



## **EXAMINER'S REPORT**

**AUGUST 2007**

### **BUYER BEHAVIOUR**

#### **General Comments**

The performance in this examination was very poor, with just over half of the candidates achieving a pass grade. This compares unfavourably with last year when nearly two thirds passed. One third 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 (most of those who did not attain a pass were awarded F grades). Lest there be any confusion, in terms of progressing from one stage to another of the Institute's Graduateship programme, the August examinations carry the exact same weight as those held in May; 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. One third of the 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 not a professional approach to presenting their work.

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.

### **Question 1**

Seven out of every ten candidates attempted Question 1, and nearly seven out of every ten of those attained a pass grade. Most were able to make a reasonable or even good attempt at Part (b) of the question. Part (a) was less well answered. Many of those who attempted this section did not address the question as posed and wrote general comments on consumer behaviour and marketing or other 'prepared' answers. Time was also wasted on drawing detailed, and mostly quite irrelevant, diagrams without adequate annotation or commentary. Just under one third of those who passed attained a higher grade.

### **Question 2**

Of those candidates who attempted Question 2 (nearly eight in every ten, making this the joint most 'popular' question on the paper, along with Question 3), just half attained a pass grade. It was disappointing that so few knew enough about motivation to write in reasonable detail about what is meant by motivation, although Part (a) was better answered than Part (b). Few enough knew acceptable definitions of the construct and made them up 'on the hoof' with some interestingly circular attempts ("the motivation of a consumer is when a consumer is motivated..."). Those who attempted to evaluate the role of motivation in marketing (Part (b) of Question 2) often relied on the vapid claim that "marketers should be aware of motivation" or they should "understand it". One fifth of those who passed attained a higher grade. One candidate scored seventy percent.

### **Question 3**

Nearly eighty percent of the candidates attempted Question 3, and there was a pass rate of over seventy percent, the second best pass rate in this examination. 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. Again, the application section (Part (b) of Question 3) was less well answered than the more descriptive Part (a). Forty-four percent of those who passed attained a higher grade. One candidate scored seventy percent.

### **Question 4**

Seventy percent of candidates attempted Question 4, but there was a very poor pass rate of thirty-eight percent. Question 4 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. Candidates wrote on various aspects of attitudes but not sufficiently on what was asked in the question, attitude formation and there was little knowledge shown of attitude formation theories. Just over one in eight of those who passed attained a higher grade (C only; no Bs or As).

### **Question 5**

Just under half of the candidates attempted Question 5. Eighty-two percent of those attained a pass grade, the best pass rate in this examination. In the main, candidates who chose to attempt this question showed quite a good grasp of the recent trends in the composition of the Irish population as evidenced in the census results. This was heartening as it shows an appreciation of key factors that affect the practice of marketing in Ireland. Many were also able to write reasonably well on these implications (as asked in Part (b) of Question 5) although this task was less well completed than the more descriptive one asked in Part (a). Nearly two thirds of those who passed attained a higher grade. One candidate scored over seventy percent.

### **Question 6**

Of those candidates who attempted Question 6, fifty-five percent attained a pass grade. While some candidates were able to give some account of search processes, many others were unable to give even a general account of how consumers search. The relationship therefore between how consumers search and how marketers attempt to facilitate consumers in this regard was not dealt with at all adequately in the main. Just over one in every four candidates attained a higher grade.

### **Question 7**

Nearly three in every four candidates attempted Question 7; just under sixty percent of them attained a pass grade. While the topic of 'loyalty' does not take up many pages in the text-book, it is still one of the key aspects of consumption behaviour and has a lot of contemporary relevance to marketers and consumers. Some candidates had difficulty in even approaching the topic and the 'circular definition' was in evidence again ("store loyalty is the loyalty a consumer has to a given store...."). Less than one in three of those who passed attained a higher grade.

### **Question 8**

Less than one in every five candidates attempted Question 8, making this by far the least 'popular question in the examination. Half of them passed; and a quarter of those who passed attained a higher grade (C only). The topic of involvement (engagement) is quite well covered in the text book, but many candidates did not pick it up in the quotation. 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. 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 about' involvement or whatever.