



## **EXAMINER'S REPORT**

**MAY 2006**

### **STAGE 2 PROJECT**

The project brief required the student to profile an Irish charity, its objectives, markets and competitors with the primary focus on present and potential benefactors. Additionally the student was required to employ appropriate primary research techniques in order to gauge the effectiveness of its marketing efforts in the face of a rapidly changing marketing environment.

In choosing the not-for-profit sector, the examiner departed somewhat from the traditional marketing environment. Charity by its nature calls for responses deep within the human psyche. For many students their commendable passion and involvement with their chosen charity was apparent and many were able to mould a personal in-depth knowledge to support the formulation of a strong marketing report. Others however were not able to extricate their feelings and lost the objectivity that is the hallmark of analysis.

The Stage 2 Project is, first and foremost, a marketing report - irrespective of the subject being investigated. Its primary focus should always be on an analysis of the organisation from a marketing stance. The examiner is therefore more interested in how students utilise and develop the marketing knowledge that they have acquired, in line with the constraints laid down in the brief. Whilst some students provided laudable accounts of how guide dogs are trained or the technicalities of wasting diseases, this information is peripheral and was often given at the expense of key metrics i.e. annual turnover, market share, structure and number of employees. Conversely, attaching vast tracts of annual financial reports, without comment or analysis, was equally of little worth. The examiner is cognisant (and makes allowance) that few organisations make full public disclosure of their competitive situation.

In the initial brief, the examiner hinted at the unique confines of the not for profit sector. Those students who addressed the dichotomy between the core values of a charity and a normal commercial operation were rewarded for doing so.

Few companies operate in perfect isolation. Students should identify particular features of the industry e.g. competition, growth stage of the market and vagaries of that market. There are many models available to describe any business entity, the industry and business environment within which it operates. A simple SWOT analysis is often a good starting point to profile a business. Many students used a PEST analysis as a framework to describe the rapidly changing

environment, which continually changes the relationship between a business and its customer. A small number of students attempted to use Porters Five Forces to describe the competitive pressures on the industry and were rewarded for doing so. These models not only provide additional structure to any report but also allow the student an opportunity to demonstrate how their knowledge of marketing theory can be applied to reality.

There was a distinct lack of marketing terminology or concepts in many of the reports. For example, charities like other businesses have product portfolios, the benefits derived are intangible and consumers go through a product adoption process. Many students failed to address the need for charities to segment, target and position their market offerings. The segmentation process is the backbone of any marketing solution. Whilst most students addressed the subject of market research methodologies, few used the opportunity to utilise their knowledge of other subjects contained in Stages 1 and 2. Information weaned in market research was often not followed through into recommendations. Few cross-tabulated the data gathered. Generally candidates based their recommendations on a myopic focus on market communications whilst ignoring the opportunities of manipulating the other parts of the marketing mix.

Plagiarism and failing to acknowledge sources continues to be a reoccurring problem with the examiner recognising his own work in one particular project. Many students relied solely on unedited information, downloaded verbatim, from corporate websites. It is mandatory that the source of the information is acknowledged and referenced appropriately.