellbeing profession.

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 direction '*With relevant reference to the outcomes from your recent Five Star Audit*', prefixing each individual question, was again 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 this year. 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 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. Whilst this frequently neglected area of 'health and safety' has increased in prominence recently, more is required to provide a parity of esteem between the two. 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 - and 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 answer. For example, Question Four required applicants to explain how the organisation ensures that the health and wellbeing of employees (and other relevant stakeholders) is suitably reflected within the requirements and stated objectives of the OH&S policy and associated arrangements. A number of applicants did not address the second part of the question and failed to adequately discuss other relevant stakeholders (i.e. focusing exclusively on employees).

Main Business Activities

Whilst marks are not awarded for this section, it is important 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 helps to put the rest of the submission into context and provides the adjudicator with a valuable insight into the organisation, its operation and risk profile. Most applicants this year provided a comprehensive summary of the main business activities, employee profiles, key risks and operational concerns.

However, it was noted that some did not adequately set out the most significant health and safety risks or issues and in doing so rather undermined their overall application.

1. With relevant reference to the outcomes from your recent Five Star Audit: explain how the organisation has established suitable processes for the effective control of planned permanent and temporary changes that have the potential to impact upon organisational health and safety performance,

This question had a number of components to it covering the entire 'Plan, Do, Check, Act' cycle. It also included (potential) risk identification and, with permanent/temporary and health/safety dimensions, offered considerable scope for applicants to showcase how their Five Star Audit was used in practice.

Only the highest scoring applicants made reference to the Audit findings, gave clear examples and discussed both temporary and permanent changes, as required by the marking scheme. The first point to address when answering any of the questions in this scheme is to fully understand what is required; Question 1 incorporated a number of components and it was notable that only the strongest applicants addressed these fully, one by one.

Most responses addressed the establishment of processes in adequate terms but it was notable that only the stronger applicants discussed their approach to permanent and temporary change (and how the two differed), particularly from a day-to-day risk assessment perspective. Only the highest scoring responses made reference to performance and how strong change management was a key component of successful health and safety at work.

Most responses covered safety but only the stronger submissions made appropriate reference to health and how health surveillance requirements adapted in line with changing activity.

The strongest responses to this question offered a clear description of the how processes had been put in place and the governance arrangements for both establishing and managing change. These responses addressed the methodologies used, why these were considered appropriate and how they impacted on the activities. They also covered short notice, high risk change and how this was managed by the organisation.

A minority of responses, typically from applicants achieving high or maximum scores across their submission, provided details of the various levels at which change management outcomes were evaluated for effectiveness (Board level, Health & Safety committee, regional level management meetings, site level performance reviews, etc.), how lessons were learned and how continuous improvement was achieved. Such responses offered an overview of how the effectiveness review fed-back into high level reviews and future amendments to process,

thereby 'closing the loop'. They also considered stakeholder involvement and how seeking the views of others (e.g. unions and the Health & Safety Executive) had provided a more complete evaluation.

A disappointing number of applicants provided generic responses that were lacking both in depth and scope. Applicants are again reminded to answer all parts of the question.

2. With relevant reference to the outcomes from your recent Five Star Audit: specify how the organisation's top management ensure the integration of the OHSMS requirements into its business processes for this site.

This question was designed to give applicants the opportunity to demonstrate their understanding of the importance of senior level leadership and sponsorship in OH&S.

It is commonly accepted that participation, communication, engagement and collaboration are important aspects when seeking to improve the OHSMS. However, this question sought to determine the importance of OH&S as an integral part of the organisation and not in terms of the 'supplement' that some may traditionally view it as. It was designed to explore the commitment that senior management afforded OH&S at the core the organisation. Weaker responses characteristically listed activities that senior management undertook (e.g. site visits and letters to employees) which, whilst commendable, were insufficiently detailed enough for an award at this level and did not demonstrate an understanding that top management action/activities play a part in continual improvement of the OHSMS.

High scoring applicants demonstrated the interdependency of OH&S and the organisation achieving its objectives. This involved a clear articulation of how the business was committed to the 'Safety is Good Business' philosophy and how OH&S was integrated effectively into their operations. These applicants explained how their senior management had demonstrated commitment throughout the process, outlined senior management involvement in formulating the objectives and identifying resource requirements across a broad range (e.g. financial, human and material) and how they were now 'walking the talk' by actively supporting the embedding of these requirements into the business. The highest scoring applicants used data to support their assertions. As required by the marking scheme, high scoring responses were also supported with clear examples.

Highest scoring responses provided examples of how the OH&S objectives directly interfaced with operational objectives (and vice versa) - the corporate balanced scorecard principle was often cited as an example here, alongside individual OH&S and operational objectives being used in performance management.

Weaker responses often failed to demonstrate an understanding of the link between objectives, resource allocation and commitment as part of achieving a high performing health and safety culture and symbiotic OHSMS.

3. With relevant reference to the outcomes from your recent Five Star Audit: identify the most significant Five Star Audit outcomes and explain how relevant recommendations will be used in ensuring continual improvement of the OHSMS performance.

This question was designed to explore the approach to implementing improvements identified as part of the audit process. It encouraged applicants to identify how the improvement opportunities identified would be applied in practice at the particular site and how would the identified objectives would be realised - essentially, continuous improvement brought to life.

Weaker applicants tended towards hierarchical or dictatorial instruction - i.e. an instruction from the centre/management to improve. Whilst this approach may work in certain organisations, it is not sustainable and has been proven to be ineffective in health and safety performance improvement over the long term.

The highest scoring applicants provided clear evidence of an understanding that their approach was multi-faceted and relied on aspects such as policy, process, people and performance review. Their responses acknowledged that leadership, management and culture all play a role in the implementation of the objectives and made reference to both hard and soft measures. Responses of this nature also typically incorporated a clear reference to the preceding question and discussed how improvement opportunities could be integrated into future plans, targets and objectives.

It should be noted that this was an opinion-based question and so there was a potential to secure high marks, but only if the marking scheme was followed and a robust methodology included within the response. The marking scheme required justified methodologies and relevant examples. As such, it was regrettable that only the highest scoring applicants answered the question in full by identifying the process used, covering the range of OH&S appropriately and by ensuring that their commentary was both site-specific and of sufficient breadth.

The highest scoring applicants developed their answer further to incorporate the broader business benefits that could be achieved by implementing health and safety objectives effectively.

4. With relevant reference to the outcomes from your recent Five Star Audit: explain how the organisation ensures that the health and wellbeing of employees (and other relevant stakeholders) is suitably reflected within the requirements and stated objectives of the OH&S policy and associated arrangements.

This question provided applicants with an opportunity to explain how the health and wellbeing needs of employees and other stakeholders were met through policy, objectives and standards (and then subsequently into practice).

This question complemented Question Two in that it sought to explore how the communication of objectives to various stakeholders and effective stakeholder management was approached by the applicant as an essential aspect in their achieving OH&S objectives and business success. The marking scheme explicitly called for reference to relevant stakeholders together with examples. It was notable that only the highest scoring applicants covered both the required range and included examples.

Internal and external stakeholder engagement, inclusion, communication and active involvement are essential components of good OH&S management. The highest scoring applicants demonstrated a good understanding of this together with different engagement tools. Through their inclusion of relevant examples, these applicants communicated how their organisations had 'gone the extra mile' to co-create and communicate their strategy through, for instance, open days, away days, seminars, safety days, quizzes, competitions (etc.).

Strong applicants provided detail on the 'who', 'what' and the 'how' of stakeholder inclusion - clearly articulating 'who' the internal and external stakeholders were (e.g. employees, regulators, customers and suppliers), 'what' methods could be used to engage with the identified groups plus the tools used to record this (e.g. policy, procedures, handbooks and sub-contracts) and 'how' these chosen methods would remain effective.

Stronger applicants made reference to two-way dialogue and the use of more innovative methods of communication, demonstrating that they did not rely solely on traditional channels such as newsletters, emails and briefings.

Weaker responses tended to approach the matter rather one-dimensionally as an organisation-to-employee issue and discussed how standards and procedures were essentially imposed upon employees and stakeholders. They therefore overlooked the partnership philosophy of successful OH&S management.

The weakest responses to this question frequently omitted reference to other significant stakeholders or focused on safety activities with limited or no direct references to health.