



EXAMINER'S REPORT

MAY 2007

BUYER BEHAVIOUR

General Comments

The pass-rate this year was sixty-nine percent, a substantial improvement on the sixty percent of last year (and moving back towards the seventy-two percent of a couple of years ago). The ratio of higher grades to overall passes was fifty-one percent (also higher than last year's forty-five percent) and the proportion of pass students attaining a "B" grade was fourteen percent (as compared to eight 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.

Fourteen 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 slightly worse than last year where twelve percent were careless in this regard; it is hard to justify any error margin in this regard in a professional examination.

Twenty-seven percent failed to attempt five questions (higher than the twenty-three percent 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 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; one candidate indicated that (s)he ran out of time in every question. On a positive note, the practice of writing out the question on the answer paper seems to have died out. (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 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, twenty-four percent of candidates managed to score an "A" in individual questions (much higher than the eighteen percent of last year). Yet only one candidate (the same as last year) managed to score an "A" in more than one question. This candidate scored in "A" in three questions, a "C" in another and did not attempt a fifth question, finishing with a "C" grade. Consistency and application across the whole course and in five questions are required to score really well.

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 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. Many, however, put too much emphasis on describing consumer behaviour rather than dealing with the application of consumer behaviour to marketing; however some presented very nicely integrated treatments of consumer behaviour and how marketing strategies can be based on a knowledge of consumer behaviour. Few enough made attempts at dealing with developments in consumer behaviour. The highest mark achieved was 70%.

Question 2

Most candidates who attempted this question showed a good basic knowledge of Perception. While many were reasonably well able to describe the elements of Perception, few enough were able to relate these to the issue in question, the factors that affect consumers' perception of a brand. In fact there was a fairly widespread tendency to list everything one might possibly know about Perception without focusing on the question as posed. However, some were able to give sound practical advice on how marketers can attempt to influence consumers to perceive their brand(s) as the marketer might wish. This was the most popular question with 75% of candidates attempting it. The highest mark achieved was 73%.

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). Likewise, those who devise the VALS typology might not be too amused at it being referred to as LAVS. 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 72%.

Question 4

Among those who passed, Part (a) was answered well, with some diligent textbook based preparation evident. Some had no idea that the research approach involved was attitudes and suggested helpful things like 'surveys' or even "conducting research" as an answer; others made the distinction between "external" and "internal" research and between primary and secondary research as the focus of their answers. 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. 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 worst pass rate (59% of those who attempted it). The highest mark achieved was 72%.

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 best pass rate (97% of those who attempted it). The highest mark achieved was 70%.

Question 6

There was a poor enough appreciation, in Part (a), of what is meant by family decision making structures and some confusion between these structures and Family Life Cycle and whether families are nuclear or extended or made up of couples or singles or whether they are smaller or larger. In Part (b), many candidates were able to give a general account of the social changes that have occurred in Ireland in recent times, although there was some confusion with demographic and economic factors. There was less clear evidence of the ability to relate these changes to family decision making structures.

Where many candidates did less well was in the ability to show, in Part (c), that they can appreciate the marketing implications 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 changes or whatever. This question had the best rate of “A” grades among those who passed (12%). The highest mark achieved was 75%.

Question 7

The topics of blogging and social networking technologies are 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 not among the most popular topics with just 54% of candidates attempting Question 7. Candidates were able to write well about social networking, giving good relevant examples in the Irish context. They were also well able to give good practical advice on how marketers should respond to the opportunities and threats posed by social networking. Where some fell down was on the ability to relate the social networking phenomenon to Opinion Leadership. As well as having a good pass rate (87% of those who attempted it), this question had the best rate of higher grades among those who passed (79%) and the best rate of “B” grades among those who passed (42%), it had the poorest rate of “A” grades among those who passed (3%). The highest mark achieved was 70%.

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 marketing generally. Question 8 was the least popular with just 35% of candidates attempting it. The highest mark achieved was 70%.