Sword of Honour 2024

Chief Adjudicator's Report

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In 2024, **79** submissions were received for the Sword of Honour awards and **71** 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 39 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 (39 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 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 are provide a less than complete answer the implication is that they are not showing due deference to this 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 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 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 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.**

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.

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.

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 maturity requirements from your recent Five Star Audit: Explain how the management of change process commensurate with appropriate risk assessment has helped in preventing possibility of unforeseen incidents.

The management of change (MOC) process, when coupled with risk management, results in smooth, well-executed transitions and continual improvement. By assessing and addressing potential risks, organisations can mitigate disruptions, enhance stakeholder support, and ensure compliance, all of which contribute to a more efficient and sustainable operation. This structured, risk-informed approach ensures that changes lead to positive, lasting outcomes, ultimately promoting innovation and growth.

Applicants discussed how their MOC process provides a structured framework for planning, assessing, and implementing changes, whether in processes, technology, personnel, or organisational structure and that by integrating risk management then potential hazards and impacts are identified early, and appropriate measures are put in place. Highest scoring applicants discussed how this structured approach reduces unexpected disruptions, gave thought to potential issues and minimises resistance to change, allowing for smoother transitions with fewer operational challenges – also equipping the organisation to respond in the event of an unforeseen event/incident.

By incorporating risk management techniques into risk identification and assessment, applicants demonstrated how they assess potential risks associated with a proposed change(s) and how through their understanding of the possible impact on business operations, employee safety, and compliance risk(s) could then be managed. Highest scoring applicants explained how thorough risk identification ensures that any risks linked to the change are anticipated and proactively addressed. This reduces the chances of unforeseen problems during implementation and contributes to a seamless changeover.

All applicants discussed mitigation strategies for changeovers and how once risks are identified, organisations can develop and implement mitigation strategies, such as process redesign, additional training, or enhanced communication channels. Highest scoring applicants discussed how these strategies are tailored to minimise disruptions and address any identified risk and how with proper mitigation in place, the transition phase is smoother, reducing downtime, errors, or safety incidents that could arise from poorly managed changes.

Applicants demonstrated an appreciation for the human element of change and how effective change management involves clear communication with all stakeholders, including employees, management, and external partners; risk management ensures that communication covers potential impacts, safety measures, and contingency plans, promoting transparency.

The MOC process, when combined with risk management, encourages continuous monitoring of the change both during and after implementation. This feedback loop helps identify any new risks (unforeseen events) or inefficiencies that arise during the transition; applicants discussed this and how continuous monitoring allows for timely adjustments, preventing small issues from escalating. Applicants, in the main, also covered how organisations learn from each change and apply these lessons to future changes, fostering continual improvement and leading to enhanced compliance and safety performance.

Q2: With relevant reference to the outcomes from your recent Five Star Audit: Describe how the site has established suitable processes to engage different stakeholders and the benefits drawn from such engagements.

Engaging stakeholders effectively in a workplace site is crucial for building strong relationships, fostering collaboration, and ensuring smooth operations. By establishing structured processes for stakeholder engagement, organisations can align their goals with the needs and expectations of diverse groups, leading to mutual benefits.

Highest scoring applicants identified the importance of stakeholder identification and mapping and how the first step is to identify all relevant stakeholders, such as employees, management, contractors, suppliers, regulators, local communities, and customers. Mapping these stakeholders helps prioritise them based on their level of interest, influence, and impact on the site's operations; a clear understanding of who the key stakeholders are, their concerns, and their influence ensures that engagement is targeted and effective.

All applicants discussed the importance of communication and how establishing multiple communication channels, such as face-to-face meetings, email updates, newsletters, surveys, suggestion boxes, and digital platforms, ensures that all stakeholders can engage in ways that are convenient and accessible to them. Only the highest scoring discussed how this openness fosters transparency, allowing stakeholders to stay informed and providing opportunities for them to share feedback or concern and that this strengthens relationships and deepens trust.

Organising regular meetings, workshops, or forums allows for direct interaction between site management and stakeholders and many of examples of this were shared. These sessions covered topics such as project updates, safety briefings, and environmental impact discussions. These fed into developing employee engagement initiatives such as suggestion schemes, training programs, and recognition systems helps employees feel connected to the organisations goals. Examples of initiatives were given that included team-building activities, workshops, and internal surveys to assess employee satisfaction and engagement. Higher scoring applicants discussed how engaged employees are more productive, motivated, and committed to organisational goals, leading to improved morale and a positive workplace culture.

The highest scoring applicants identified in their summary that there are numerous benefits drawn from stakeholder engagement such as improved decision making, enhanced trust and reputation, increased employee satisfaction and retention, operational efficiency, reduced risks and conflicts and enhanced compliance and regulatory support.

Q3: With relevant reference to the outcomes from your recent Five Star Audit: Outline the contractor management system that has been developed, and how this has helped in improving contractor's health and safety performance.

Contractor management – including the prequalification, selection and management of contractors is a critical step in ensuring that any organisation's contractors meet required health and safety standards before being selected. This process helps to mitigate risks, ensure compliance, and promote a culture of safety.

Applicants consistently discussed how their organisation establishes/ed, implemented and developed clear contractor management systems to help improve performance and meet regulatory standards; the criteria typically includes safety records, certifications, accident and injury rates, compliance with relevant regulations, training programmes, and previous performance. They discussed how in setting high standards for contractor selection, the organisation ensures that only contractors with proven safety practices are eligible to bid for contracts – and how this in turn helps prevent accidents and reduces liability. Highest scoring applicants discussed the business benefits of this, for example insurance premium reduction, reputation enhancement, trusted partner.

Applicants discussed how contractors are required to submit documentation and evidence demonstrating their adherence to the contractor selection criteria and how this had moved from traditional paper based assessments to more digital solutions and how the use of external verification organisations were playing an increasingly important role; applicants discussed how this review process helps the organisation evaluate each contractor's safety management system consistently and equitably and assess their commitment to maintaining safe working conditions. Applicants also discussed how contractors with poor safety records or inadequate documentation are disqualified, reducing the likelihood of engaging high-risk parties. Highest scoring applicants discussed this *and* how in some cases they would partner/coach/rehabilitate those failing short of their standards as a commitment to partnering; this was interesting to read and not commonplace.

Some applicants discussed how they had developed their approach to include physical checks on what had been reported i.e. by conducting site visits or audits to verify the accuracy of the documentation provided by contractors and how these inspections help to ensure that contractors not only meet the qualifications on paper but also implement best practices in the field; adding an extra layer of security by validating that contractors maintain the required health and safety standards in real-life operations, enhances overall safety and is good governance.

Higher scoring applicants discussed how assessing, prequalifying and monitoring contractors ensures that only those with robust health and safety systems are selected. This in turn raises

the overall standard of safety across the organisation's operations, contributing to fewer incidents and a safer workplace – for example an engaged, well managed and relationship based contractor connection is more likely to prevent workplace injuries, leading to reduced accident rates on site. Higher scoring applicants linked this to risk mitigation and compliance and discussed how robust contractor management helps mitigate the risks associated with outsourcing work to trusted third parties by ensuring that contractors comply with industry regulations, legal requirements, and internal safety policies. They went on to share how in their experience selecting contractors who meet high safety standards builds a reputation for their organisation that health and safety is their priority.

As many know, engaging competent contractors reduces the likelihood of workplace accidents, leading to lower costs related to insurance claims, legal disputes, medical expenses, and downtime. Applicants shared their understanding of this and how working with contractors could enhance their own organisations health and safety performance by mutual understanding/challenge; development examples included collaborative risk assessments and method statements and regular safety meetings and communication were given as examples.

The highest scoring applicants discussed monitoring and auditing contractor performance and recognition/incentives for safety excellence. They shared how their organisation implements reward/recognition programmes to acknowledge contractors who demonstrate exceptional safety performance; the use of bonuses, certifications and public recognition were examples of methods for incentivising safety excellence and a way of motivating contractors to go beyond compliance and strive for continuous safety improvements.

Q4: With relevant reference to the outcomes from your recent Five Star Audit: Describe how the operations at the site can potentially impact wellbeing of employees and how these are addressed and communicated.

Workplace operations can significantly impact the wellbeing of employees, influencing their physical, mental, and emotional health. Addressing these impacts requires a proactive approach that includes identifying potential risks, implementing measures to mitigate them, and maintaining open communication to ensure employee needs are met.

Applicants discussed how wellbeing falls into a variety of categories; physical, mental, emotional, and financial.

Applicants understood that ensuring that employees have a safe working environment is key to maintaining physical health. This includes providing appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE), implementing safety protocols, ergonomic adjustments, and conducting regular risk assessments. They discussed how safety guidelines and risk management procedures should be communicated clearly through training sessions, posters, safety handbooks, and digital platforms. Highest scoring applicants emphasised the importance of regular updates and reminders reinforce the importance of health and safety in daily operations.

It was good to read how so many organisations are offering mental health support and resources such as employee assistance programs (EAPs), counseling services, stress management workshops, and mental health days; creating a culture that supports open discussions about mental health is also vital. Applicants discussed how communication about mental health support should be open and non-stigmatising, they also discussed how information is shared via newsletters, email communications, or during team meetings, with a focus on encouraging employees to seek help when needed.

High scoring applicants linked occupational health with wellbeing and discussed factors such as ergonomics and environmental adjustments. Examples given included how providing ergonomic furniture, optimising workstations, improving lighting, and maintaining proper air quality and temperature are essential to ensuring employees' physical comfort and reducing fatigue. Highest scoring applicants discussed how employees should be informed about ergonomic practices, such as posture and workstation setup, through training and visual aids -and kept updated on this.

All applicants demonstrated an understanding that creating a supportive and inclusive workplace culture – one that promotes teamwork, recognises achievements, and encourages open communication - is essential for improving social wellbeing. High scoring applicants

included reference to diversity, equity and inclusion and cited examples such as anti-harassment policies and diversity initiatives also support a positive culture.

Applicants discussed the importance of work-life balance and how offering flexible working hours, remote work options, or reduced hours for certain roles can help employees balance work with personal responsibilities. Simple things such as encouraging employees to take regular breaks and use their vacation time was also discussed as being important. High scoring applicants discussed how policies regarding flexible work schedules and time-off should be clearly communicated through employee handbooks, HR updates, or internal newsletters and that managers should regularly check in with employees to ensure they are maintaining balance. The use of periodic surveys and encouraging feedback from employees was discussed as a way the organisation can gauge employee wellbeing and identify any emerging issues that need to be addressed. It was understood that survey results and feedback mechanisms should be communicated transparently, and action plans should be shared with employees to demonstrate that their input is being taken seriously.

The highest scoring applicants discussed communication strategies for wellbeing initiatives such as creating clear, open channels with inclusive messaging, feedback loops that are well known and with manager training in place.