



Sword of Honour 2025

Chief Adjudicator's Report

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In 2025, 86 submissions were received for the Sword of Honour awards and 70 (81%) 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. With the pass standard set high, 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 Adjudicators 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 once again 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, the implication is that they are not showing due deference to this scheme and consequently this is a disservice to the safety, health and wellbeing profession. In addition, applicants are reminded that the mark scheme is made available to applicants for reference when completing their application; this mark scheme should be considered throughout the application process. The Chief Adjudicator is of the belief that these documents continue to be 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 explicitly linked to the Five Star Occupational Health and Safety Audit Report ('the audit') and its findings. Despite it being an

explicit requirement of both the questions and marking scheme, it was regrettable applicants continue to fail to develop responses incorporating a clear link to the audit findings; the statement '*With relevant reference to the outcomes from your recent Five Star Occupational Health and Safety 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 audit.

The highest performing applicants distinguished themselves through their explicit and consistent integration of the audit findings into their responses. Their answers were structured, evidence-based, and demonstrated both operational excellence and cultural leadership.

Mid-level applicants tended to address some elements of the marking criteria but often lacked consistency, depth, or clear linkage to the audit.

Lower scoring applicants frequently gave process-based or superficial answers with little or no reference to the audit, few concrete examples, and minimal evidence of strategic or cultural leadership.

This year's Sword of Honour adjudication process has once again revealed a clear difference in quality between the highest scoring applicants and the remainder of the field. In summary, only the highest scoring applicants consistently made relevant and effective reference to the outcomes of their recent audit across all four questions.

These top-performing applicants demonstrated a mature, embedded approach to health and safety management, providing well-evidenced, structured responses that were tightly aligned to their audit outcomes. In contrast, lower scoring applicants frequently gave broad or generic answers, often failing to link their programmes, leadership activity or planning to their audit findings.

This year I have streamlined my report to give clearer and more targeted feedback so that going forwards applicants can use this report to further improve the quality of their submissions in the future.

Specifically, the highest scoring applicants:

- Made appropriate and explicit reference to the outcomes of their audit within each response.
- Answered the questions in full, addressing both strategic and operational aspects of health and safety.
- Provided a range of suitable methods, demonstrating structured and deliberate approaches to participation, leadership, risk management and system effectiveness.
- Supplied a range of relevant, well-chosen examples that demonstrated measurable impact and clear alignment with audit recommendations.
- Gave rounded explanations and descriptions, linking their actions directly to audit findings and demonstrating continuous improvement.

Lower scoring applicants commonly:

- Referred to the audit only superficially, if at all.
- Focused narrowly on single elements of each question, often missing required dimensions.
- Described processes without demonstrating clear linkage to the audit or measurable outcomes.
- Provided few or overly general examples.
- Missed opportunities to show evidence of continuous improvement or leadership engagement.

Again, this year I am pleased to report that there were numerous high-quality, well-written, and well-structured submissions. It was clear that a significant amount of preparation, thought, time, and effort had gone into these entries, and the applicants are to be commended for this. The use of examples to support and illustrate points was particularly evident this year, which the adjudicating team found helpful, making the responses more complete and engaging. While some submissions did not meet the standard required for a Sword of Honour, it should be recognised that these organisations still possess excellent health and safety management systems, as reflected in their audit ratings.

However, as noted in previous years, there remains work to be done on the 'health' component of health and safety. While this often-overlooked area is gaining more attention, there is still progress to be made in giving equal focus to both health and safety. Some applicants provided detailed information on safety but made little mention of health. Health affects us all—individually, collectively, and globally. This scheme seeks to promote workplace health as a key priority, emphasising its importance to the British Safety Council. This year's Sword of Honour results highlight that strong performance is characterised by meaningful engagement with the

audit. High-scoring applicants used their audit findings as a strategic driver, embedding them into participation structures, leadership activity, risk-based planning and system governance.

Applicants who failed to make strong and explicit connections to the audit outcomes did not achieve the higher scores, underscoring the central importance of audit integration in demonstrating excellence.

The adjudication panel commends those organisations that provided clear strategic alignment, robust evidence, and leadership-driven approaches to health and safety management. Their submissions set a strong benchmark for future applicants.

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 Occupational Health and Safety Audit: Explain how the site ensures the participation of all employee groups in the continual improvement of the Occupational Health & Safety Management System (OHSMS) and associated arrangements.

- High scoring applicants (11–15) – Provided a comprehensive description of how all employee groups are engaged and identified (e.g. through RACI analysis, job family assessments). Outlined a wide range of participation methods, such as safety forums, focus groups, suggestion schemes, and improvement teams. Offered clear, audit-linked examples demonstrating how these arrangements contributed to tangible improvements in performance, engagement and culture.
- Mid scoring applicants (6–10) – Made some reference to the audit, but with less depth. Described a limited range of participation methods and gave general or partial examples. Linkage to improvement outcomes was present but weak or implied.
- Low scoring applicants (0–5) – Little or no reference to the audit. Participation methods were basic or unclear. Examples were minimal or absent, with no clear link to improvement or cultural change.

Q2: With relevant reference to the outcomes from your recent Five Star Occupational Health and Safety Audit: Describe how the site has established suitable processes to recognise and support employee mental health.

- High scoring applicants (11–15) – Presented a structured and evidence-based description of mental health recognition and support processes, including how approaches were identified, assessed for suitability, and implemented. Provided a broad range of relevant and audit-linked examples (e.g. wellbeing champions, EAP access, mental health first aiders, training, targeted campaigns). Showed clear alignment between initiatives and audit findings.
- Mid scoring applicants (6–10) – Outlined mental health processes but with limited explanation of how they were assessed or implemented. Provided some examples but lacking depth or strong audit linkage.

- Low scoring applicants (0–5) – Provided only a basic description or referenced isolated initiatives. Lacked explanation of process or implementation. Few or no examples linked to the audit.

Q3: With relevant reference to the outcomes from your recent Five Star Occupational Health and Safety Audit: Describe how the emergency planning and associated arrangements are clearly linked to the risk assessment process and how this drives compliance.

- High scoring applicants (11–15) – Delivered a full and structured explanation of how emergency planning is clearly linked to the risk assessment process, supported by strong evidence and examples. Referenced a range of campaigns, programmes and initiatives (e.g. emergency drills, scenario planning, training and review cycles) showing how these arrangements drive compliance and performance improvement. All examples were clearly linked to the audit.
- Mid scoring applicants (6–10) – Provided an adequate explanation but with limited detail. Some linkage between emergency planning and risk assessment was described, with some relevant examples but lacking depth or explicit connection to the audit.
- Low scoring applicants (0–5) – Offered a basic or generic description of emergency planning. Linkage to risk assessment was weak or absent. Few or no examples, and no clear demonstration of how compliance is achieved.

Q4: With relevant reference to the outcomes from your recent Five Star Occupational Health and Safety Audit: Explain how the site's top management ensures the continued effectiveness of the OHSMS.

- High scoring applicants (11–15) – Clearly defined who constitutes Top Management and explained their active role in leading and ensuring the effectiveness of the OHSMS. Described governance mechanisms, performance review, resource allocation, leadership visibility, and strategic oversight. Provided clear examples of actions and forums (e.g. management reviews, walkarounds, leadership briefings) directly linked to audit outcomes and demonstrating continuous improvement.
- Mid scoring applicants (6–10) – Identified Top Management but with limited detail about their role in ensuring system effectiveness. Some examples were present but linkage to the audit and strategic leadership was weak.
- Low scoring applicants (0–5) – Provided only a basic description or referenced isolated initiatives and single engagement. Lacked explanation of effectiveness review. Few or no examples linked to the audit.

Conclusion

This year's assessment reinforces the importance of meaningful engagement with the audit as a cornerstone of successful applications. Where applicants fully leveraged their audit findings — using them as a platform for action, leadership, performance improvement and cultural change — they achieved higher scores and demonstrated best practice.

Those who did not make strong reference to their audit outcomes, or who treated it as a background activity rather than a driver of improvement, fell short of the required standard.

The adjudication panel commends those organisations that showcased clear strategic alignment, evidence-based action, and cultural leadership. Their responses set a strong benchmark for future applicants.