



## **EXAMINER'S REPORT**

**AUGUST 2005**

### **BUYER BEHAVIOUR**

#### **General Comments**

The performance in this examination was reasonable, with just under three fifths of the candidates achieving a pass grade. This compares unfavourably with last year when just over three fifths passed. Fifteen percent of those who passed achieved a higher grade. No candidate attained a B grade or above. A grades were achieved in only four 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.

Ten 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 a much-improved performance, indicating appropriate professionalism on the part of the vast majority of candidates.

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 three out of every four candidates attempted Question 1, and seven out of every ten attained a pass grade (the best pass rate in this examination). 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 knowledge of the consumption process might be useful to marketers, was less well answered. Many of those who attempted this section had not read the question carefully and addressed several different aspects of marketing strategy rather than just one as required. 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. Just over one third of those who passed attained a higher grade. One candidate scored over seventy percent.

## **Question 2**

Of those candidates who attempted Question 2 (nearly nine in every ten, making this the most 'popular' question on the paper), sixty percent attained a pass grade. Most knew enough about motivation to write in reasonable detail about what is meant by motivation; but few knew acceptable definitions of the construct and made them up 'on the hoof' with some interestingly circular attempts ("motivation is when a consumer is motivated...."). Very few even attempted to evaluate the role of motivation in marketing and those who did often relied on the vapid claim that "marketers should be aware of motivation". Just over one third of those who passed attained a higher grade. One candidate scored seventy percent.

## **Question 3**

Just over half of the candidates attempted Question 3, and there was an acceptable pass rate of sixty-seven percent. Most were able to describe the main learning theories and summarise how marketers apply those theories in marketing practice. There was a marked tendency to avoid definitions of learning. Those who hadn't prepared for this question tried their luck with Perception and such like, to no avail. One third of those who passed attained a higher grade (C or B)

## **Question 4**

Question 4 was the least popular question on the paper (just over one in three candidates attempted it), but there was a reasonable pass rate of sixty-three 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, as we say, very useful. Less than forty percent of those who passed attained a higher grade. One candidate scored seventy percent.

## **Question 5**

Question 5 dealt with a part of the syllabus that is consistently questioned in these examinations, consumer attitudes and the formation and changing of attitudes, so there really is little excuse for the extent of confusion that was evident in the answers presented in this examination. This question had the worst pass rate; only two out of every five candidates who attempted it attained a pass grade (three in every five 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. Less than one in ten of those who passed attained a higher grade (C only; no Bs or As).

## **Question 6**

Many candidates were unable to give a general account of the social class structure 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. Less than half of those who attempted it passed Question 6. Few enough could write at all about social class in any meaningful manner. 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 may have learned. Candidates must develop the ability to apply the concepts of Consumer Behaviour to marketing activity; it is never sufficient to merely suggest that marketers 'must understand' or 'must know' social class changes or whatever. Nobody attained a higher grade.

**Question 7**

The topic of consumer search behaviour is of contemporary relevance and should generate more interest and expertise among candidates at this stage of the programme. Neither interest nor expertise was particularly evident in the answers to this question, although basic knowledge of categories of search was evident. Nearly two thirds of the candidates attempted Question 7; sixty percent of them attained a pass grade. One fifth of those who passed attained a higher grade (C or B).

**Question 8**

Three in every five candidates attempted Question 8. Two out of three of them passed; and two thirds of those who passed attained a higher grade. One candidate scored seventy percent. 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 8. 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 on-line advertising let alone the issue of involvement in that context.