



# Sword of Honour 2023

Chief Adjudicator's Report

## **Sword of Honour 2023**

### **Chief Adjudicator's Report**

In 2023, 143 submissions were received for the Sword of Honour awards and 115 (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 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 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 often be 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 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 outcomes from your recent Five Star Audit: Identify the most significant Five Star Audit outcomes and explain how relevant recommendations will be used in ensuring continual improvement of the OHSMS performance.***

The purpose of this question was to delve into the approach for enacting improvements identified during the audit process. In essence, it aimed to uncover how these identified opportunities for enhancement would be put into practice at **the specific site**, and how the established objectives would be achieved—a practical realisation of continuous improvement.

Low scoring applicants merely alluded to a top-down, authoritarian style of instruction - a command-and-control approach, where improvement directives were essentially issued from central management. While this approach may yield results in certain organisational contexts, it is ultimately unsustainable and has been proven ineffective for achieving long-term improvements in health and safety performance.

On the other hand, the most highly scoring applicants presented compelling evidence of their grasp of a multifaceted approach. They recognised that success hinged on various factors, including policies, processes, personnel, performance assessments, and the pivotal roles played by leadership, management, and organisational culture in achieving the established objectives. They delved into both quantitative and qualitative measures, demonstrating a clear connection to the preceding question, and showcasing how opportunities for improvement could seamlessly integrate into future plans, targets, and objectives.

This question was subjective in nature, offering the potential for candidates to score well. However, achieving high marks was contingent upon adhering to the grading criteria and furnishing a well-reasoned methodology accompanied by pertinent examples. Only the most accomplished candidates fully addressed the query, elucidating the procedures employed while covering a spectrum of occupational health and safety elements, thus tailoring their responses to the specific site, and avoiding generic and superficial answers.

In addition to the above, the top-scoring candidates took their responses to the next level by expanding upon the broader business advantages attainable through effective implementation of health and safety objectives.

**Q2: *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.***

The purpose of this question was to evaluate the organisation's dedication to training and competence at various levels and how this competence was assessed in alignment with role requirements and legal mandates. Given the typical profile of most applicants for these awards, a well-deconstructed and comprehensive response to this question held the potential for achieving exceptionally high scores.

Unfortunately, this question received subpar responses on numerous occasions. It necessitated coverage of operational proficiency, health, and safety training, and encompassed a range of personnel, including directors, managers, and supervisors. Responses with lower scores typically enumerated safety training for workers and supervisors or provided a rather generic overview of training provisions. Some candidates acknowledged the impact of financial constraints, outlining the need to defer certain aspects of their training programs. Such frank and candid responses were not penalised; this award values insights into both positive and negative aspects of safety, health, and workplace wellbeing. Adjudicators fully recognised the financial constraints routinely faced by those responsible for health and safety.

The highest-scoring responses astutely recognised seemingly unrelated matters and adeptly connected them to safety, such as leadership training and project management. In doing so, these candidates demonstrated an appreciation for the direct correlation between effective management and competence and positive health and safety performance. Superior responses also included a comprehensive description of the delivered training and its specific objectives. As expected, this question prioritised quality over quantity, and consequently, several applicants achieved high scores despite providing a limited number of examples in their responses.

The top-performing applicants offered answers supported by multiple instances of competency requirements, thorough analysis, and concrete examples that clearly illustrated the link to operational risk factors.

**Q3: 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 required applicants to provide a clear delineation of the risk assessment procedure and its application in the identification, prioritisation, and effective control of a spectrum of relevant emergency incidents, both potential and actual. This encompasses aspects of organisational governance, risk management, and compliance.

Successful responses required a keen understanding of the interplay between risk assessment and emergency incident management, and only the highest-scoring applicants managed to achieve this synergy. The most exemplary responses were, in most instances, exhaustive in their consideration of activities and stakeholder groups. They acknowledged the potential necessity of collaborating with specialised services such as fire authorities, rescue services, insurers, regulators, and enforcement agencies. These responses provided concrete examples of communication methods and painstakingly identified all pertinent stakeholders. Moreover, top-scoring responses categorised activities by risk levels, distinguishing between high, medium, and low-risk scenarios. They also delved into discussions concerning emergency arrangements. Responses of this caliber typically delved into scenario planning, business continuity, and disaster recovery strategies. They underscored the importance of engaging employees in the development of high-quality emergency plans.

In contrast, responses that were generic or lacked sufficient detail struggled to attain high marks. Responses that merely stated, "We inform our employees during induction," or similar phrases, were disappointingly prevalent among lower-scoring submissions.

The highest-performing applicants presented a comprehensive account of how emergency incident arrangements are communicated to all relevant parties at the site, along with an explanation of how relevance had been determined. These top candidates not only offered this information but also built upon it by meticulously identifying all pertinent stakeholders, including non-employee groups. They furnished specific examples showcasing the evaluation of effective communication. Additionally, they made reference to their organisation's requirements for specific risk assessments, such as fire, first-aid, security, IT, and infection control. They illustrated how this process was seamlessly integrated into broader business continuity planning, replete with relevant examples. Furthermore, the highest-scoring applicants capitalised on the opportunity to reference their response to the COVID-19 pandemic and recent natural disasters occurring in the international business explaining how pre and post-pandemic/incident risk profiling and responses had been reevaluated for effectiveness. This question also provided a platform to showcase stakeholder involvement in the risk management process and demonstrate leadership from top management.

**Q4: 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 aimed to provide applicants with an opportunity to showcase how they supported the health and wellbeing needs of their employees by actively including and engaging with stakeholders.

It complemented the first and second question by delving into the importance of continuous improvement, competence, engaging stakeholders, communicating objectives to various parties, and effectively managing stakeholders to achieve health and safety objectives and overall business success. The marking scheme explicitly instructed applicants to reference the monitoring processes and to provide clear examples of outcomes influencing health, safety and wellbeing strategy and objectives.

Effective health and safety management hinges on internal and external stakeholder engagement, inclusion, communication, and active involvement. The most outstanding applicants demonstrated a deep understanding of this concept. They also exhibited an appreciation for various engagement tools, presenting a wide array of examples, such as face-to-face interactions, written communication, and more innovative approaches. These top candidates also detailed how their organisations had gone above and beyond to collaboratively create and communicate their health and safety strategies, including activities like open days, away days, seminars, safety events, quizzes, competitions, and similar initiatives.

Strong applicants provided comprehensive information on "who" the internal and external stakeholders were, including employees, regulators, customers, and suppliers. They also explained "what" methods could be employed to engage with these identified groups, and the tools used to capture and document these interactions, such as policies, procedures, handbooks, and sub-contracts. Moreover, they outlined "how" these chosen methods were and would remain effective over time.

The most impressive applicants emphasised the importance of two-way dialogue and exhibited a willingness to employ innovative communication methods, not solely relying on traditional channels like newsletters, emails, and briefings. The highest-scoring applicants furnished responses that were substantiated with relevant examples of monitoring processes and clear illustrations of how these outcomes influenced health, safety, and wellbeing strategies and objectives, all within the prescribed word count parameters.

Conversely, weaker applicants tended to describe the imposition of standards and procedures upon employees and stakeholders, approaching the question in a one-dimensional manner that

treated it solely as an issue between the organisation and its employees. These candidates often lacked an understanding of the partnership philosophy inherent in successful health and safety management. The weakest applicants failed to acknowledge other significant stakeholders, and typically centered their responses on safety activities, neglecting the broader concept of health. This question aimed to elicit the applicant's approach to (a) consultation and participation and (b) health and wellbeing arrangements while discussing the interconnectedness of these aspects with each other and with organisational success.