General Comments

1.   As always, there is little to add to the examiner's comments from one year to another. The challenge in this paper is to demonstrate competence in the ordinary tasks. Therefore the paper tests basic skills rather than aiming to become ever more challenging. It is different to a Leaving Cert where new problems arise. Here you are just required to be competent in routine matters relevant to business information and marketing research. The tasks are those that might be appropriate to a marketing assistant. Data collection, summary, analysis and interpretation are required. Therefore the topics examined and the format of the paper do not change from year to year (i.e. eight areas of the course are examined every session over eight questions). So this paper bears a strong resemblance to those set in previous years. This year's results at 57% are pretty much on a par with those of the recent past.

2.   The examiner must acknowledge that the remarks made here are really no different from those made since such reports were instituted many years back. However, as students each year approach the subject for the first time, these comments are new for each group. Remember that marks are available in this paper irrespective of one's mathematical talent. Given a variety of tasks in the paper, one should carefully work on one's strengths.

Some questions, such as those relating to sample types, the design of research, research report writing or the meaning and use of particular techniques, will suit candidates who are good at essay writing. All students should practice calculations for confidence intervals, the mean and standard deviation, correlation, regression, time series and index numbers. This is all fairly routine stuff and should be mastered.

The point to be noted is that a study of past papers will reveal where a particular candidate can gain most marks. She or he should then concentrate on those areas.

Question 1
This wasn't really popular and the answers were also varied - ranging from full marks to zero. The number of interviews required for a particular level of precision is a really simple calculation which would repay study. The second part of the question is also quite familiar. Here the candidate was required to design a quota sample of 2000 respondents, given their age and gender distribution in addition to whether or not they have children.

Question 2
The first part of the question related to a weighted mean where one product had a sales levels double that of the others. This had an exceptionally poor success rate. Other parts of the question were routine – making a histogram from raw data. While there were 60 people in the sample, some failed to check that their frequency table added correctly and so they finished with

totals of 56, 62 and even 52!! Always check. Also, the calculation of the mean and standard deviation are standard skills that should cause no problems. Full marks were achieved by a number of candidates.

Question 3
The topic of index numbers was quite popular and had a 50% pass rate. While students were able to distinguish between Laspeyres and Paasche approaches to designing an overall price index, they were less clear as to which was most useful in practice. The key issue is that the Paasche index requires double work as the quantities as well as the prices of every item must be researched on each occasion. The section on changes in the purchasing power of a euro over time was generally well done.

Question 4
As usual, the question on time series was both popular and well performed. Students were generally able to graph the data and to calculate the trend. The calculation of seasonal variation and forecasts were also generally dealt with in a competent manner. This was by far the best question for many people.

Question 5
The examiner was pleased with the results of this question on regression and rank correlation. Not only did it have the highest pass rate but also generated the highest number of full marks scores. Candidates were able to demonstrate typical scatter diagram patterns and also to use a regression equation to make a forecast. The level of agreement between judges using rank correlation also proved popular.

Question 6
Only 30% of candidates attempted this question on probability, which yielded a pass rate of 50%.

Question 7
Surprisingly, no one attempted this question on a Chi-square test and hypothesis test for the difference of two populations using data from two small samples.

Question 8
Again, the examiner was surprised that less that half of the candidates attempted this essay-type question. Good marks can be gained when one works through the planning of a research programme to investigate particular behaviours and attitudes. Decisions should be made regarding all the steps necessary for such an exercise. In this case the focus was on the health services in Ireland.