

# CIEH Annual Moderators' Report

## 2010–2011

CIEH Level 4 Award in Managing Food Safety in Catering

CIEH Level 4 Award in Food Safety Management for Manufacturing

**This report covers the period 1 July 2010 to 30 June 2011.**

## Qualifications performance

Percentage breakdown of the total number of candidates who completed the assessment for the CIEH Level 4 Award in Managing Food Safety in Catering (1 July 2010 to 30 June 2011):

- pass: 62 %
- fail: 38 %

Percentage breakdown of the total number of candidates who completed the assessment for the CIEH Level 4 Award in Food Safety Management for Manufacturing (1 July 2010 to 30 June 2011):

- pass: 62 %
- fail: 38 %

The failure rate for both of these qualifications is of concern. A key purpose of this report is to highlight areas where candidate performance is weak and to suggest possible causes. It also recommends where improvements might be made, by both trainers and candidates, in order to increase future pass rates.

## General comments

### Candidate eligibility for Level 4 awards

Level 4 awards are aimed at managers or aspiring managers, and the expected competencies for the successful achievement of these awards are therefore commensurately challenging. However, there are candidates whose basic underpinning knowledge and practical application are lacking and do not meet the required depth for a Level 4 qualification.

A number of candidates appear to have been recruited onto the course without sufficient prior knowledge and appreciation of food safety or management principles to meet the exacting demands of a Level 4 qualification. Consequently, they struggle with the content, terminology and requirements of the training programme, examination and controlled assignment and will be unlikely to achieve a pass. Indeed, there is some evidence that candidates move straight from Level 2 to Level 4. This raises concerns about employers placing their employees on a Level 4 course in preparation for them to undertake a management role for food safety without assessing or appreciating the employees' capability to cope with the rigours of such a qualification. Candidates should have achieved at least a Level 3 award in food safety, or have gained sufficient practical experience in managing food safety, before undertaking either of these Level 4 qualifications.

Candidates must be made fully aware of the levels of knowledge and understanding they will be expected to demonstrate in both the examination and the controlled assignment. Trainers might consider sending the CIEH course book to candidates in advance of the training to allow them to appreciate what the qualification involves.

Trainers should determine candidates' eligibility for the Level 4 awards at the earliest opportunity, either through some means of initial assessment before they embark on a course (though this may not always be possible) or during the early stages of a course. Some candidates may benefit from a preparatory training course or undertaking other work prior to attempting a Level 4 qualification.

Failure to ensure that candidates are up to the expected standard or capable of this level of study will result in residual course dilution and require basics to be re-taught, leaving no time for subject development at this advanced level.

Consequently, able candidates may be disadvantaged if on the same course as those who are ill prepared to undertake a Level 4 qualification.

It is inappropriate to prime candidates with standard-style answers to examination questions. While it is possible to prepare candidates for the type of questions they are likely to encounter, they should not be encouraged to reproduce answers learned by heart and should instead address each examination question in context on the day.

### Trainer support during the course

It is imperative that trainers consult with candidates during the course to understand any difficulties they are experiencing and to establish whether these can be addressed to enable candidates to meet the requirements or whether a decision needs to be made not to continue with the course or assessment at that stage.

If candidates have limited experience of sitting examinations or completing controlled assignments, centres should defer the assessment process rather than risk losing the confidence of candidates or their employers.

### Course duration and focus

Trainers are reminded that the duration for delivering the qualification stated in the training literature is a *minimum* requirement, which assumes that candidates are fully able to undertake the assessment activities and have good command of written communication. The learning needs of candidates should be assessed carefully and taken into account, and it may be necessary to spend longer on areas of difficulty.

On this basis, it may be helpful for trainers to devise a pre-course task that asks candidates to evaluate their existing subject knowledge and to familiarise themselves with the Level 4 syllabus. By identifying areas of weakness at this early stage, it may be possible to prioritise learning areas. One successful approach is to issue a case study based on a recent press release and ask questions.

### Syllabus areas

There is still great concern among examiners and moderators that some parts of the syllabus are not being taught and that other parts are not being covered in sufficient depth. The syllabus areas represent the cornerstone of successful food safety management in an organisation, and it is troubling that some candidates cannot demonstrate understanding of important principles.

Candidates must be fully conversant with the whole syllabus and the scope of the subjects within it, rather than only focusing on specific topics. Without this level of knowledge, they will be unable to meet the rigours of a Level 4 award.

## Requirements

Level 4 assessments test knowledge, understanding and application. These elements are incorporated into the questions in order to allow candidates to demonstrate the breadth and depth of their knowledge and understanding of food safety. They are explained below in light of recurring comments about leading words/verbs and their meanings.

Trainers should provide examples of questions in their training/teaching and not assume that candidates can automatically differentiate between the skills of knowledge, understanding and application.

### Knowledge

This aspect tests a candidate's ability to recall facts and information and uses question words such as 'list', 'state' and 'define'. For example:

- List five key points a manager would include in an induction training programme for food handlers.
- State two fundamental legal responsibilities for ensuring the safety of food for consumers.
- Define the terms 'contamination' and 'disinfection'.

When answering knowledge-based questions, candidates need to provide more than one-word answers. Brief answers tend to reveal a candidate's lack of detailed knowledge.

### Understanding

This aspect tests a candidate's comprehension and uses question words such as 'identify', 'describe', 'explain' and 'outline':

- identify – name or pinpoint something
- describe – communicate the key features of a situation or process, possibly using examples
- explain – this is different from 'describe'; explanations often include short descriptions but also express the relationships between component parts, for example explain why induction training is provided for food handlers and when it should be provided
- outline – this involves part description and part explanation, but in a more concise format.

Proficient candidates use detailed examples of good practice to demonstrate their depth of understanding.

Weaker candidates who only make lists are not 'describing', 'explaining' or 'outlining' as specifically requested in the question and fail to provide the relevant detail. This severely limits the number of marks that can be awarded.

Candidates should recognise that at Level 4 their understanding will be checked using realistic and relevant examples of the syllabus being applied to the workplace.

## Application

Question words such as 'apply', 'demonstrate', 'prepare' and 'solve' are frequently used for application questions.

Candidates are required either to make reasoned arguments for or against a point (or several points) or to find an answer to a problem. These words are often used in scenario questions, for example 'You are asked to prepare a case for additional resources for food safety training to present to your general manager'.

With the command to 'apply and demonstrate', candidates need to be able to show that they understand how to use their knowledge practically in any given situation.

These qualifications are aimed at managers or aspiring managers, and a recurrent weakness is candidates failing to answer questions from a management perspective. They need to address how they would react as a manager in the given circumstances, and demonstrate how they would manage a situation and implement a solution. Even if candidates are not yet in a managerial position in their own workplace, they must still answer as if acting in the role of manager, otherwise they are unlikely to provide the level of detail required by the question. Examples, where required, need to be relevant and applicable to the specific type of food premises.

For example, when discussing training, a manager would look at identification of training needs, prioritisation, the selection of trainers, appropriate levels and methods of training, assessment of competence after training and keeping training records.

Application is particularly important in the controlled assignment, where candidates must use their own workplace experiences in order to answer the questions.

## Syllabus areas

### Weaknesses

Highlighted below are the key syllabus topics that moderators have identified as recurrent areas of weakness in candidates' responses.

#### Ensuring compliance with legislation and industry guidance

Candidates continue to cite out-of-date legislation, such as the Food Safety (General Food Hygiene) Regulations 1995, or they provide inaccurate detail. Many candidates show little awareness of codes of practice and guidance appropriate to their particular sector of the food industry. Overseas candidates still tend to struggle with UK law; they should focus on UK practice and law, and not on ISO standards and consultants.

#### Food safety hazards

Understanding of microbiology is still generally poor and causes problems for less able candidates, particularly regarding bacterial spores, toxin production, *E. coli* O157, *Staphylococcus aureus* and the associated controls required in food preparation to prevent food poisoning. Without an adequate understanding of this topic, candidates tend to struggle in other areas.

Trainers should focus carefully on this area in order to address the generally weak understanding by candidates.

#### Managing the operational requirements of a safe food business

Candidates must answer questions from a manager's perspective. Key words such as 'implement', 'control', 'monitor', 'verify' and 'audit' still pose problems for some candidates. Trainers should ensure that all candidates can apply these terms correctly.

### Strengths

Candidates tend to display a sound understanding of cleaning and disinfection regimes and pest controls.

## Examination technique

High-scoring scripts are well structured and coherent, and it is evident that candidates have the required depth and application of knowledge.

There are some scripts where, with a little more thought and structure, candidates would have picked up those few marks that make the difference between pass and fail.

However, many candidates continue to demonstrate poor technique. This may be due to their general educational standard, and these candidates may need additional support.

Trainers should allow candidates to practise their examination technique; sample examination questions are available from the CIEH. This will help candidates to assess their progress and level of knowledge, and familiarise themselves with the format and level of the examination paper.

The following comments from moderators highlight the key areas in need of improvement in candidates' responses. Trainers should emphasise these matters when providing feedback to candidates.

#### Think like a manager

As already mentioned in this report, but worthy of being repeated, candidates must demonstrate their depth of understanding and knowledge of key concepts, systems and controls from a *management* perspective. Some candidates answer questions from an employee perspective, when additional marks are available for reference to management arrangements. For example, an employee may refer to the various controls in place, whereas a manager would plan, prioritise, implement, monitor and review.

#### Focus on the question

Candidates must be reminded to read examination questions carefully in order to understand what is being asked of them. It is still apparent that some candidates do not read questions properly and as a result waste both time and marks by giving inappropriate and irrelevant answers. They should be careful to answer the question as set, rather than one that they would like to answer. It is strongly recommended that candidates read through the entire question *before* answering any part of it. Note that there is no need for candidates to write out the question in their answer.

Using highlighter pens to pick out key words/verbs in the question can help candidates to ensure that they respond to all the requirements and avoid deviation.

Candidates need to be able to answer questions based on any part of the syllabus, so it is essential that they address and revise every element of the course programme.

## Quality versus quantity

As in previous years, there are too many occasions when candidates provide one-word or very short answers, which do not provide sufficient depth or detail at this level.

Candidates are required to give reasoned answers to questions and should ensure that they have sufficient knowledge to respond in depth. Bullet-pointed lists do not generally provide sufficient depth and breadth of information and tend to be restrictive. Unless the question specifically requests it, a bullet-pointed list will not be eligible for the full range of marks; neither will vague or generalised statements such as 'following good practice'.

Conversely, writing copiously on a subject without considering the finer points of the question is not an effective practice. It leads to digression and unnecessary/irrelevant information, which will not gain any marks. It is also a waste of a candidate's time, which would be better utilised in answering another question. By looking at the mark scheme, candidates should be able to work out the level of detail required in their answers. Answers should be concise but show a complete and rounded appreciation of food safety.

Some candidates repeat similar points, or the same point by means of an alternative phrase, when additional marks are available for citing different examples. For instance, candidates have lost marks by referring to hand washing several times when other examples of personal hygiene are required. Duplicated material can only be credited once.

## Structure, focus and clarity

Questions are specifically worded and written in a format that guides the candidate. Stronger candidates use the structure of the question to plan their answer. Lack of clear structure and focus is a key area where weaker candidates continually let themselves down. Trainers should provide guidance and support to candidates with regard to the length, structure and necessary depth of answers.

The use of a simple answer plan with key headings would help candidates to structure longer responses in a logical and concise manner. This approach allows candidates to focus on the particular demands of the question and to respond to the specific issues. It will also ensure that no salient information is omitted and points are not repeated.

Individual sentences should ideally not exceed 25 words in length, although this can be difficult when working under timed examination conditions.

## Time management and planning

Candidates need to prepare thoroughly for the examination and manage their time carefully. Candidates have lost most marks either by failing to answer all the questions or by spending too much time answering the earlier questions and as a consequence rushing the later ones. This weakness is often as much about candidates failing to plan adequately or pace themselves accordingly as a greater or lesser depth of knowledge informing their application to the question.

Candidates should look at the mark scheme to gauge the amount of information the question is requesting and the comparative amount of time they should afford in answering it. A question worth five marks will require a more detailed response than one carrying a single mark, and should therefore take longer to answer. Providing only one or two points for a five-mark answer will not be sufficient.

Candidates who are unsure of how to answer a section of a question should move on but leave sufficient time to return to it before the end of the examination when they are checking their work. They must answer all the questions.

Candidates should be advised to allow around 15 minutes at the end of the examination to check through their answers for any gaps or errors – in particular, they should make certain that all the key issues have been addressed.

Practice is essential, as it will allow candidates to become familiar with the process and time demands of the examination. Trainers should ensure that there is opportunity to undertake mock examinations to build the confidence of their candidates.

## Legibility

On occasion, candidates' handwriting is difficult to read, and sometimes it cannot be deciphered at all – if a candidate's answers are not clear, marks will be limited. If this problem is identified by trainers during the training programme, the candidate should be advised and help should be sought.

## Controlled assignment

Many of the controlled assignments have been disappointing, despite the guidance available to assist trainers and candidates, and in particular the sample controlled assignments available from the CIEH.

It is clear that, in some cases, candidates have not been adequately prepared to complete a controlled assignment and require more guidance. As this part of the course is carried out under examination conditions, candidates are unable to rely on and/or use company documentation/material. Therefore, trainers must emphasise the importance of thorough preparation.

It is essential that candidates read through the exemplar scoping documents and sample controlled assignments provided by the CIEH, so that they understand what is expected of them. It is also recommended that trainers allow their candidates to undertake practice controlled assignments, in order to familiarise themselves with the requirements and timings.

The overall standard of the controlled assignments needs to be improved and trainers must be fully conversant with the requirements.

### Scoping documents

The scoping document provides a background to assist the examiner in understanding the type of food premises and the role the candidate plays within it. To date, they have generally been suitably completed with the appropriate level of detail.

#### Part 1: Food safety management

As the questions in this section of the controlled assignment are interrelated, candidates need to make sure that their answers follow through. Accordingly, it is important in the first question that candidates select four distinct hazards that allow them to provide the depth of response required to achieve the highest marks. Ideally, they should choose hazards from each of the four categories – microbiological, chemical, physical and allergenic. The choice of food item is also important, to support detailed answers on control measures.

Part 1 hinges on candidates being able to identify hazards in their own business – in some cases, candidates were unable to do this, which in turn led to poor performance in the rest of the assignment.

It is insufficient for candidates to describe hazards in general terms; if candidates fail to be specific and thorough at this stage, the subsequent steps – identifying control measures, carrying out effective monitoring procedures and taking appropriate corrective actions – will also tend to be considered in vague, general terms, and as a result marks will be lost. A common weakness is that many candidates do not include sufficient detail when identifying hazards. For example, 'physical contamination' is not adequate as a hazard description. More appropriate statements might be 'metal contamination due to machine failure' or 'hair contamination due to food handlers failing to wear hair nets'.

This part of the controlled assignment assumes that candidates have a suitable understanding of HACCP terminology and are able to apply HACCP principles.

However, candidates often struggle to understand the differences between a control measure for a hazard and monitoring procedures. For example, a control measure for ensuring the safety of cooked chicken would be cooking to a temperature of 75°C for 30 seconds or equivalent. The associated monitoring procedure would be the act of checking the temperature of the chicken with a temperature probe.

Discussion of monitoring procedures often lacks detail, with little or no evidence included of the method of monitoring, frequency or responsibility.

There is limited understanding of what to do if control is lost. Corrective actions are often covered too briefly. Any discussion of corrective actions should include not only what happens to the product but also an investigation as to why the critical limit was exceeded and what should be done to prevent a recurrence. Candidates need to be reminded that rejection is the last resort and that there are often several actions that can be taken before this stage is reached.

#### Part 2: The role of the manager

In general, candidates perform worse in the second part of the controlled assignment, with inadequate details provided about training requirements. Candidates tend to discuss the specific contents of the training programme, rather than offering a more strategic view that takes into consideration identification/evaluation of need and staff prioritisation (high risk/low risk), devising and implementing a training strategy, means of monitoring and evaluating training programmes, record keeping and review.

Candidates appear to be confused by the concept of a 'food safety culture'. They need to consider such things as food safety policy and procedures, providing induction training, reporting issues, communication, provision of resources and assessment of training needs.

## Notes for trainers

While the introduction of controlled assignments has removed the need for trainers to mark coursework, trainers must still ensure that candidates gain sound knowledge and understanding through the delivered training programme. The following comments from moderators help to emphasise the important role that trainers play.

### Legislative/technical knowledge

While the onus is on candidates to research the taught topics, trainers must ensure that they keep up to date with legislative/technical changes and changes in professional practice, and that this is reflected in training materials and course delivery.

### Pre-course information

It is important that candidates are provided with accurate, comprehensive pre-course information regarding Level 4 qualifications and that they are fully advised on the requirements and knowledge/skills/experience needed to cope with the rigours of the course and the assessment process and to fulfil the objectives and learning outcomes.

Centres may wish to consider using some form of pre-course assessment. This would not only help to identify the candidate's abilities towards the Level 4 programme but also be a useful way of assessing candidate's strengths and weaknesses. This will aid the trainer and candidates in compiling suitable study plans.

### Trainer support for candidates

It is essential that trainers take candidates through the candidate guidelines document to ensure that they are fully aware of what needs to be addressed and how, in both the examination and the controlled assignment.

Trainers are encouraged to mentor and support candidates appropriately, coaching them in the required skills to fulfil their controlled assignment and tackle the examination with confidence. The ability of candidates to express themselves in writing varies significantly, and it may be necessary to provide assistance with written communication skills.

Trainers should consider the support that they will provide to candidates prior to re-sitting the examination paper or controlled assignment.

### Training delivery

The complexities of some learning outcomes mean that the trainer needs to teach the material in an instructive manner. The information should be presented clearly and accurately so that candidates appreciate the range and depth of the various topics and apply the acquired knowledge to their own workplaces.

### Practice questions

It is recommended that trainers spend time focusing on examination technique and include a session on this within the course scheme of work.

Devising mock examination questions for candidates is good practice. Precise wording is essential, and the syllabus will provide a useful guide to trainers who wish to compile their own bank of mock questions. Ideally, candidates should undertake a timed mock examination, in order to evaluate their time management skills before they sit the examination proper. If this is not possible, short written exercises in groups with trainer feedback might be another way to increase confidence.

Trainers are advised to ensure that candidates fully appreciate the examination format of the new controlled assignment.

### Coverage

As candidates need to be able to cope with questions based on any part of the syllabus, it is essential that trainers cover every element in their training programme.

While it is imperative that trainers keep their own knowledge up to date, they should also liaise with other experts in delivering their course, such as local environmental health practitioners (EHPs), who can provide technical information and advice on current legislation and policy and industry good practice.

Candidates should read textbooks and other sources in addition to coursework notes, as this will increase their understanding as well as reinforce formal training sessions. Trainers might provide reading lists and webpage references in order to encourage such further study.

### Procedure for reasonable adjustment

Trainers should refer to the 'Procedure for reasonable adjustment' in the CIEH Procedure Manual if there are specific candidate needs to be accommodated. This must be done prior to any assessment activity.

### Presentation of scripts

Trainers should ensure that scripts are secured with staples or treasury tags; do not use plastic sleeves for each page of text, as this slows down the moderation process.

Candidates should ensure that they write clearly.

## Other comments

While the demands of the Level 4 awards in food safety have resulted in a high average failure rate, pass levels can be improved through the diligence and approach offered by trainers to their candidates.

Trainers are actively encouraged to provide regular feedback to the CIEH to ensure a process of continual improvement. This may be on any issue, for example administration, course materials, examination questions and controlled assignments.



Chartered  
Institute of  
Environmental  
Health

**Customer Services**

Chartered Institute of Environmental Health  
Chadwick Court, 15 Hatfields, London SE1 8DJ

**Telephone** 020 7827 5800 (Option 1)

**Email** [customerservices@cieh.org](mailto:customerservices@cieh.org) **Web** [www.cieh.org/training](http://www.cieh.org/training)