



EXAMINER'S REPORT

AUGUST 2008

BUYER BEHAVIOUR

General Comments

The performance in this examination was very poor, with just over half of the candidates achieving a pass grade. This is the same as last year but compares unfavourably with the previous year when nearly two thirds passed. One fifth of those who passed achieved a higher grade (it was one third last year). No candidate attained a B grade or above. An A grade was achieved in only one of the eight questions. For the first time in this examiner's memory, there were two questions where no candidate achieved a pass grade.

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 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.

More than 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

Nearly half of the candidates attempted Question 1, and just over two out of every three 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. Only one candidate made any reference to the quote at the beginning of the question. Just over one fifth of those who passed attained a higher grade.

Question 2

Of those candidates who attempted Question 2 (over eight in every ten, making this the most 'popular' question on the paper), just under two thirds attained a pass grade. Part (a) was better answered than Part (b), showing that many candidates had a basic grasp of the motivation construct and of some of the motivation theories. Those few who attempted to evaluate the role of motivation in marketing (Part (b) of Question 2) mostly relied on the

vapid claim that “marketers should be aware of motivation” or they should “understand it”. One of those who passed attained a higher grade. No candidate scored sixty percent or over.

Question 3

Over two-thirds of the candidates attempted Question 3, but there was a pass rate of less than fifty percent. It was disappointing that so few knew enough about lifestyles to write in reasonable detail about it. Some were able to describe life-style and summarise different life-style inventories without, in the main, sufficient emphasis on how it can affect consumption behaviour (Part (a) of Question 3). 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. (Part (b) of Question 3). Nearly a quarter of those who passed attained a higher grade. No candidate scored sixty percent or over.

Question 4

Nearly three in every five candidates attempted Question 4, but not one attained a pass grade. This is the first time that such a result has had to be reported. 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 (or on learning theories) but not sufficiently on what was asked in the question, attitude formation and there was little knowledge shown of attitude formation theories.

Question 5

Just over two in every five of the candidates attempted Question 5, making it the least favourite question in this examination (jointly with Question 6). Unfortunately, none of those attained a pass grade, making the record reported in Question 4 a very short-lived one indeed. In brief, not one candidate knew enough about what is meant by social class or how it is measured in Ireland, to prove a ‘passable’ knowledge. Candidates for a professional marketing qualification should not find themselves exposed to that extent.

Question 6

Of those candidates who attempted Question 6, fifty percent attained a pass grade. Most were able to describe family role structures and summarise different role structure categories without, in the main, sufficient emphasis on their impact on marketing strategies. There was frequent (and ineffectual) recourse to the plaintive ‘marketers should be aware of decision making role structures’ without any specific comment on what actions this ‘awareness’ might engender. Just over one in every four candidates who passed attained a higher grade. No candidate scored sixty percent or over.

Question 7

Nearly four in every five candidates attempted Question 7, making it the second most popular question in this examination. It was the best answered question with just under three quarters of candidates attaining a pass grade. It also had the best rate of higher grades achieved; sixty percent of those who passed attained a higher grade, all of them grade ‘B’ or higher; one candidate scored 70%, the only such mark achieved in this examination. Candidates generally showed a good appreciation of the consumer information search process, how it is facilitated by the web and how marketers can use the web to aid consumer search. Many answers were given depth and colour by the use of pertinent examples.

Question 8

Less than fifty percent of candidates attempted Question 8. Just over half of them passed; and just over two-fifths of those who passed attained a higher grade. No candidate scored seventy percent or over. The topic of involvement is quite well covered in the text book, but many candidates did not seem to know that. 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 concepts such as involvement to consumption behaviour and to marketing activity; it is never sufficient to merely suggest that a concept is 'important' to consumption or that marketers 'must understand' or 'must know about' involvement or whatever.