



## EXAMINER'S REPORT

MAY 2005

### BUYER BEHAVIOUR

#### General Comments

The pass-rate this year was sixty-seven percent, a disappointing reduction on the seventy-two percent of last year. The ratio of higher grades to overall passes, however, was fifty percent (higher than last year's forty-six percent) and the proportion of pass students attaining "B" grades was nine percent (as compared to four percent last year). No candidate attained an "A" grade.

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. During the transfer period to a new text there was no expectation that the new text would be followed to the exclusion of the previous one and most candidates were very sensible in this regard.

Thirteen 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 much better than last year where fully twenty-five percent were careless in this regard, although it is hard to justify any error margin in this regard in a professional examination.

Fifteen percent failed to attempt five questions (slightly higher than the thirteen percent of the last two years but much better than the twenty-three percent of the previous year). 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 slipshod 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. Some

wasted the examiner's time as well as their own time by stapling their answer sheets together in a manner that suggested a career in security rather than marketing might be their ambition.

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 (the same as the last two years; it was twenty percent the previous year). Yet only two candidates (the same number as the last two years) managed to score an "A" in more than one question. One of these candidates scored 100% in one question (a record in itself), 80% in another, a mid 50s and then two really poor fail marks and finished up with a "C" overall; the other candidate scored two marks in the low to mid 70s two in the low to mid 60s a mid 40s and finished with a "B"; consistency can be better than brilliance.

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.

### **Question 1**

The thrust of this question should be familiar to any candidate who took the trouble to research past papers. While Part (a) is not dealt with directly in Solomon it should not cause difficulty for candidates aspiring to a professional diploma in marketing. In fact it was generally well dealt with except by those who merely listed the elements of a marketing plan. What was required in (b) was the ability to show how knowledge of consumers can assist marketing practice. Any type of marketing practice could be chosen to illustrate how it might be affected by knowledge of consumers. Illustration such as this cannot be accomplished by merely stating that it is 'important' or 'very important' or suchlike for marketers to know this.

Many answered this quite well showing a good grasp of the issues. 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 one part of the question, mostly the first part, thus reducing their possible marks by half. This question had the second best pass rate. The highest mark achieved was 100%.

### **Question 2**

Most candidates who attempted this question were reasonably well able to describe the 'field of study known as semiotics', although some wrote rather generally about perception and culture.

Some gave good relevant practical accounts of current Irish marketing campaigns; many were able to describe the campaigns and give quite imaginative interpretations of them but could not relate them to semiotics or could not describe specific promotional usage of symbols. The more detail on semiotics and the more specific the treatment of the applications to campaigns the better.

This question had the highest rate of higher grades among those who attained a pass level. The highest mark achieved was 80%.

### **Question 3**

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.

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. Some failed to mention multi-attribute models while waxing on about attitudes.

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 or even motivation theories. Many of those who did tackle both parts of the question reasonably well made little enough effort to relate them together. One candidate helpfully explained that "attitudes are lasting because they tend to endure over time"

This question had the worst pass rate (57% of those who attempted it). The highest mark achieved was 80%.

#### **Question 4**

The subject matter of this question is of considerable topical import to Irish marketing professionals. Its contemporary relevance was soundly expressed in some well informed and insightful answers.

Other answers were less relevant and certainly less insightful and lacked knowledge of what is meant by culture and sub-cultures. Some did not address the question at all but delivered ‘rants’ on the question of immigration. General points about segmentation criteria were trotted out without any obvious connection to the topic at issue. Some candidates attempted an answer without any reference to Ireland, which in light of the quotation was odd indeed.

The highest mark achieved was 70%.

#### **Question 5**

Most candidates were able to give a good clear description of family decision making structures. Some wasted time by also writing at length about family life cycle without making any connection between family life cycle and family decision making structure. Many attained a pass grade purely on Part (a) as few enough made any serious attempt to elaborate on how different family role structures can impact on marketing strategy, as required by Part (b). As has already been made clear, it is not adequate at this level to merely say that it is important for marketers to ‘understand’ family decision making structures. Examples must be given of how marketers in practice react to and apply this understanding..

This question had the best pass rate (84%) but it was the only question where no candidate attained an “A” grade; the highest mark achieved was 65%.

#### **Question 6**

This question, perhaps not surprisingly, had the least numbers of candidates attempting it. Many wrote reasonably well on opinion leadership but few enough could clearly relate the use of web logs to opinion leadership. Still, most of those who attempted the question were familiar with blogging as was evidenced in the quite interesting and insightful answers to Part (b). As a result, this question had the highest rate of “B”s and “A”s among those who passed.

As with Question 4, this question makes clear the relevance of contemporary issues to this subject; it also stresses how important it is for candidates to keep up-to-date and be aware of what is written on relevant topics in the Irish media.

The highest mark achieved was 73%.

#### **Question 7**

In regard to Part (a), many candidates were unable to explain what is meant by loyalty or to show any grasp of underlying 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 “customer loyalty is when customers stay loyal”). One candidate referred to Paslow’s theory.

As regards Part (b), many answers here were quite practical, sensible and well informed but again lacked the theoretical under-pinning that could help develop more excellent presentations.

The widespread inability to clarify the theoretical bases of loyalty led to this question having the lowest rate of higher grades among those who passed. The highest mark achieved was 70%.

### **Question 8**

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 whatever little they knew about situations with no direct reference to the quotation and with less successful results.

Part (b), was reasonably well answered by many, but again there were too many trying to avail of the empty formula rather than providing meaningful content. The candidate who wrote that “situational variables offer multiple opportunities for positioning” may have had a clear idea of what this meant, but high marks cannot be awarded for what is undoubtedly true unless the content of the ‘truism’ is elaborated on.

One candidate achieved an A grade (70%).