



## EXAMINER'S REPORT

MAY 2006

### MARKETING IN PRACTICE Certificate in Marketing Skills

#### General Comments

This was the second *Marketing in Practice* paper of The Marketing Institute's new Certificate in Marketing Skills programme. The standard of scripts in 2006 was lower than in 2005, the first year the Certificate in Marketing Skills was offered. The presentation of scripts was poor, with illegible handwriting and unclear numbering of questions. The examiner would appreciate if more care and attention were given to presenting clearly legible scripts. On a more positive note, the vast majority of students was able to attempt the case study and required number of questions.

It is clear that most candidates have gained a very thorough grounding in marketing from the programme and show potential for further studies. Students often bring considerable practical experience of the business world so that their answers to marketing problems are grounded in reality. Those who achieve a merit grade across all four subjects are eligible to continue their studies by proceeding to the Foundation Certificate in Marketing with an exemption from Stage 1.

For those who will be sitting the autumn paper in *Marketing in Practice*, there are a number of simple steps that can be taken to improve performance. It is estimated that approximately 40% of exam success can be attributed to effective study and examination technique, so it is well worth while taking previous papers and answering single questions and, if possible, a complete paper against the clock before sitting the exam. This will allow the student to test his or her ability to apply a systematic approach to answering questions, including keeping within the time limit for each question. This exercise also helps the exam candidate to build up stamina in writing by hand for two hours!

#### Question 1: Case Study - McCann's Hotel

The case study represents 50% of the marks for the whole exam so, theoretically, it is possible to pass the exam by doing an excellent case study analysis. A case study provides an opportunity to the candidate to demonstrate marketing principles and apply marketing techniques.

The greatest danger to exam candidates is to see the case study as a general knowledge question and to provide answers that do not reflect the new learning gained from the *Marketing in Practice* programme. If the answer could have been written without the candidate taking part in the course then the answer is insufficient for the purposes of the exam.

A second danger lies in simply reiterating the main points of the case study without any analysis or conclusion. Candidates are required to make recommendations and to justify those

recommendations, given the facts of the case. There is no 'right' answer. If arguments are well reasoned and supported by the facts of the case, they are acceptable.

In the first part of the question, students were required to provide a basic segmentation, targeting and positioning strategy for McCann's Hotel. Some of the stronger candidates clearly distinguished between business users and private customers. Most students provided a number of distinct segments and were able to suggest contrasting marketing mixes for each segment.

The second part of the question led to some confused responses. The promotion strategy was to be targeted at loyal customers and should not have been a general promotion strategy for all customer segments. The better answers used the database to identify and target customers who were already loyal. However, it should also have been possible to suggest strategies to encourage infrequent visitors to use the hotel more regularly.

### **Question 2**

Most students who attempted a question on the PEST model (political, economic, social and technological forces) were able to do an adequate analysis. However, it is very important to focus on emerging PEST forces rather than solely existing forces as you should be using the PEST analysis to help you identify *new* opportunities and threats. Furthermore, the PEST analysis looks at forces external to the organisation, that is the business environment. Many students discussed issues such as their office computer systems, staffing levels and other internal issues.

### **Question 3**

While all students understand the four elements of the marketing mix (product, price, promotion and place), an alarming number of candidates failed to use the extended mix (people, process and physical evidence) for service organisations.

### **Question 4**

A question on New Product Development (NPD) Strategy was well answered. However, some students did not deal adequately with the first part of the question on why companies persist with NPD, despite the risks of failure. It was possible to answer this in a number of ways, for example, the product life cycle model clearly shows that products can die, so that any company needs new products to replace maturing and 'dying' products. This approach was used by the majority of students. Most students who attempted the question were able to identify the key phases in NPD.

### **Question 5**

A straightforward question on a company's Marketing Information System produced some very good answers in which students were able to identify the three key sources of information as internal records, marketing intelligence and market research.