



EXAMINER'S REPORT

AUGUST 2002

BUYER BEHAVIOUR

General Comments

With seventy percent of the candidates achieving a pass grade, the performance in this examination was a major improvement on last year's under fifty percent pass rate. Just under two in every five of those who passed attained a higher grade. Less than one in ten of those who passed attained a B grade. This is one of the best set of results ever in the August examinations in this subject.

This is a fine achievement and all concerned must be complimented. The majority of candidates prepared seriously for this examination and took the trouble to present their material clearly and carefully. Most candidates clearly understand that in terms of progressing from one stage to another of the Institute's graduateship programme, the August examinations carry the exact same weight as those held in Summer; therefore the same high standard is required and the examination scripts are assessed in the same rigorous manner. Serious preparation is evident from the familiarity shown with the content and orientation of the set text, while overall the standard of presentation was very good indeed.

Some areas of performance however were worse than they have been in recent years. Twenty-five percent of candidates did not correctly complete the requirements in relation to identifying the numbers of attempted questions, in the correct order, on the front of their answer papers, or by not starting their answers at the beginning of a page as required. The comparable figure last May was eighteen percent (up from fifteen percent last year and seven percent the year before that). This is a disappointing trend, indicating a lack of appropriate professionalism.

Thirty-eight percent failed to attempt five questions. 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. 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.

Some candidates ran out of time. Time management is as necessary a skill in examinations as it is in professional practice. Some wasted good time writing out the question on the answer paper. This is unnecessary and a serious waste of scarce time resources. Some also spent much too much time on elaborate rough work schemes rather than getting down to the task at hand. Some allocated too much time to carefully drawing meticulous diagrams without adequate, or sometimes any, explanation.

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. In this examination, sixteen percent of candidates managed to score an "A" in individual questions. Yet only one candidate managed to score an A in more than one question, and that candidate attained an overall "B".

As regards legibility, it must be stressed again that it is the candidate's responsibility to provide material that is capable of being marked with reasonable facility. The clear and appropriate use of headings and sub-headings improves the presentational appearance of answers, and attracts higher marks.

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.

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

While cross-fertilisation with other subjects is encouraged, there is no point in hoping that what is (poorly) learned in another subject will suffice to answer questions in this subject. The buyer behaviour syllabus and buyer behaviour text must be studied, in depth.

In some cases, topics that were not directly asked on the paper were still produced, frequently without any "tailoring", as answers to totally different questions. 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.

Comments on Individual Questions

Question 1

Answers to parts (a) and (b) of the question showed that most candidates had a good clear grasp of the three research perspectives and were able to show how a consumer purchase may involve some elements of all three perspectives. The application of consumer behaviour to marketing practice is a central thrust of this subject. However, part (c), which required candidates to elaborate on marketing applications, was the most poorly answered part of the question.

Question 2

The answers, in the main, were clear and well prepared with relevant up-to-date examples intelligently employed to highlight the uses of semiotics in promotional campaigns.

Question 3

Many displayed a basic idea of what is meant by consumers' experiential or affective processes, which went some of the way towards achieving a pass grade. The text-book draws attention to the various areas of consumer behaviour where affective processes apply, but few enough could make a reasonable effort at Part (b) of the question. As is frequently the case, marketing applications, in answer to Part (c), were conspicuous in their absence.

Question 4

A basic knowledge was evident, indicating again that many students are making the effort to study the text-book material. The absence of high grades was almost entirely due to candidates' inability to apply what they have learned to professional marketing practice.

Question 5

Part (a) was generally well answered with information directly from the text-book. Part (b) required a more marketing practice orientation; most answers were adequate but lacking in the depth and detail that might result in the attainment of the highest grades.

Question 6

The question could be answered directly from the text-book and some candidates had prepared very thorough answers. Where answers were weak it was typically in Part (b), the application dimension, rather than in Part (a), the descriptive requirements.

Question 7

What was true of most other questions was also evident in Question Seven. Candidates find it easier to learn and write about Part (a) of the question, the informational or descriptive aspects of the subject, but are less well prepared and confident in Part (b), the applied areas.

Question 8

In every other respect, Question 8 was at the lower end of the scale; it had the worst pass rate (forty-seven percent); it had the worst rate of higher grades (forty-three percent); nobody attained a "B" or an "A". The topic of involvement is quite well covered in the text-book. Unfortunately, more than half of the candidates who attempted Question Seven do not appear to know this. There were many odd definitions ("low involvement is where consumers see a product as low involvement") and odder classifications that confused types and dimensions and were generally ill informed.