

Assessment of Academic Ability

Supplementary text: 'HSE and Diving'

1: Introduction

The “diving industry” can be considered as a number of sectors where people need to go underwater to work. With the exception of the recreational sector, diving is primarily a method of getting to a work site that happens to be underwater. Diving is considered to be a high hazard activity. In the 8 year period from 1996/97 to 2003/04 there were 24 fatal accidents. Many of these were members of the public undergoing recreational diving training with paid instructors. However, the risks can be significantly reduced by adhering to regulations and adopting established good practice.

HSE seeks a significant and sustained reduction in fatal and major accidents across all sectors of the diving industry. HSE is organised into a number of Directorates. The Hazardous Installations Directorate is the operational arm responsible for Major Hazards, including the Offshore Oil and Gas Industry. HSE's Diving Group is part of the Offshore Division of the Hazardous Installations Directorate, but the group deals with all diving at work activities – not just offshore. HSE's Policy Unit supports the Diving Group's work through the formulation of policy and legislation.

HSE's plan of work for the Diving industry targets the key priorities identified in the *Revitalising Health and Safety Strategy* and additional priority topics identified by HSE's Hazardous Installations Directorate (HID). HSE's Diving Teams work with key stakeholders such as trade associations, trade unions and Diving Schools to promote good practice and make available general, industry specific and topic guidance.

2: The Diving at Work Regulations

Diving is a high hazard activity and there are specific regulations on diving at work to control the risks. These are The Diving at Work Regulations 1997 (DWR). The DWR cover all dives when one or more divers are AT WORK in the diving industry whether employed or self-employed. The regulations apply to everyone from the client for whom the work is being done, to the diver undertaking the work. All persons involved have a responsibility to take measures to ensure the health and safety of those taking part in the diving project as well as their own.

Divers have a number of responsibilities under DWR. These include holding an approved qualification for diving; being competent to work safely; and holding a valid certificate of medical fitness to dive.

Under the DWR, the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) approves diving qualifications it considers suitable for ensuring the adequate competence of divers. Divers must hold an appropriate qualification for the class of diving required in a diving project.

3: Diving at work

Diving is the means of getting to and from a worksite and carrying out tasks. These tasks may be part of a wide range of industry from civil engineering to archaeology. Potential working divers should ideally already possess the technical skills that are relevant to the job. For example, construction workers may require welding qualifications, while divers involved in an archaeology project may require a degree in archaeology. You need to have both the diving skills and work skills that employers want. There are different types of working divers, each demanding different skills and competencies. These include:

- Offshore Diving in support of the offshore oil and gas industries. Usually it is contract based.
- Inland / Inshore Diving, for example, in support of civil engineering or marine-related projects and fish farming.
- Scientific and Archaeological Diving in support of scientific research and education, and archaeological investigation of sites of historic interest.
- Media Diving in support of film or TV productions which require divers to work as stunt performers, journalists, presenters, photographers, camera operators, sound and lighting technicians, and unit crews.
- Recreational Diving involving the instruction and guiding of recreational divers.
- Police and Armed Forces. These divers are specialists who are chosen from personnel already in the service.

4: Becoming qualified as a working diver in Great Britain

In order to become a working diver in Great Britain you must obtain a qualification approved by HSE that is relevant to and sufficient for the work to be undertaken. Unless you already hold one of the approved qualifications, you will need to have your diving competence (if any) assessed by an organisation recognised by HSE. This may include training. Diving is physically and mentally demanding. Some potential divers drop out of the training because they find they are not suited to working underwater. Good health is absolutely essential. At the earliest possible stage you should complete an initial medical questionnaire to see if there is anything in your medical history that might preclude you from a career in diving. Before beginning training and or assessment you must pass an initial medical examination carried out by an AMED to ensure you are medically fit to dive. If you pass the medical you will be issued with a certificate of medical fitness to dive, which is valid for up to 12 months. This must be renewed annually and will include a fitness test.

HSE has four assessment standards of commercial diving competence: SCUBA Diving, Surface Supplied Diving, Surface Supplied Top Up Diving and Closed Bell Diving. SCUBA stands for Self Contained Underwater Breathing Apparatus where the air supply is in cylinders worn by the diver. Surface supplied divers receive their air supply via an umbilical (hose) from the surface. In order to dive offshore on surface supplied equipment, divers must also undertake a Surface Supplied Diving (Top Up) assessment. Closed bell divers use mixed gas in order to dive deeper than 50 metres. They can spend up to 28 days working (and living) in a compression chamber complex transferring to the work site in a diving bell.