



EXAMINER'S REPORT

AUGUST 2004

BUYER BEHAVIOUR

General Comments

The performance in this examination was reasonable, with just over three fifths of the candidates achieving a pass grade. This compares favourably with last August when less than half passed. Although nearly one in every three of those who passed achieved a higher grade, no candidate attained a B grade or above. A grades were achieved in only three of the eight questions

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 Autumn 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.

While the vast majority made some attempt at five questions, many of these attempts were perfunctory at best. Many candidates only wrote 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 presentational 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.

Comments on Individual Questions

Question 1

Almost all candidates attempted Question One, yet only two out of every three attained a pass grade. Most were able to make a reasonable or even good attempt at Part (a), the more descriptive requirement. Part (b) of the question, which required a demonstration of how the three research perspectives might be useful to marketers in deciding how to appeal to consumers, was typically very poorly answered. Some who had prepared an answer on exchange processes 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. Nearly half of those who passed attained a higher grade. One candidate scored over seventy percent.

Question 2

Of those candidates who attempted Question Two (early nine in every ten), seventy percent attained a pass grade. Nearly everyone knew what PERMS means. Most knew enough

about motivation to write in more detail than was required about motivation theories; few knew enough to write about the principles and concepts of motivation, as was required. Very few even attempted to evaluate the role of motivation in marketing. Less than half of those who passed attained a higher grade. One candidate scored over seventy percent.

Question 3

Question Three was the least popular question on the paper (less than one in six candidates attempted it), but there was a very good pass rate of eighty percent. Most were able to describe life-style and summarise different life-style inventories without, in the main, sufficient emphasis on researching life-styles. There were some reasonable attempts at evaluating the usefulness of life-styles to marketers but most were not, shall we say, very useful. Eighty percent of those who passed attained a higher grade (C or B)

Question 4

Question Four 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. This question had the worst pass rate; only two out of every five candidates who attempted it attained a pass grade (two in every three candidates attempted it). Too many of the answers showed scant awareness of the main thrust of the text book approach let alone any depth or subtleties. Nor were there many serious attempts to apply theory to a common enough contemporary marketing problem. Only one in four of those who passed attained a higher grade (C or B).

Question 5

Many candidates were unable to give a general account of the demographic changes that have occurred in Ireland in recent times. It is important for candidates to keep up-to-date and be aware of what is written on relevant topics in the Irish media. Just over half of those who attempted it passed Question Five. Where many candidates also fell down was in the ability to show, in Part (b), that they can appreciate the marketing applications of 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. Forty percent of those who passed attained a higher grade (C or B)

Question 6

The topic of on-line searching and shopping is of contemporary relevance and should generate more interest and expertise among candidates at this stage of the programme. Neither interest nor experience was particularly evident in the answers to this question. Just over one in every five candidates attempted Question Six. Somewhat over half of them attained a pass grade. About forty percent of those who passed attained a higher grade (C or B).

Question 7

Some candidates were well able to apply the specifics of the quotation to the general categories of situational influence as their answer to Part (a). Others just listed everything they knew about situations with less successful results. Part (b), based directly on the text book, was quite well answered by many. About half of the candidates attempted Question

Seven and roughly half of them passed; of those who passed about half attained a higher grade. One candidate achieved an A grade.

Question 8

Over two in every three candidates attempted Question Eight. Over seventy percent of them passed; more than forty percent of those who passed attained a higher grade (C or B). 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 the informational or descriptive aspects of the subject, but are less well prepared and confident in the applied areas. Very few even attempted to address the issue of measurement of involvement.