



## EXAMINER'S REPORT

MAY 2006

### BUYER BEHAVIOUR

#### General Comments

The pass-rate this year was 60%, a very disappointing reduction on the 67% of last year (and the 72% of the year before last). The ratio of higher grades to overall passes was 45% (also lower than last year's 50%) and the proportion of pass students attaining "B" grades was 8% (as compared to 9% 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.

12% 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 slightly better than last year where 13% were careless in this regard, although it is hard to justify any error margin in this regard in a professional examination.

23% failed to attempt five questions (substantially higher than the 15% of last 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 overall 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.

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, 18% of candidates managed to score an "A" in individual questions (much higher than the 12% of the last three years). Yet only one candidate (one less than the two who scored the same in each of the last three years) managed to score an "A" in more than one question. One candidate who scored 80% in one question scored 50% in another, 40% in a third, and 5% in his or her final question, finishing with an "E" grade. Consistency and application 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 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 Part (a) of this question should be familiar to any candidate who took the trouble to research past papers. While it 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. Many put too much emphasis on describing the consumption process rather than dealing with the marketing strategies based on the consumption process; however some presented very nicely integrated treatments of the consumption process and how marketing strategies can be based on it. Part (b) was directly from the textbook and is a topic with which students at this level should be concerned. It was generally poorly answered. The fact that this topic has not been specifically raised on an examination paper before is no excuse; it is a theme of the current

textbook. In any event, at the very heart of professionalism is the ability to cope with what might be perceived as unexpected. Some attempted only one part of the question, mostly the first part. The highest mark achieved was 80%.

### **Question 2**

Most candidates who attempted this question were able to identify that the area of consumer behaviour involved in the quotation was Perception. Many struggled with suggestions that it might be Attitudes or Communications or Memory or Learning or Search or whatever else they might have (poorly) prepared. While most were reasonably well able to describe the elements of Perception, few enough were able to relate these to the issue in question, advertising clutter. However, some were able to give sound practical advice on how to counteract clutter, without necessarily relating this advice to Perception. The highest mark achieved was 70%.

### **Question 3**

Many were able to describe life-style and summarise different life-style inventories without, in the main, sufficient emphasis on researching life-styles. There was, however, a disturbing lack of information regarding life-styles among some candidates who, for instance, confused it with family-life-cycle or even social class. The Central Statistics Organisation was credited with researching life-styles (which might come as a surprise to the Central Statistics Office). There were some reasonable attempts at evaluating the usefulness of life-styles to marketers but most efforts were not well focused on the uses that life-style might have for marketers. The highest mark achieved was 80%.

### **Question 4**

Among those who passed, Part (a) was answered well, with some diligent textbook based preparation evident. However, there were relatively few attempts to clearly relate attitude research approaches to the precise issue raised in the quotation. 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 wrote irrelevant stuff on attitude change and attitude functions. Others had no idea that the research approach involved was attitudes and suggested helpful things like 'surveys' or even "conducting research" as an answer. The prediction of behaviour from attitude measures is a common topic on these papers and it is a part of the course that should attract detailed consideration and study. Notwithstanding that, Part (b) was generally answered poorly. This question had the joint worst pass rate (58% of those who attempted it), but the joint second best rate of higher marks (61% of those who passed). The highest mark achieved was 73%.

### **Question 5**

The subject matter of this question is of considerable topical import to Irish marketing professionals. Its contemporary relevance was soundly expressed in well-informed and insightful answers. Many, however, did not make clear (or indeed any) connections between their knowledge of immigrant marketing initiatives and the topic of sub-cultures as specifically raised in the question. This question had the joint best pass rate (90% of those who attempted it) and the joint second best rate of higher marks (61% of those who passed). The highest mark achieved was 75%.

### **Question 6**

Although this was one of the least popular questions (48% attempted Question 6) it had the joint best pass rate (90% of those who attempted it) and the best rate of higher marks (76% of those who passed). Many candidates were able to give a general account of the socio-economic changes that have occurred in Ireland in recent times, although there was some confusion with demographic and economic factors. It is important for candidates to keep up-to-date and be

aware of what is written on relevant topics in the Irish media. Where many candidates did less well 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' socio-economic changes or whatever. The highest mark achieved was 73%.

### **Question 7**

The topic of consumer search behaviour is of contemporary relevance and should generate interest and expertise among candidates at this stage of the programme, particularly in light of the growing use of the Internet. Interestingly, it was by far the most popular topic with 84% of candidates attempting Question 7. It had a high pass rate (83% of those who attempted it) mostly due to candidates' ability to answer Part (a) quite well. Part (b) was less well approached, with relatively little evidence that candidates were able to match the strategic approaches used by marketers with the types of search sources that consumers use. The highest mark achieved was 73%.

### **Question 8**

Some candidates were 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. As regards Part (b), there was little enough direct focus on the question as posed but quite a lot of general comments on segmentation generally. One candidate achieved an A grade (70%). Question 8 was the least popular with just 36% of candidates attempting it. It had the joint worst pass rate (58% of those who attempted it), and the joint worst rate of higher marks (44% of those who passed). It was the only question where no candidate attained an "A" grade; the highest mark achieved was 64%.