



EXAMINER'S REPORT

AUGUST 2003

BUYER BEHAVIOUR

General Comments

The performance in this examination was poor, with just under half of the candidates achieving a pass grade. This compares very poorly with last year's seventy percent. Although one in every three of those who passed achieved a C grade, no candidate attained a B grade or above.

Many candidates cannot have bothered to prepare seriously for the examination, nor did they bother to present their material in a careful or clear manner. Lest there be any confusion, 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 May; therefore the same high standard is required and the examination scripts are assessed in the same rigorous manner.

While the vast majority made some attempt at five questions, many of these attempts were perfunctory at best. Many candidates wrote only a few lines as an attempt on individual questions. How can candidates expect to achieve pass grades when they produce so little evidence of their work?

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 appearance of answers, and attracts higher marks.

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.

Many candidates wrote as if the briefest mention of the shortest summary of the barest details of the topic in question would suffice. It does not. Candidates are required to deal with questions in a professional manner which exhibits a full and detailed grasp of the subject.

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.

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.

Thirty 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. This is disappointing, indicating a lack of appropriate professionalism.

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.

Question 1

It is stated, in Chapter One of the text book, that "this book views the exchange process as a fundamental element of consumer behaviour". Yet only two out of every three attained a pass grade. While most were able to make a reasonable attempt at Part (a), the more descriptive requirement, Part (b) of the question, which required a demonstration of how the concept might be applied by marketers in making strategy decisions, was typically very poorly answered. Some who had prepared an answer on research perspectives presented it here unabashed and unavailing. Other 'prepared' answers were also presented with the same results. Time was also wasted on drawing detailed, and sometimes quite irrelevant, diagrams without adequate annotation or commentary. One candidate scored over seventy percent.

Question 2

Every candidate who attempted this question knew that the field of study 'that analyses symbols and their meanings' is semiotics. Many were less accurate in their attempts at describing semiotics. Some gave good relevant accounts of current Irish marketing campaigns; many were able to describe the campaigns but could not relate them to semiotics. Eighty-four percent of those who attempted Question Two attained a pass grade.

Question 3

It is perhaps ironic, in the context of the overall standard in this examination, that the question on learning was very badly answered. Few enough had acquired sufficient knowledge to explain how (consumer) knowledge is acquired. There was much confusion and mixed-up attempts to recall poorly digested elements of classical learning theories in a question about cognitive learning. Only one third attained a pass grade.

Question 4

This question was attempted by just one third of the candidates, making it the least popular question on the paper. It also had the worst pass rate at less than ten percent. For whatever reason, most of those who attempted Question Four felt they had to specify the precise type of health the 'natural health segment' might have. That was not the question, nor could it be. The question focussed on what approach to segmentation was being employed; the answer was life-style or psychographic segmentation. Keep it simple.

Question 5

Question Five dealt with a part of the syllabus that is consistently questioned in these examinations, consumer attitudes and the changing of attitudes. One of the strengths of Mowen and Minor is that they clearly identify how different approaches to understanding attitudes can result in different approaches to changing them and this is presented in a marketing relevant manner. There really is little excuse for the extent of confusion that was evident in the answers presented in this examination. The text-book must be read with care. Half of those who attempted this question attained a pass grade.

Question 6

The answers to Question Six were generally well informed on the topic of family influence and the role of children in family decision-making. It was good, in particular, to see quite thoughtful approaches to the ethical dimension in Part (c). Nearly ninety percent of those who attempted it attained a pass grade and three out of every four of those were awarded higher grades; one candidate scored over seventy percent.

Question 7

In regard to Part (a), candidates were unable to clearly explain what is meant by loyalty, or to show any grasp of underlying theory; many did not even tackle the issue of theory. Among those who attempted a definition (too few), the old mistake of using the term to be defined in the definition was quite prevalent (as in eg "loyalty is the extent to which a person is loyal"). As regards Part (b), there was little enough evidence of critical thinking on the topic and many made no reference to SMS technology. The spelling "loyalty" is always with us it seems. Less than half of those who attempted Question Seven attained a pass grade.

Question 8

This was by far the most popular question with almost nine in every ten attempting it. Three out of every five attained a pass grade. The topic of involvement is quite well covered in the text-book. There were many odd definitions and odder classifications that were generally ill informed. What was true of most other questions was also evident in Question Eight. 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. Candidates are required to be competent in both areas.