



Sword of Honour 2021

Chief Adjudicator's Report

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In 2021, 86 submissions were received for the Sword of Honour awards and 80 (93%) 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 important to score well on each question. One or two weak answers will put the pass standard out of reach. As in previous years, the highest-scoring applicants answered all aspects of each question and adhered closely to the marking scheme and it was evident that the advice to read the prior year's Chief Adjudicator's Report had been taken. This allowed them to give a much more complete answer and so access the top mark band for each question. Notwithstanding this improvement, applicants are again reminded to read the Chief Adjudicator's Report from the previous year prior to completing the application as this report provides helpful insight, comments, and direction on what is required when completing the application; the webinar hosted earlier this year and available [online](#) is another helpful guide. Whilst not wishing to be overly critical, the Chief Adjudicator feels it incumbent to make the strong point that more care should be taken when completing these applications – The Sword of Honour recognises excellence in health and safety and when applicants do not answer the question fully or provide a less than complete answer, they will be less likely to reach the required standard for a pass grade. In addition, applicants are reminded that the marking scheme is made available to applicants for reference when completing their application. This marking scheme should be considered throughout the application process. The Chief Adjudicator is of the belief that these documents are often neglected by some of the lower-scoring applicants - something which needlessly risks their achievement of the award.

The highest-scoring applicants 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 supported with examples where required.

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, notably higher than previous years, failed to develop responses incorporating a clear link to the Audit findings. The statement '**With relevant 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. This is a key component of the question and failing to address it is a limiting factor as the Sword of Honour has a direct relationship with the Five Star Occupational Health and Safety Audit.

There were a large number of high quality, well written and well-structured 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. The use of examples to support the answer and illustrate the point was evident this year and the adjudicating team commented on how helpful this was and that it provided for a more complete and engaging answer. 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 audit.

As noted in previous years, there remains some work to be done on the 'health' part of health and safety; this often neglected area of 'health and safety' is coming to the fore, however, there is still more to be done to give parity of esteem to the two aspects. Some applicants went into 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 – this demonstrates the importance of this to British Safety Council.

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 profile, key risks and operational aspects. However, some did not adequately set out the most significant health and safety risks or issues.

Q1: With relevant reference to the outcomes from your recent Five Star Audit: Explain how senior (top) management ensure health and safety factors are fully integrated into the overall business strategy and processes

This question was designed to give applicants the opportunity to demonstrate their understanding of the importance of senior level leadership and sponsorship, in influencing behaviours both within the organisation and its stakeholder/supply chain – emphasising the “Safety is Good Business” philosophy.

It is commonly accepted that participation, communication, engagement and collaboration are important aspects when seeking to improve health and safety culture and consequently performance. This question though sought to explore the importance of workplace health and safety, as an integral part of the organisation and not the traditional “bolt on” some may view it as. The highest scoring applicants referenced both cultural and operational dimensions and both how and where health and safety featured in corporate decision making.

This question was designed to explore the commitment that senior management gives to workplace health and safety at the core the organisation, in short how it lives health and safety in the operation(s). Weaker applicants listed activities that senior management undertook e.g. site visits, letters to employees, which, whilst commendable, are not detailed enough for an application such as this and did not demonstrate an understanding that top management action/activities play a part in continual improvement of the organisation’s health and safety performance. The issue at the heart of the question is one of governance, oversight and active leadership – only the highest-scoring applicants identified and discussed this – including defining what is meant by ‘top management’.

The highest-scoring applicants demonstrated the interdependency of workplace health and safety and the organisation achieving its objectives. They demonstrated a clear understanding that businesses who are committed to the “Safety is Good Business” philosophy and who consider workplace health and safety as integral to the operation, were more advanced in terms

of health and safety culture. As required by the marking scheme, their response was **supported with a full explanation**. They then went on to explain, that senior management had demonstrated commitment throughout the process and, in fact, had been involved in formulating objectives, identifying resource requirements, across a broad range e.g. financial, human, material. They were now “walking the talk” by actively supporting the embedding of these into the business.

The highest-scoring applicants provided examples of how the workplace health and safety objectives were directly interfaced with operational objectives and vice versa. The corporate balanced scorecard principle was often cited as an example of this, alongside individual workplace health and safety and operational objectives being used in performance management. Their answer was supported with a description of the process and methodology used, together with a range of relevant health and safety factors and examples of integration.

Weaker applicants failed to demonstrate an understanding of the link between objectives, recruitment of competence, resource allocation and commitment, as part of achieving a high performing health and safety culture, and symbiotic relationship within the organisation and into its stakeholder base.

Q2: With relevant reference to the outcomes from your recent Five Star Audit: Describe how the organisation ensures the requirements within the business recovery plan (post emergency event) are effectively communicated to relevant stakeholders

The response should clearly describe the risk assessment process and how it is used to identify, prioritise and suitably control a range of relevant emergency incidents (potential and/or actual) – organisational governance, risk and compliance. Operational and organisational profiling, as discussed in question one, could also be referenced within the response. This question served as a good example of how effective reference to the marking scheme can support an applicant. Applicants needed to consider the relationship with risk assessment. Only the highest-scoring applicants achieved this

The highest-scoring responses were, in most cases, comprehensive in terms of the activities and stakeholder groups considered and they recognised that partnering with specialist services (e.g. fire authority, rescue services, insurers, regulators and enforcers) may be necessary. The response was supported with clear examples of communication methods and identified all relevant stakeholders. Furthermore, the highest-scoring responses determined activities by high, medium and low risk and detailed the emergency arrangement discussions that had been conducted. Responses of this nature also typically reported on scenario planning, business continuity/disaster recovery planning and the importance of employee engagement in effecting high quality emergency plans.

Taking the above into account, generic or insufficiently detailed responses to this question inevitably struggled to secure high marks. Responses limited to “We tell our employees at induction” (and similar) were observed with frustrating frequency in the lower-scoring submissions.

The highest-scoring applicants provided a comprehensive description of how the emergency incident arrangements at the site are communicated to all relevant parties, with a brief word on how relevance had been determined. The highest-scoring applicants provided the information above and then ensured that their response built on this, identifying all relevant stakeholders (including non-employee groups) and included specific examples of how effective communication is evaluated. The highest-scoring applicants also referred to their organisational requirements for specific risk assessments (fire, first-aid, security, IT, infection control, etc.) and the incorporation of the process into wider business continuity planning. Their responses referred to a range of emergency incidents supported and illustrated by relevant examples. The highest-scoring applicants took the opportunity to reference their response to the COVID-19 pandemic and how the pre and post pandemic risk profiling and response had been revisited for effectiveness.

The question provides a further opportunity to demonstrate stakeholder participation in the risk management process and also leadership from top management.

Q3: With relevant reference to the outcomes from your recent Five Star Audit: Explain how monitoring of work-related ill health (including mental health factors) is used to influence health, safety and wellbeing strategy and objectives

This question was designed to give the applicant an opportunity to explain how the health and wellbeing needs of employees were supported by including and engaging with stakeholders. This question was complementary to question one, in that it sought to explore how engaging and communicating objectives to the various stakeholders, and effective stakeholder management, are essential in achieving health and safety objectives and business success. The marking scheme explained to the applicant that the answer should refer to relevant stakeholders and that the answer should be supported **with several examples**; only the highest-scoring applicants discussed both the range and provided examples.

Internal and external stakeholder engagement, inclusion, communication and active involvement are essential components of good health and safety management. The strongest applicants demonstrated a good understanding of this, along with an understanding of different engagement tools. They provided a range of examples e.g. face to face, written etc. and they provided examples of how their organisations had “gone the extra mile” to co-create and

communicate their strategy e.g. open days, away days, seminars, safety days, quizzes, competitions etc.

Strong applicants provided detail on the 'who', 'what' and the 'how' of stakeholder inclusion. They clearly articulated 'who' internal and external stakeholders were e.g. employees, regulator, customer, supplier etc., 'what' methods could be employed to engage with the identified groups, the tools used to capture and record this e.g. policy, procedures, handbooks, sub-contracts etc. and 'how' these chosen methods would be and 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 e.g. newsletters, e-mails and briefings.

The highest scoring applicants gave an answer that was supported with relevant examples of monitoring processes and clear examples of outcomes influencing health, safety and wellbeing strategy and objectives, succinctly and in the word count parameters.

Weaker applicants tended to discuss how standards and procedures were imposed upon employees and stakeholders. They approached the answer very one dimensionally, thinking it was simply an organisation to employee issue. The partnership philosophy of successful health and safety management was clearly not understood. The weakest applicants omitted to refer to other significant stakeholders. Furthermore, they generally talked about safety activities, omitting reference to health. This question sought to draw out the applicant's approach to (a) consultation and participation (b) health and wellbeing arrangements, and discuss the relationship these have with each other and with organisational success.

Q4: With relevant reference to the outcomes from your recent Five Star Audit: Describe how operational risk factors are reflected within core health and safety competency requirements across all levels of the organisation

This question was designed to examine the commitment of the organisation to training and competence across the various levels and how this competence was determined, to reflect the requirements of the role and legislative requirements. Given the profile of most applicants to these awards, this question offered the potential to achieve very high marks where it was deconstructed appropriately and answered in full.

Regrettably, this question was answered poorly on a number of occasions. The question involved coverage of operational competency, health and safety training and a range of levels e.g. directors, managers and supervisors. Lower-scoring responses typically listed the safety training provided to operatives/supervisors or alternatively provided a rather bland overview of

the training provision in general. Some applicants noted the impact of financial constraints and the need to defer aspects of their training provision. Frank and honest responses of this nature were not disadvantaged in terms of their ability to attract marks. This award looks for both positive and negative dimensions of safety, health and welfare at work and the financial restrictions routinely negotiated by those responsible for health and safety are fully acknowledged by the adjudicators.

The highest-scoring responses acknowledged what were ostensibly unrelated matters and linked them appropriately to safety e.g. leadership training and project management. In doing so, these applicants demonstrated an understanding that good management and competence has a direct relationship with positive health and safety performance. Higher-scoring responses also included a detailed description of the training delivered and its objectives. As one would expect, this question prioritised quality over quantity and accordingly a number of applicants scored highly here despite the limited number of examples included in their response. The highest scoring applicants gave a response that was supported with several examples of competency requirements, analysis and examples of a clear link to operational risk factors.