



EXAMINER'S REPORT

MAY 2000

BUYER BEHAVIOUR

General Comments

The pass-rate this year was seventy-three per-cent, slightly down from the seventy-nine per-cent of last year. Also, the ratio of higher grades to overall passes, at twenty-nine percent, was substantially lower than the standard of recent years.

Nearly ten per-cent of candidates did not complete the requirements in relation to identifying the numbers of attempted questions at the correct places and in the right manner on their answer papers. This is inexplicable and unacceptable at this level. Some candidates failed to start their answers at the beginning of a page as required.

Twelve per-cent failed to attempt five questions (up from ten per-cent last year). This indicates that a substantial number of candidates are not preparing properly. Many candidates only wrote a few lines as an attempt on individual questions and these are not included in these figures.

As regards legibility, it must be stressed that it is the candidate's responsibility to provide material that is capable of being marked with reasonable facility. Legibility was poor this year in far too many scripts. General presentation was also poor in many cases. So also was the structuring and paragraphing of answers. The clear and appropriate use of headings and sub-headings improves the presentational appearance of answers, and attracts higher marks.

Many candidates ran out of time, which is quite silly at this level. And some of those wasted good time writing out the question on the answer paper. This is unnecessary and a serious waste of scarce time resources.

The spelling of key authors' names and of technical terms was more prone to individualistic licence than has been the case in the recent past. Kotler got mangled (Kothler), Maslow got mashed (Mastlow), loyalty got muddled ("loyality"), TQM got murdered ("Time Quality Management"). Please.

It is again worth noting that the attainment of higher grades is only possible by consistent high scoring in all questions. The overall level of higher grades as a proportion of all passes is substantially lower than the same proportion in nearly all the individual questions. This can only mean that while some candidates are scoring reasonably well in each question they are clearly not the same candidates across the examination as a whole. Candidates should have the ambition of scoring in the eighties and seventies in five questions. Sadly, in this examination not one answer to any question attained an "A" standard. This is quite unusual.

Questions should be answered in a full and comprehensive manner that attempts to examine the complexity of the subject matter and to elucidate its applications to marketing decision making. The subject is inherently concerned with marketing decision making; all answers should therefore be imbued with a marketing orientation. Those candidates who show the ability to apply what they learn in other marketing classes to the subject matter of this paper are developing the correct approach to the subject.

It seems that candidates are not thinking application and evaluation and where these are required, as they are in nearly every question, many flounder and too many founder.

Some candidates made very brief attempts at questions. At a professional practice level there is an expectation that more than the minimum will be offered to clients. The same requirement holds for professional examinations. For instance, it is not adequate to draw a diagram, however accurate, and assume that, without elaboration or comment, it answers a question on a paper such as this.

This year again the practical application of theories was emphasised by breaking most of the questions into two separate parts. This seemed to help some candidates to focus on this aspect of their answers, but it highlighted other candidates' lack of preparation. Many failed to answer both parts and effectively limited themselves to half of the available marks.

Those who attained better grades, generally exhibited a more applied and also a more evaluative approach that did not solely rely on lists and categories. These papers were characterised by good coherent answers with a beginning middle and end, where key terms were defined as they were introduced and where the presentation was imbued with an evaluative and applications oriented approach

In some cases, topics that were not directly asked on the paper were produced, frequently without any "tailoring". Where prepared material is completely at variance with a question's main thrust, it is a waste of time to write it all down; more marks could be gained by making a genuine attempt at the question as posed, or by attempting a different question.

Where the prepared answers were apposite they were frequently not adequately directed to the precise point at issue. This approach can fortuitously lead to a pass result but it cannot generate better grades. To generate better grades, a more evaluative approach is required that does not solely rely on lists and categories.

Question 1

This question refers to a theme in the set text that should be familiar to all candidates. It was by far the most popular question with nearly nine out of every ten candidates attempting it, but it generated only the (equal) third highest pass-rate, seventy-seven per-cent. Just short of two out of three of those who passed attained a higher grade; this performance was the second worst, in this regard, this year.

Part (a) of the question required straightforward and absolutely basic information from the textbook. Diagrams alone did not suffice. Nor did unsought meanderings about research perspectives.

What was required in (b) was the ability to relate marketing strategy on the one hand and consumer behaviour concepts on the other. Any marketing decision process (eg new product

development) could be chosen to illustrate how it might be affected by knowledge, say, of problem recognition (one element of consumer behaviour). In the course of this illustration it could be shown that problem recognition is shaped by some individual influencing factor (experience for example) and any environmental influencing factor (eg family role structure).

It is not adequate to list consumer behaviour concepts; it must be shown how just one of these affects marketing strategy in the context of individual and environmental influencing factors. Nor is it adequate to list marketing strategies; it must be shown how just one of these is influenced by knowledge of the consumer behaviour concepts.

Question 2

The web and e-commerce has been receiving substantial attention in the press and marketing literature generally and is a topic that prospective professional marketers should be considering seriously. The question was therefore designed to allow the thinking candidate to show some paces away from the constraints of established theory.

Less than one in four candidates attempted Question Two, the least popular of all the questions in this examination. Less than half attained a pass mark, the worst performance in the examination. However, nearly two out of every three of those who passed attained a higher grade.

Many gave quite interesting views on the web and its development as a marketing vehicle and they were awarded marks for this. But very few indeed had any idea at all of anything to do with search behaviour let alone how it applies to the web. And pitifully few could relate the topic to marketing requirements.

Question 3

Question Three was the second most popular question, with more than three in four attempting it. Over four in every five achieved a pass grade and of these three out of every four attained a higher grade (the second best such performance in this examination).

The question required a candidate to demonstrate a knowledge of motivation, which should be relatively easy at this level, and indeed most who attempted this topic were able to show some appreciation of motivation theory.

However, the question focused firstly on the application of motivation theory to specific consumer behaviours in any one product and any one service (eg *consumption* of coffee, *search* for a restaurant, or anything at all really). This was not well done in the main.

The second focus of the question was on marketing applications of motivation theory. Again this was poorly enough treated.

Those who attempt this paper must develop an applications orientation.

Question 4

This was the second most unpopular choice with just over two out of every five candidates attempting it. It had the joint worst pass rate at just over two out of every three achieving a pass grade. Of these, nearly two out of every three attained a higher grade.

There was a general willingness to write about loyalty schemes and to go into elaborate descriptions of what is involved in those schemes. This of course generated marks.

There was less effort put into explaining what is meant by customer loyalty, which was the focus of the question. The whole area of customer retention, loyalty and developing relationships with consumers is current in the business press and is of substantial importance to marketers. One would not get that impression from most of the candidates who attempted this question.

When questions contain quotations, as in Question Four, it is desirable for candidates to refer to the quotation in their answer. This fairly obvious requirement was more honoured in the breach than in the observance in this examination.

Question 5

This question had the same pass rate as Question One, with just over three out of every four candidates achieving a pass grade. It was attempted by over two in every three. Over two out of three of those who passed attained a higher grade.

The prediction of behaviour from attitude measures is a common topic on these papers and it is a part of the course which should attract detailed consideration and study. The way in which the question is worded is designed to make it relatively easy for the candidate to focus on the key issues, and many did indeed do well on this question.

However, the very wording which might make it easy to focus well on the question also makes the loose general “pre-packed” answer look all the poorer. Candidates must be prepared to tailor their prepared work to suit the exigencies of the question which they find on the paper.

Question 6

Just over three in every five of the candidates attempted Question Six and nearly four out of five of them attained a pass grade (the second best performance in this regard in this examination). Of those who passed, over three out of every four achieved a higher grade (the best performance in this regard in this examination).

Candidates were conversant with the issues here although there was perhaps too much emphasis on economic factors and the introduction of the Euro to the detriment of the broader concerns which may be raised under the heading of culture.

It should be remembered that cultural change in Europe has domestic marketing implications for Irish marketers as well as the perhaps more obvious ones which relate to marketing to other European countries.

Question 7

Over two out of every three of the candidates attempted Question Seven. It had a (relatively poor) pass rate, also just over two out of every three of those attempting the question. Just over half of those who passed attained a higher grade.

Most candidates had a good general grasp of the demographics which are relevant to this question. The reason for the relatively poor attainment of adequate grades was, in the main, that candidates were unable to analyse the relevance to marketers of the demographics with which they were familiar.

Question 8

This question was tackled by just over half of the candidates. The pass rate was nearly three out of every four of those who attempted it. Less than half of those who passed attained higher grades, the worst such performance in this examination.

The question was drawn directly from the textbook and should have been relatively easy for that reason.

The theme of involvement is flagged as of substantial importance in Mowen and it is referred to throughout the text. Candidates should take the trouble to integrate these various references into an overall view of the topic and be able to apply them to marketing decision making.