

Sample pages from the 'Task' in the free Taster module



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Cost effective CPD by distance learning

BlueBox *partners* is pleased to announce the launch of its Distance Learning Programme for residential practitioners. This new initiative redefines professional development and responds to the challenges of the recession.

Our programme is:

- **cost effective** – a fraction of the cost of conventional seminars and conferences;
- **available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week** – no need to lose that important fee;
- **on your computer screen at your home or office** – no more early morning traffic jams;
- **practical and focused on topical issues** – tackles the new challenges you face everyday;
- **highly illustrated and interactive** – maximum pictures, minimum words;
- **RICS compliant** – designed to satisfy the RICS' CPD requirements.

Our customers have told us that the recession is biting hard. Many cannot spare the time to sit in training rooms no matter how useful the subjects might be. But the world is rapidly changing and we all need to keep up-to-date and diversify so we can survive the lean times. In short, cutting back on CPD is not an option.

New challenges, new programme

The BlueBox *partners* Distance Learning Programme is our solution. We have created a series of low cost modules that you can use at your convenience. You will no longer have to battle through traffic or cope with crowded commuter trains to get to a training seminar on time. You can develop your professional skills and knowledge before you go to the office (*if you are a lark*), or after your supper at night (*if you are an owl*). Our Distance Learning modules have the following characteristics:

- We have kept the technology simple to keep the costs down;
- The material can be downloaded quickly so you will not need a 'top of the range' computer just to open a file;
- All are highly illustrated. Surveyors like photographs and practical case studies and so we have tracked down examples that you will encounter every day.

Although you will have to carry out your own research (usually web based), you will not be faced with reading a long, dry, academic article only to be asked a few multi-choice questions at the end. Instead you will analyse a photographic case study and apply your newly acquired knowledge to formulate an appropriate response. Once you have completed this, you will be able to download our model answer and evaluate your own performance.

Sample pages from the model answer in the free taster module

Chimney height and arrangement

The top of the chimney should be roughly 1.5m high above the bearing application, as high as practicable, as long as the chimney is at least 1.5m above the line.

The chimney should be at least 1.0m above the roof surface and it is our view it is clearly more than this.

If the chimney is less than 2.3m from a roof window, the top of the chimney should be at least 1.0m above the top of it. We think that the chimney is around 2.3m and the top of the chimney is probably around 1.0m above the window. Although it is within the margin, or below, we would judge this as acceptable.

This information is taken from Part J of the Building Regulations, diagram 17.

Summary: Using Part J as a benchmark for comparison, the size and arrangement of the chimney is satisfactory.

Flue terminal fitting

We have assumed that this pot serves the fireplace in the front bedroom. As this is an 'easier' terminal used for venting cleaned flues, it is important to check the fireplace to make sure it is not being used.

Although not a formal requirement to rain and be good to good practice, the terminal fitting to a flue should also be easy to access and the fitting looks satisfactory.

The chimney pot should be sound and secure. Based on this view, it has relatively new and the render and flashing (where visible) looks OK.

Summary: The type and condition of the chimney pot to the flue looks satisfactory.

The fireplace

The heating appliance is a small, free standing, closed hearth door model heater, various but with the flue of the chimney.

The top of the hearth is satisfactory (see diagram 20 and 27 in Part J). However, the fixed air face should be laid over a solid hearth rather than a concrete base. A heavy top with the knicker can help you decide what this is. Ideally, there should be a change in the floorboards because the appliance is small, closed, likely to have a low heat output, and is set back into the recess, or balance as would find this acceptable.

Combustible materials should generally be 200mm from the inside face of the fireplace air flue. Typical combustible like slings, door mats, metal plates, etc. can be fixed to the side of a chimney or fireplace recess. As long as the floor/ fireplace surround meets this requirement (see Part J, diagram 21) the inner face of the recess below has if been fixed with brickwork and looks satisfactory.

Summary: We are concerned that the hearth could be partially laid over the floorboards. Because the appliance is small, closed, likely to have a low heat output, and is set back into the recess, or balance as would find this acceptable.

Ventilation

All solid fuel appliances need ventilation to the outside air to make sure it is properly used. This should be done as follows:

If the appliance is below the level of the floor, it will need filtered for outside air. However, most manufacturers recommend via ventilation for ALL appliances what ever their use. They also warn about rooms that have replacement glazing or good draught stopping. These could affect the use of the room and affect the effectiveness of the flue.

Summary: Ventilation is in place for outside air, although it is not clear if the grille is to be covered over in this position. The grille looks damaged, so it is not clear if this is the case.

Floor vents - diagram 12 from Part 2 allow floor vents. However, this raises a number of questions: how big is the vent? how big is the vent? how big is the vent? how big is the vent?

Review of the critical indicators

The summary section from each critical indicator page are shown below.

Critical indicator	Green	Yellow	Red
Chimney height and arrangement	Green		
Chimney - stability and condition	Green		
Flue terminal fitting	Green		
Fireplace	Green		
Connection to flue	Green		
Ventilation	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow
Notice plate, contractor and maintenance			Red
The heating appliance			Red
Type of fuel		Yellow	Yellow

The Technical Forum

One of the advantages of conventional 'face to face' training is that you can question the speakers, discuss the topics and generally 'network' with fellow professionals. Although this cannot be fully duplicated by distance learning programmes, we will give you access to a 'technical forum' after you have completed our module. Although we will not be able to respond to individual queries, our version of a surveyor's 'chat room' will give you the opportunity to read and contribute to module based discussions. You might even make some new friends!



Example of our technical forum for energy assessors

The Distance Learning Programme

Distance learning requires a different level of discipline by the participant than a training seminar demands; we appreciate this and therefore are building the modules over a period of time so that they are up to date and relevant to current activity. We will produce a series of modules, one being the "Services pack", another on Valuation, with others to follow on Condition assessment, Environment and Energy:

Services Pack – building services in residential dwellings. This will include four separate modules including electrics, heating, water and drainage. These will be launched from May 2009;

Valuation Pack – appraisal of property in changing times. This pack will build into 4 modules looking at new build property, valuing in a recession, and the impact on value of environmental issues and the condition rating system. The first module in this pack will be available in early May 2009;

Condition Assessment Pack – condition assessment and reports. These modules will review and tackle some of the perennial and controversial issues including: identifying and reporting on health and safety risks; managing 'further investigations' in level two reports; structural movement, dampness and timber defects. The first module in this pack will look at the new HomeBuyer's Report and will be available from early June 2009 to coincide with the launch of the new report. Further modules will be introduced from September 2009 and by March 2010 we will have at least 20 modules in the programme.

Meeting your CPD requirements

We have designed our programme to match the RICS' life long learning regulations. We will provide you with a copy of our unique personal development planner together with a set of learning objectives and outcomes for each module. This will help you to comply quickly with the new CPD regulations, especially useful as the RICS is now monitoring member records more regularly. Although the amount of CPD will vary between modules, if you follow our guidance you should be able to log between four to six hours of learning activity for each one. That could be as little as £5.00 for each CPD hour! Beat that if you can!

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Sample pages from one of our valuation modules

The future of 'face to face' training

Although we think that the Distance Learning Programme will benefit many practitioners during these difficult times, there is still a place for conventional training. Distance learning does not suit all learners. For example, many prefer personal contact and interaction. When the pace of life is hectic, others enjoy getting away from ringing phones and busy email inboxes for a few hours.



Structured learning and training seminars – a coordinated approach

This new development has presented us with a challenge: how does our Distance Learning Programme coordinate with our conventional training seminars? We have resolved this by:

- not using the same material for both programmes;
- making sure that the training seminars provide maximum opportunities for interaction with both the presenters and fellow participants;
- developing higher order knowledge and skills by using active rather than passive learning strategies.

In this way, our programmes are complimentary and cater for a range of learner needs.

Costs

To keep things simple, each module costs £28.00 plus VAT. You will have to pay this 'up-front' and once your payment has cleared you will be sent a password enabling you to download the material. A 10% discount will be available if you purchase a minimum of four modules. Discounts will be available for corporate organisations where we can also provide bespoke modules and technical forums.

Free 'taster' – six hours of CPD for nothing!

You do not have to take our word about the quality of our modules. You can download a 'taster' module for free! This complete module looks at the assessment of solid fuel appliances in domestic dwellings and includes:

- a guide on how to use the module;
- sources of information;
- an illustrated task for you to tackle.

Once you have completed your research and responded to the task, you can download our response.

If you then compare and reflect on the similarities and differences and set a personal action plan, we think you should be able to allocate up to 6 hours CPD on your personal development planner. You will be able to see what our modules are like. So if you want to 'try before you buy' visit our website at www.blueboxpartners.com and download your first module for free!

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