



## EXAMINER'S REPORT

MAY 2002

### BEHAVIOURAL ASPECTS OF MARKETING

#### General Comments

Overall performance on this paper can be described as nothing short of dismal with an alarming proportion of the candidates showing little or no command of the syllabus content. In all 64% passed with a further 7% getting a grade of E. Of the total number who sat the paper 29% attempted fewer than the five questions required and a further 34% obtained no mark at all for at least one of their attempted questions. The impression in the eyes of this examiner is that a large majority of students relied on covering only a narrow sample of the course material or alternatively relied on having a very vague smattering of knowledge with respect to each topic, which they hoped to be able to use irrespective of the actual questions asked.

At the other end of the scale a small number of candidates demonstrated a remarkably detailed grasp of the syllabus, earning A and B grades in the process. While there were performances on the paper spanning the entire spectrum of grades, that the average should be so skewed towards the very lower end is a grave cause for disquiet.

There are a great many indications in the responses of candidates to questions that both lecturers and students failed to adjust to the new textbook. Lecturers in particular should be cognisant that while the syllabus remains unaltered this in no way implies a lack of change. The syllabus constitutes no more than very brief headings indicating issues to be covered within a set of 10 topic areas. I am necessarily guided primarily by the textbook (as should lecturers and students) to identify what exactly I as an examiner should expect to be covered under those headings. In an effort to further bridge the gap between the limited guidance offered by the syllabus and the needs of lecturers to envisage the course content in the same manner as I interpret it, I circulated a document at the Lecturers Conference offering a more detailed and focused interpretation of the Syllabus. This I felt to be necessary as there are various issues covered in the text that are not part of the syllabus. It is imperative, therefore, that lecturers use the 'Suggested focus/interpretation' document in conjunction with the textbook to design the course they teach and that students use the textbook to gain a thorough command of the topics covered on the course.

In an effort to inform lecturers and students on the issues that arose in regard to examination responses, I will make specific comments on the nature of performance in each question. Mindful of my comments in the previous paragraph, I will also outline below how the question relates to the syllabus for The Behavioural Aspects of Marketing as contained in the Student Handbook. Additionally, I will indicate how the question relates to the document

entitled 'Suggested focus/interpretation of syllabus for teaching and examining purposes' (abbreviated to 'Syllabus Focus' when referred to below), which I circulated at the Lecturers Conference at the beginning of the academic year and which is available from The Marketing Institute. Finally I will draw attention to the relevant parts of the textbook to which the question refers.

### **Question 1**

By and large those who failed showed no evidence of ever having even read the relevant chapter in the book and seemed to be answering in terms of what the average citizen in the street might have to say if stopped and asked to explain what the concept of science is about. This area clearly needs to be given greater emphasis when this course is being taught as it is pointless studying human behaviour without any grasp of the scientific process through which insights into human behaviour are obtained. This question was based on topic 1 of the syllabus (Introduction), specifically to 'Behavioural Science as a 'science'. It refers to topic 1 (Introduction) of the Syllabus Focus, specifically to 'The characteristics of science and how they contribute to realising the objectives of the scientific endeavour'. The material is covered in detail in Chapter 1 of the text, particularly pages 10-25 (excluding Box 1.3).

### **Question 2**

Many answers were restricted to a), b) and c) with no attempts at d) and e). With respect to a) 'Stereotyping' most answers were limited to the vernacular version of the term. Scarcely anyone seemed to appreciate that it has a specific meaning (attribution of common personality traits to groups) in the field of social psychology. This indicates a tendency to rely on general knowledge rather than specific course learning. With respect to c), again and again the term 'script' (once more following the vernacular) was taken to have something to do with written reports. When describing Halo Effects (b), very few answers explained the fact that the positive impression encompasses relatively inaccessible traits and is derived from prominent characteristics. Most candidates relied on specific examples but were unable to offer any coherent explanation of what the five terms mean in general. This question was based on topic 2 of the syllabus (Perception), specifically 'social perception/categorisation' and on topic 2 (Perception) of the Syllabus Focus document, specifically: 'Social Perception.....the kinds of errors we are prone to and their consequences.' In the text the relevant material is covered in Chapter 3, pages 99 – 110.

### **Question 3**

Those who failed largely showed no evidence of having studied the topic or read the chapter in the book but were simply making up answers from their general knowledge. A lot of answers contained no relevant information at all. Many described and offered opinions on advertisements they regularly see on TV but, unfortunately, in the absence of any information on the science of human behaviour, this did not contribute much to answering the question asked. This question was drawn from syllabus topic 3, specifically: 'perspectives on attitudinal change' and refers to topic 3 in the Syllabus Focus, specifically: 'Attitude Change: the relevance of the communicator, message, medium and audience.' In the text the relevant information is covered in Chapter 7, pages 259-270.

### **Question 4**

This constituted the poorest answered question of all. No one could offer a good explanation of how tests of traits are designed, despite the fact that the process is quite simple in principle and does not need a great deal of explaining. Few could make any meaningful attempt at any kind of explanation. As for part two of the question, though most could list all or some of the

Big 5 Personality Factors, explanations of what they each mean were dismally scant. Once again the generally understood meaning of the words formed the basis for a high proportion of answers. Thus, for example 'Openness' is taken to mean 'willingness to self-reveal' when in this context it means 'open to new ideas and experience'. Even worse was the fact that for many 'Conscientiousness' became 'Consciousness', which was taken to mean awareness of others and of one's surroundings. Many answers to this question consisted of learned-off material to do with personality but which had no bearing on the actual question asked. This question was drawn from syllabus topic 5 (Personality), specifically: 'personality measurement'. In the Syllabus Focus document it refers to topic 5 (Personality), specifically 'how traits are measured'. The relevant material is covered in the text in Chapter 6 at pages 203-208.

### **Question 5**

A very high proportion of answers devoted much pointless time and space to descriptions of both Tolman's and Kohler's research with animals as if this had somehow become synonymous for them with 'Cognitive Learning.' Why two specific pieces of research, of which the textbook offers relatively brief descriptions by way of illustrating the limitations of the behaviourist theory of learning, should be taken to be somehow a description of the cognitive learning process is entirely unclear. Another problem was a tendency to confuse the cognitive with the behaviourist explanation of learning. Answers to this question showed ample evidence of candidates having arrived with a learned off passage which they intended to offer irrespective of the actual question posed on the topic. This question was based on syllabus topic 4 (Learning), specifically 'How learning takes place ....cognitive approaches; stages in the memory process; memory and forgetting.' In the Syllabus Focus document it refers to topic 4 (Learning), specifically 'Cognitive Approach: the role of perception and memory'. In the text the relevant material is to be found in Chapter 4, pages 144-149.

### **Question 6**

Very few showed any clear grasp of the basic principles of expectancy theory – what do the terms Expectancy, Instrumentality and Valence mean and how do they help to explain human motivation. Even the minority who had a reasonable grasp of the theory were largely unable to apply it to the context cited in the question. Most seemed to believe that the theory can only apply to work motivation and sought to explain how having the prospect of a holiday might induce one to work harder which was not the point of the question. This question was based on Syllabus topic 6 (Motivation), specifically 'Process approaches to motivation.' In the Syllabus Focus document the question was drawn from Topic 6 (Motivation), specifically 'Process Theories: Expectancy Theory'. The relevant material is covered in the text in Chapter 8, pages 296-299.

### **Question 7**

The second best performance of the eight questions. As for those who failed, they in the main seemed to know nothing at all about the Asch or Sherif studies and many instead wrote about issues to do with groups, which had no bearing on the question. This question was designed to assess topic 8 of the syllabus (Social Groups), specifically 'conformity'. With respect to the Syllabus Focus document it refers to topic 8 (Social Groups), specifically 'Group influence on members:...research evidence on group influence.' The relevant material is covered in Chapter 9, pages 334-336.

### **Question 8**

Rather mysteriously the overall performance on this question, both in terms of quantity and quality, was in a different league to the other questions. While it might be tempting to assume that it was a question that allowed for reliance on general knowledge, this goes little way to explain the quality of answers in that the majority showed a very clear grasp of the ‘emergent’ and ‘traditional’ culture constructs which is specific to their textbook. It was as if Chapter 11 was seized upon and digested in great detail by all, while all the other chapters and topics on the course received little or no attention except from a minority. This question was drawn from both syllabus topic 9 (Culture and Society) and 10 (Current Irish Demographic Issues), but most specifically from topic 10, ‘contemporary Irish culture; background and profile of current Irish family structure.’ It was designed to reflect topics 9 and 10 of the Syllabus Focus document, specifically ‘Culture change in Ireland ‘ from topic 9 and ‘Description of contemporary (emergent) Irish culture’ from topic 10. The relevant material is covered in the text at Chapter 11, particularly on pages 392 – 428.