



EXAMINER'S REPORT

MAY 2003

BUYER BEHAVIOUR

General Comments

The pass-rate this year was sixty-six percent, a considerable dis-improvement on the seventy-two percent of last year. The ratio of higher grades to overall passes was a quite respectable fifty-one percent. The proportion of pass students attaining "B" grades was seven percent, half the proportion achieved last year. One candidate attained an A grade, the second person to achieve this grade in this examination.

The majority of candidates prepared seriously for the examination and took the trouble to present their material clearly and carefully. 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 candidates also showed familiarity with other relevant sources of information and this is most welcome.

Some areas of performance however were worse than they have been in recent years. Twenty eight 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 (substantially up from eighteen percent last year and fifteen percent the year before that).

Thirteen percent failed to attempt five questions (substantially down from twenty-three percent last year and also better than fifteen percent the year before). 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 some scripts, but over-all it was very good. While most candidates did present their material clearly, there was a substantial minority who were quite slip-shod in this regard. A good structure, good use of paragraphing, clear and appropriate use of headings and sub-headings, all improve the presentational appearance of answers, and attract higher marks.

Some 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. 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, twelve percent of candidates managed to score an "A" in individual questions (it was twenty percent last year). Yet only two (four last year) candidates managed to score an A in more than one question, among them the candidate who attained an overall "A". One candidate scored eighty five percent in one question, yet finished with a "C"

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.

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 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.

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

The thrust of this question should be familiar to any candidate who took the trouble to research past papers. Part (a) required the identification of key consumer concepts, a topic introduced as early as Chapter One of the text book. Many answered well and clearly; others generated unexplained diagrams, described the exchange process, summarised research perspectives but did not generate marks. Part (b) was well answered by those who tackled the question as posed.

What was required in (c) was the ability to show how one marketing decision process can be assisted by knowledge of one consumer behaviour concept. Any marketing decision process could be chosen to illustrate how it might be affected by knowledge of any one consumer

behaviour concept. Many answered this quite well showing a good grasp of the issues. Some did not read the question carefully and answered for more than one concept or more than one marketing decision process.

Some answers failed to show any understanding and at best consisted of lists or unexplained diagrams. These displayed no elaboration or elucidation or explanation, just bare, apparently reluctant, jottings, without definitions or other clarity. In some cases what was presented looked like notes which could be used as the bones of an answer; certainly these did not have the level of detail or depth which is expected at this (professional) level.

Some attempted only two parts, thus reducing their possible marks by a third.

Question 2

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 (Question Two had the best pass rate) were able to show a good appreciation of motivation theory.

Good clear summaries of the various general and mid-range theories were provided as answers to Part (a).

Part (b) was also well answered, in the main, with candidates giving thoughtful suggestions to explain the movement away from general theories to mid-range theories of motivation

Most candidates presented well prepared and well organised examples of the application of motivation in regard to, for example, research, advertising, segmentation, and product development as answers to Part (c). Part (c), however, asked for evaluation of the role of motivation and this aspect of the question was consistently ignored.

Question 3

This question had the second best pass rate - a very good performance considering that candidates had to rely on sources other than the text book to answer the question. A good knowledge and appreciation of both traditional and on-line shopping behaviour was displayed in answer to Part (a). Many organised their answers round the decision making process and influencing factors, explaining how these might differ in the two different shopping experiences.

Sensible comments on marketing approaches online and in bricks and mortar business were made in answer to Part (b); many were organized around the main marketing strategy processes.

Question 4

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. This question was particularly poorly answered. It is not acceptable that only two out of five of those attempting the topic should be able to achieve a pass grade.

Among those who passed, Part (a) was answered well, with diligent text-book based preparation evident. However, some answers consisted of just notes or lists without the context and elaboration required at this stage; in these answers, definitions of attitude were noticeably absent. Part (b) was also answered well, in the main, by those who attained a pass grade. Again, some candidates wasted valuable time, and the opportunity to gain marks, by writing at length about attitude functions or attitude change (including the 'experimental' path to change) or even

personality theories. Many of those who did tackle both parts of the question reasonably well made little enough effort to relate them together.

Question 5

‘Cultural sensitivities’ are mentioned in the quotation at the top of Question Five. ‘Sensitivities’ is used in the normal English sense and is not a technical term. Not many people knew that, which of course didn’t stop them imagining what this technical thing ‘sensitivities’ might be, and wasting time writing with vigour about these strange things, ‘sensitivities’.

Those with a rough knowledge of the language and a passing acquaintance with the text book were able in Part (a) to identify the cultural elements of which marketers might be sensitive. Those lacking either of the above wrote some quite amazing rubbish, to no avail.

Part (b) was a straightforward question, based on the text book.

Question 6

This was, by some way, the worst answered question on the paper. As regards Part (a), few enough knew anything about social class, its categories or how it is measured. In particular, they knew little of the Irish situation. It is important for candidates to familiarize themselves with Irish sources of information on consumer behaviour where they are available. The level of ignorance was astonishing.

It follows that they therefore, in regard to Part (b), had no idea whether or not social class was useful for segmentation purposes, in the Irish (or any other) context.

Question 7

Most candidates had a good solid grasp of the essentials of this question, particularly regarding Part (a). There was some confusion over the meaning of demographics. Where candidates typically fell down was in the ability to show, in Part (b), that they can see the marketing applications of the information that they have learned. Candidates must develop the ability to apply the concepts of Consumer Behaviour to marketing activity; it is never sufficient to suggest merely that marketers ‘must understand’ or ‘must know’ demographic changes or whatever.

Question 8

Part (a) was typically well answered with good preparation widely evident. Many candidates were well able to apply the specifics of the quotation to the general categories of situational influence in quite an impressive manner. Others just listed everything they knew about situations with less successful results. Part (b), based directly on the text book, was generally well answered.