



Sword of Honour 2026

Question Set and Marking Scheme

Background

This marking scheme relates to the written application component of the 2026 Sword of Honour scheme. The final marks for each submission will be determined by reference to applicants' performance in the written application only. The results of the Five Star Audit process will not be considered other than as a right of entry to the awards.

Please note that the marking descriptors are indicative by nature. For example, two organisations may adopt differing approaches to the written application and score equally well. Nonetheless, high-scoring organisation will typically answer all aspects of the question, clearly following the marking scheme, provide site-specific references (evidenced and referenced through the audit report) and fully utilise, but not exceed the specified word allowance per response.

Scoring criteria

- A maximum of 60 marks are available for the written application. Applicants must score a minimum of 45 marks to remain eligible for the award.
- A minimum of two individual responses must be scored within the top mark band (11-15 marks).
- Submissions will become ineligible for the Sword of Honour award should any individual responses be scored within the lower mark band (0-5 marks).
- Responses to each sub-question must not exceed 750 words per sub-question (i.e. 3,000 words overall per submission).
- The two optional questions for the Innovation and Development award will be marked separately by a panel. The grades for these questions will not be included in the overall score of the main application.

A sample number of applicants will be randomly selected to validate the responses given on their application in a virtual interview. This selection will be made following the application submission deadline on 14 September 2026, and the selected applicants will be notified with a Microsoft Teams placeholder invite for the week beginning on 28 September 2026

	11-15 marks	6-10 marks	0-5 marks
1. With relevant reference to the outcomes from your recent Five Star Health and Safety Audit, describe how your organisation will use innovation (for example, research, technology, tools and equipment, training, and management information or data) in future plans and programmes to improve health and safety performance.	• A full description of how the organisation will use innovation in its broadest sense, including both hard and soft approaches, in future plans and programmes to improve health and safety performance. • The response contains a wide range of relevant examples, such as research, technology, tools and equipment, training, and management information or data, and explains how they will be applied. • All examples are clearly linked to relevant outcomes from the recent Five Star Health and Safety Audit.	• An adequate description of how the organisation will use innovation in the broadest sense to improve health and safety performance. • The response contains some relevant examples of tools and approaches and provides some explanation of how they will be applied. • All or most examples are linked to relevant outcomes from the recent Five Star Health and Safety Audit.	• A basic description of innovation, with limited context specific to the organisation or its future plans and programmes. • There is little explanation of how the examples will improve health and safety performance. • Few or no examples are clearly linked to relevant outcomes from the recent Five Star Health and Safety Audit.
2. With relevant reference to the outcomes from your recent Five Star Health and Safety Audit, describe how the site has established suitable processes to recognise and support employee suggestions and feedback in support of continual improvement.	• A full description of the processes used to invite, capture, recognise, assess, support and respond to employee suggestions and feedback. • The response explains how the available channels were identified, how suggestions are assessed for suitability, how decisions and feedback are communicated, and how accepted ideas are implemented and reviewed. • A wide range of clear examples demonstrates how these processes have supported continual improvement, with all examples linked to relevant outcomes from the recent Five Star Health and Safety Audit.	• An adequate description of the processes used to invite, assess and respond to employee suggestions and feedback. • The response includes some explanation of recognition, implementation or communication arrangements, but lacks depth in one or more areas. • Some relevant examples are provided and are linked to outcomes from the recent Five Star Health and Safety Audit.	• A basic description of how employee suggestions or feedback are collected. • There is limited or no explanation of how suggestions are recognised, assessed for suitability, supported, implemented or communicated back to employees. • Few or no examples are clearly linked to relevant outcomes from the recent Five Star Health and Safety Audit.

3. With relevant reference to the outcomes from your recent Five Star Health and Safety Audit, explain how the site's top management ensures the continued effectiveness of the Occupational Health and Safety Management System (OHSMS).	• A full explanation of how top management assures the continuing suitability, adequacy and effectiveness of the OHSMS. • The response addresses relevant governance and assurance arrangements, such as management review, objectives and key performance indicators, legal and other requirements, resources, responsibilities, audit findings, corrective actions, worker participation and verification of improvement. • Clear examples show how significant audit outcomes and recommendations are prioritised, acted upon and reviewed to drive compliance, continual improvement and post-audit value. All examples are linked to the recent Five Star Health and Safety Audit.	• An adequate explanation of how top management reviews and maintains the effectiveness of the OHSMS. • The response refers to some relevant governance, assurance, resourcing, performance-monitoring or corrective-action arrangements, but lacks depth or breadth. • At least one clear example shows how an audit outcome or recommendation is being used to drive continual improvement and post-audit value.	• A basic outline of top management involvement in the OHSMS, with limited explanation of how continued effectiveness is assured. • There is little or no reference to management review, performance information, resources, accountability, corrective actions or verification of improvement. • Few or no examples are linked to relevant outcomes from the recent Five Star Health and Safety Audit.
4. With relevant reference to the outcomes from your recent Five Star Health and Safety Audit, describe how the senior management team leads and manages the organisation to improve health and safety performance both now and in the future.	• A full description of how senior management is defined at the site and how its members both lead and manage the health and safety agenda. • The response identifies the significant contribution senior management makes to compliance, culture and engagement, and explains its role in driving continual improvement now and in the future through standards, objectives, visible leadership, resourcing, accountability and employee engagement. • Clear examples demonstrate relevant planned or completed actions to improve health and safety performance. All examples are linked to outcomes from the recent Five Star Health and Safety Audit.	• An adequate description of how senior management is defined and how its members lead and/or manage the health and safety agenda. • The response identifies the role senior management plays in compliance, culture and engagement and shows some appreciation of short-term and long-term considerations but does not fully explain its contribution to continual improvement. • Some relevant examples are clearly linked to outcomes from the recent Five Star Health and Safety Audit.	• A basic description of senior management at the site, with little or no distinction between leading and managing the health and safety agenda. • The response focuses mainly on compliance and gives limited consideration to culture, engagement, future priorities or continual improvement. • Few or no examples are linked to relevant outcomes from the recent Five Star Health and Safety Audit.