



EXAMINER'S REPORT

MAY 2009

BUYER BEHAVIOUR

General Comments

The pass-rate this year was seventy-four percent, a substantial and very welcome improvement on the dismal fifty-one percent of last year. This is the best performance in ten years (since the seventy-nine percent pass rate of 1999). This is a fine achievement and all concerned must be complimented. The vast majority of candidates are preparing seriously for the examination and taking the trouble to present their material clearly and carefully.

However, the forty-four percent ratio of higher grades to overall passes, while higher than last year's forty-two percent, was lower than the standard of recent years (fifty-one percent the previous year). The proportion of pass students attaining "B" grades was sixteen percent, much better than last year's four percent and in line with the fourteen percent of the previous year. No candidate attained an "A" grade.

Twenty-five 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 better than last year where thirty percent were careless in this regard, but much worse than the previous year (fourteen percent); some did not identify the (a) and (b) parts of their answers; it is hard to justify any error margin in this regard in a professional examination.

Twenty percent failed to attempt five questions (actually worse than the sixteen 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 overall it was acceptable. 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. 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 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, seventeen percent of candidates managed to score an "A" in individual

questions (higher than the fourteen percent of last year but much lower than the twenty-four percent of the previous year). Yet only one candidate managed to score an “A” in more than one question. 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 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 both 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

Question 1 was the second most 'popular' question on the paper with just over three in every four attempting it. It was generally well answered with over eighty percent of candidates attaining a pass grade. The treatment of the 'digital age' element of the question was particularly good with many useful references to social networks, e-searching and blogs. The thrust of Part (b) should be familiar to any candidate who took the trouble to research past papers. Many of those who answered Part (b), however, put too much emphasis on describing consumer behaviour rather than dealing with the application of consumer behaviour to marketing. A few presented nicely integrated treatments of consumer behaviour in the digital age and how marketing strategies can be based on knowledge of this behaviour; they did well.

Fourteen percent of those who passed achieved an A grade, the highest such proportion in the examination. The highest mark achieved was 75%.

Question 2

Of those candidates who attempted Question 2 (nearly six in every ten), just over three quarters attained a pass grade. Part (a) was better answered than Part (b), showing that many candidates had a basic grasp of the motivation construct. However, knowledge of motivation theories seemed to be limited in the main to Maslow's classification. 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”. Very few made any effort to comment on HSBC. Such

comment is not strictly necessary, but some attempt to relate an answer to the practical situations identified in the questions would gain extra marks.

Seven percent of those who passed achieved an A grade. The highest mark achieved was 75% (interestingly by the same candidate who attained 75% in Question One).

Question 3

This was the least popular question on the paper; just forty-three percent of the candidates attempted it. It had the best pass rate in the examination at eighty-seven percent. Most of the candidates were able to describe the main learning theories although there was a marked tendency to spend too much time describing learning experiments involving animals; these can be referred to without wasting too much time on them; the subject is concerned with human consumption behaviour and learning. The application section (Part (b) of Question 3) was less well answered than the more descriptive Part (a) with many candidates not devoting sufficient emphasis to this aspect.

Fifty-four percent of those who passed attained a higher grade. No candidate scored seventy percent or above.

Question 4

Six in every ten of the candidates attempted Question 4; just over seven in ten of those attained a pass grade. 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 Four). However, there was uncertainty about what life-styles are and some seemed to think that life-style was the same as motivation or even social class. There were few enough reasonable attempts at evaluating the usefulness of life-styles marketing beyond the empty declaration that it is 'important' (Part (b) of Question 4).

Forty percent of those who passed attained a higher grade. No candidate scored seventy percent or over.

Question 5

Fifty-four percent of the candidates attempted Question 5; among those, just fifty-eight percent attained a pass grade, the lowest such percentage in this examination. Some had no idea that the research approach involved was attitudes and suggested motivation or life-styles or the consumption process or perceived risk or situations or whatever. Among those who passed, Part (a) was answered well, with some diligent textbook based preparation evident.

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 everything they knew about attitudes including, in this context, irrelevant material on attitude change and attitude functions and hierarchies of effect and such like. The prediction of behaviour from attitude research 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, with relatively few attempts to clearly relate attitude research approaches to the prediction of behaviour.

Just over a quarter of those who passed attained a higher grade. No candidate scored seventy percent or over.

Question 6

The subject matter of this question, ethnic and youth sub-cultures, is of considerable topical import to Irish marketing professionals. Its contemporary relevance was reflected, in Part (a), in some well-informed and insightful answers that showed good awareness of these markets in Ireland; some also added information on the grey market. As regards Part (b), quite good knowledge of the type of marketing strategies that marketers use in Ireland to target and service these markets was also in evidence. Many, however, did not make clear (or indeed any) connections between their knowledge of these marketing initiatives and the topic of sub-cultures as specifically raised in the question.

Fifty-four percent of candidates attempted Question 6; it had a good pass rate of eighty-four percent. Six percent of those who passed attained an A grade. The highest mark achieved was 70%.

Question 7

Of those candidates who attempted Question 7 (nearly six in every ten, the exact same percentage as Question 2), seven in ten attained a pass grade.

In the main, candidates who chose to attempt this question showed quite a good grasp of recent demographic and social changes in Ireland, although there was more information on demographic than there was on social aspects of these change. 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 7) although this task was less well completed than the more descriptive one asked in Part (a).

Ninety-three percent of those who passed attained a higher grade, by far the best performance in this regard in the examination. No candidate scored seventy percent or over.

Question 8

Social networking and user-generated web-sites are of contemporary relevance and should generate interest and expertise among candidates at this stage of the programme. Interestingly, Question 8 was the most 'popular' in the examination with eighty-three percent of candidates attempting it.

Candidates were able to write well about social networking and user-generated web-sites, giving good relevant (and often personal) 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 and user-generated web-sites. Where most fell down was on the ability to relate these phenomena to theory on word-of-mouth.

Question 8 had a good pass rate (eighty-six of those who attempted it, the second best pass rate in the examination). Seventy-two percent of those who passed attained a higher grade and four percent of those who passed attained an A grade. The highest mark achieved was 70 %.