



Sword of Honour 2022

Chief Adjudicator's Report

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In 2022, **118** submissions were received for the Sword of Honour awards and **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 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 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. 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 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 oft 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 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 had a risk identification (potential) aspect and with permanent and temporary and health and safety in the question there was considerable scope for the applicant to showcase how the Five Star audit is used in practice.

Only the highest scoring applicants referred to the audit findings, gave **clear examples** and discussed both the **temporary and permanent changes** as required by the marking scheme. Others tended to be somewhat general in nature (i.e., rather than specific to the site concerned). This was commonly occurring theme in the applications.

The first point to address when answering any of the questions in this submission is to fully understand what is required. This question had a number of components and only the best scoring applicants addressed them fully – aspect by aspect.

Most applicants addressed the establishment of processes but only the higher scoring applicants discussed their approach to permanent and temporary change and how the two differed – especially from a day-to-day risk assessment perspective – and the impact this has/had on performance. Only the highest scoring applicants referred to performance and how strong change management was a key component of successful health and safety at work.

Most applicants addressed safety but only the higher scoring submissions made appropriate reference to health and how health surveillance requirements can and do flex in the face of a changing activity.

The strongest responses offered a clear description of how processes had been put in place and the governance for both establishing and managing change – including the methodologies

used, why these were appropriate and how they impacted on the activities. They also discussed short notice, high risk change and how this was managed.

A minority of responses, typically from applicants achieving high end 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.) and how lessons were learned and continuous improvement achieved; such responses offered an overview of how the effectiveness review fed-back into high level reviews and future amendments to process (thus closing the loop). They also considered stakeholder involvement and how seeking the views of others (e.g., unions, HSE) had provided a more complete evaluation.

A disappointing number of applicants provided generic responses lacking both in depth and scope. Applicants are again reminded to answer all parts of the question across the range and as explained on the webinar, it is helpful to deconstruct the question the build up the answer to reflect the various parts therein.

Q2: 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, this question though sought to explore the importance of OH&S as an integral part of the organisation and not the traditional "bolt on" some may view it as.

This question was designed to explore the commitment that senior management gives to OH&S at the core the organisation. 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 OHSMS.

High scoring applicants demonstrated the interdependency of OH&S and the organisation achieving its objectives – they demonstrated a clear understanding that their organisation is committed to the "Safety is Good Business" philosophy and that OH&S was integrated into the operation. As required by the marking scheme their response was **supported with clear examples**. They then went on to explain that senior management had demonstrated commitment throughout the process and in fact had been involved in formulating the objectives,

identifying resource requirements, across a broad range e.g., financial, human, material and were now “walking the talk” by actively supporting the embedding of these into the business. The best scoring applicants used data to support their assertions.

Highest scoring applicants provided examples of how the OH&S 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 OH&S and operational objectives being used in performance management.

Weaker applicants 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.

Q3: With relevant reference to the outcomes from your recent Five Star Audit:

Describe how the site has established suitable processes to recognise and support employee mental health and wellbeing.

This question was designed to demonstrate the increasing importance of mental health at work – a subject the British Safety Council and their award-winning mental wellbeing sister charity Mates in Mind take very seriously. This question sought to explore the avenues open to employees should mental health support be required. In order to achieve top scores, a **full description** of how the site identifies and supports employee mental health was required – in turning to the marking scheme the applicant could see that actual and potential issues needed to be discussed; only the highest scoring applicants did this.

Another trait of the highest scoring applicants was the provision of **clear examples of effective support mechanisms and risk management processes** as required by the mark scheme. The majority of applicants referred to how mental ill health was supported i.e., access to counselors, employee assistance programmes, health and wellbeing interventions/days etc. but did not discuss mental health proactive risk management and identification of issues.

This question was a strong differentiator, with only the highest performing applicants overall scoring well on this question. I would again encourage applicants to refer to the mark scheme to enable them to fully answer the question.

Q4: With relevant reference to the outcomes from your recent Five Star Audit:

Outline 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 – essentially, how the improvement opportunities would be identified, brought to life at the particular site, how would the identified objectives be realised – continuous improvement brought to life.

Weaker applicants simply referred to hierarchical or dictatorial instruction; a command-and-control approach; essentially 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 the approach was multifaceted and relied on aspects such as policy, process, people, performance review and that leadership, management and culture all played a role in the implementation of the objectives; hard and soft measures were discussed. They also made a clear reference to the previous question and discussed how improvement opportunities could be integrated into future plans, targets and objectives.

This was an opinion-based question and so there was potential to secure high marks, but only if the marking scheme was followed and a robust methodology provided. The marking scheme asked that the answer was supported with **justified methodologies and relevant examples**. Only the highest scoring applicants answered the question in full, by identifying the process used, appropriately covering the range of OH&S, making it site specific, non-generic and of sufficient breadth.

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