

# TRAINING PARTNER

*With so many courses and qualifications for the health and safety industry, making a selection can be quite confusing. Gary Fallaize helps you decide what you need.*



OVER THE last few years there have been a lot of changes in the range of accredited/badged health and safety courses and qualifications on the market. New entrants and existing players are now offering a far wider range of awards and there is now a war going on between awarding bodies who are competing for what is a relatively finite market. Study duration and assessment are the main battleground, with aggressive marketing increasingly used to promote the relative benefits of courses. As always with marketing, bold claims are being made, but are not always providing the information users of these awards need to make an educated choice. As a training provider this is a challenge, but for consumers it can be confusing and even more challenging to find the most appropriate qualification or course. Can a 2 day course provide the same outcomes as a 3 day course? Is a 250 hour diploma the same as a 350 hour one? What is the best form of assessment? Etc.

There is increasing pressure from some learners and employers to reduce course duration and make assessment more accessible (or easier). Learners increasingly demand quicker, cheaper and (what they perceive as) easier assessment. Employers want the best of both worlds, less time out of the office, less cost, rigorous assessment (but 100% pass rates), BUT at the same time expect staff to be fully competent with the knowledge and skills to perform their role. Interestingly some more senior H&S professionals I have bumped into in recent months have a different view - wanting more to be taught, and longer courses, as they are not seeing the skills they need in their staff. Whether their organisations would want to allow more time and cost is another question.

Whether less study time is a good thing is not something easily answered.

At awareness level it very much depends on what is expected from the training, with a 1 day and a 10 day course being equally valid for different organisations/individuals needs. But selection should focus on the required outcomes and not just duration and cost, money is just wasted if the wrong training is selected.

For qualification training standards are set by membership bodies, who define the level of knowledge (along with other factors), for the varying levels of membership. Employers have varying needs with lower risk organisations needing significantly less competencies than those with higher risk. However employees change jobs so there is a need for professional bodies to set membership standards so employers should be able to expect a similar level of expertise irrespective of which qualification was taken. The problem starts when the various awarding bodies, universities and colleges that have developed courses that meet the membership criteria have to compete for learners.

Health and safety is a complex subject requiring a wide range of knowledge and skills. This requirement continually expands through new legislation, technologies and the expansion of the safety professional's role. Cutting the time spent learning is thus a challenge.

The art of developing an effective specification for a course is to define what a reasonable course duration is and then prioritise the content on what benefits the majority. There will always be specialist areas that some would like to be included but developing courses with unrealistic time commitments and cost would result in learners and purchasers seeking an alternative option. Far better to teach what is important well and engage the learners so they have the enthusiasm to research

more specialist areas as needed in working life. That does mean learners will have to take responsibility for adding to their knowledge and skills as their career demands.

I would argue for the future that good awarding bodies should invest in providing more course specifications that complement their current awards so to enable those in the profession to expand their knowledge.

The last link in the chain is the independent training providers, we have to decide what courses to offer and then interpret the awarding body specifications to develop an effective course. I would also argue that the job of the training provider is to educate our customers on the relative strengths and weaknesses of these competing awards. If you have 30% less time in the classroom what do you miss out on, or, more positively 30% more time what do you gain? Where we offer competing awards what are their relative strengths and weaknesses, or even ask why we are offering apparently very similar courses?

When it comes to delivering the courses we must not only teach our learners the knowledge, its application and how to approach the assessment but to educate them on the limitations of their knowledge and skills. Sending somebody back to the workplace with a shiny new certificate or diploma who thinks they know everything is not helpful to anybody.

They say competition is a good thing and to some degree that is true, the problem is price competition often comes at a cost either in quality or quality. When looking for training it is important to remember this as less is not always more.

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