



Advanced Certificate in Market & Social Research Practice

How to Complete and Submit the Integrated Assignment
Centre Candidates – Brief & Proposal Format

Effective From June 2007 Assessment

MRS is the world's largest association for people and organisations that provide or use market, social and opinion research, business intelligence and customer insight.

MRS is the awarding body for market and social research qualifications in the UK. It offers a range of government-approved qualifications suitable for different interests and levels of experience

MRS Advanced Certificate - How to Complete and Submit the Integrated Assignment
Centre Candidates – Brief & Proposal Format
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1. Introduction

The Integrated Assignment (IA) is one of the two components of assessment within the MRS Advanced Certificate in Market & Social Research (the other being the examination). In order to attain the Advanced Certificate, you must pass in both components.

The aim of the IA is to enable you to demonstrate the extent to which you have developed a range of market and/or social research skills. To this end, you must complete a practical project which integrates learning objectives from the various units of the Advanced Certificate syllabus.

The Advanced Certificate syllabus focuses on all stages of the research process, from problem identification to reporting research results. The IA requires you to demonstrate your ability to meet learning outcomes at all stages in the research process.

Integrated Assignment submissions are provided twice per year:

2009 – February & June

2010 onwards – January & June

2. Overview of the Integrated Assignment

Format

The IA should take the form of a research brief, and research proposal based on the brief. Fuller guidance on how to approach the task is contained in Section 9.

All assignments must contain a copy of a client brief, indicating the client's requirements, to demonstrate the extent to which the research project being discussed meets those stated needs. The brief must be prepared by the candidate, although it can be based on a research problem provided by a client or centre. In all cases, it should provide clear indication of the proposed timing of and budget for the project being discussed.

The Brief must be included within the word count. It is recommended that the brief should be completed in no more than 500 words.

Candidates may undertake the research elements of the assignment as a group task. However, each candidate must submit an individual assignment which provides evidence of his/her ability to analyse, describe and evaluate the research process.

IAs that do not include a 'Brief' will be graded as 'non-compliant' as they do not comply with assessment criteria and cannot be assessed within the qualifications framework.

Assignment length, layout & language

- The assignment should be between **3000 – 3500 words** (excluding appendices). Materials included in appendices should *illustrate* points made in the body of the assignment. Appendices should not be used to extend the word limit.
- All words within the main body of the text, including those within tables are included within the word count. Text within the title page or contents page is not included in the word count.
- IAs that considerably exceed the 3500 word limit (by more than 10%) will be graded as 'non-compliant' as they do not comply with assessment criteria and cannot be assessed within the qualifications framework.
- Candidates must include a word count at the end of the assignment.
- MRS Qualifications strongly recommends that candidates produce their Integrated Assignment in Word format. This format best allows candidates to provide full explanation and justification of their rationale. This does not preclude the inclusion of charts, data tables, pictures etc.
- Sections within the assignment should be clearly indicated with headings.
- Candidates who use their own company's proprietary products as part of their solution to the research problem need to ensure that the underlying methodology associated with the product is clearly explained and demonstrated within the IA as to why such a method is superior to other non-proprietary methods. Failure to do so could result in marks being lost.

The use of such material is not forbidden within the IA. However, candidates need to be aware that the aim of the IA is to demonstrate their knowledge of the syllabus and therefore the use of such material must be handled with care.

- The language used in all assessed components of the MRS Advanced Certificate is normally *English. The language of your assignment should be appropriate to both the task and the professional nature of the qualification.

***Candidates whose first language is Welsh or Irish (Gaelige)**

Candidates who are following courses/programmes of learning in Wales or Northern Ireland can elect to complete the assessed components in Welsh or Irish (Gaelige). Centres wishing to offer access to assessment in either Welsh or Irish (Gaelige) are required to inform the MRS Qualifications Manager of this requirement when submitting an application for centre approval or, subsequently, when submitting a course notification form.

***Candidates whose first language is not English, Welsh or Irish (Gaelige)**

It is the responsibility of the centre to ensure that all candidates have an appropriate level of language competence in English to allow them to undertake and complete the assessed components of the qualification.

For candidates whose first language is not English, Welsh or Irish (Gaelige) a measure of English language competence can be provided through the following internationally-recognised English language certificates:

- Cambridge Proficiency in English (Grade C or above)
- Cambridge Advanced Certificate in English (Grade B or above)
- IELTS (6.0 or above)
- TOEIC (880 or above)

3. Presentation of your assignment

- Your assignment should be printed on A4 paper, with a one inch margin around the text.
- The IA should be secured with a staple in the top left hand corner. Please do not bind your IA by any other means.

Make sure that each section within your assignment is easy to read by:

- using headings and bullet points effectively.
- avoiding over-brief note form. If you include notes, you should ensure they make your points clearly and overtly.
- ensuring that your use of English is clear, accurate and appropriate to a client audience.

2 copies of your Integrated Assignment must be submitted with a completed IA Coversheet.

4. Submitting your assignment

The Integrated Assignment must be submitted to your centre co-ordinator by the specified deadline.

When submitting your assignment, you should:

- ensure that you have completed both sides of the Integrated Assignment Coversheet and attached a copy of this form securely to the front of each copy of your assignment;
- retain a copy of your assignment for your own records.

If you are submitting your assignment by post, please use recorded or registered postal services.

5. Assessing your assignment

When marking integrated assignments, the assessors have *Assessment Criteria* to support them. This is contained in Appendix 1.

IAs do not receive a numerical mark, but are given a band mark (Distinction, Merit, Pass, Fail).

In addition to this first round of marking, a sample of all IAs are double marked by a Senior Examiner. After marking, all IAs which fail to meet the pass standard or which fall on a borderline are then subject to moderation by an industry expert and by the Joint Chief Examiner. Only then is a decision made on your result.

6. When do I get my results?

The results are released approximately 12 weeks following the exam, after exam scripts and integrated assignments have been marked and moderated.

7. What happens if I don't pass the IA?

Don't worry! All candidates can resubmit their IA twice after the initial submission, as long as the resubmissions are within the 3-year registration period. Full details for those who wish to resubmit are included with the notification of results.

8. Confidentiality

A copy of your assignment will be retained at MRS for three years after submission.

MRS recognises that some IAs may be based on sensitive, real-life projects. Any assignments based on a real-life research problem must be anonymised to ensure that the client, product, research agency and personnel are disguised. Confidential assignments will be read only by the appointed assessors, appointed moderators and approved members of MRS staff and will not be selected for use in training and standardisation*.

If you wish for your IA to be treated confidentially you are required to include a covering letter with your assignment outlining the reasons why your IA must remain confidential.

** Permission will be obtained from individual candidates before their IA is used for training & standardisation. Once permission has been granted from the candidate the IA is anonymised and returned to the candidate for approval prior to use.*

9. Guidance for completing the assignment

The assignment can be divided into seven clear stages. Guidance for each stage is given below. At each stage, take care to:

- ❖ describe what you propose to do
- ❖ provide a clear rationale for the choices you have made.

If you have identified any potential limitations with any of those choices, indicate how you would address those limitations.

Please note that, at each stage, you need both to describe the approach(es) you have selected and provide a rationale for your choice.

Stage 1: The Brief

- 1) Identify a **research problem** which has relevance to you, your current job and/or your current employer. For example, you might decide to research training provision and training needs within your department, or how to extend the market for your company's products. You might like to discuss your choice of problem with your employer.
- 2) Carry out some **background research** relevant to the problem you have decided to research. If this is a problem you are investigating for someone else, discuss the issues with them to clarify any points that are not clearly understood. You will also need to collect information on what they have to spend on the research project, what information they are expecting to receive and finally and most importantly, what they intend to do with the information gained as a result of the research project.
- 3) In no more than 500 words, **write out a formal brief** on behalf of your 'client' expressing the relevant information gained in 2) above.

Stage 2: The Proposal: Background and Objectives

- 1) **Prepare to write the background to the proposal** by revising the background information you gained at Stage 1. Carry out some further background research so that you can show you understand the problems facing your potential 'client' and that you understand the character and dynamics of her/his marketplace and the products and services in it.
- 2) Decide on the **specific objectives** which the research is going to achieve. For example, if you have decided to research the training needs in your department, you may wish to identify needs within a particular area (e.g. IT training). Make sure that you define very clear boundaries for the research project.
- 3) Write out the **first two sections of your proposal**:
 - Background
 - Objectives

Stage 3: The Proposal: Research Design and Sampling Plan

- 1) Consider **which type of research design** is suitable for the research problem. What type of data are you going to collect? What categories of research are you going to carry out?

(N.B. You are not actually required to undertake the research which you propose. You are submitting a proposal in response to the brief in the hope that it will be accepted by a client and you will get the contract.)

- 2) Identify the sampling method which is most appropriate for the research problem you have defined. Identify the population of interest and whether a sampling frame will be used. Specify how the sample size is decided and indicate the relationship between the sample size and the population of interest.
- 3) Write up your proposals for:-
 - The research design
 - The sampling plan

Stage 4: The Proposal: Data Collection

- 1) **Determine** whether you are **collecting qualitative and/or quantitative data**. You will need to focus here on specific data collection techniques. Do not be tempted to use all the techniques available, but select those which are most appropriate to your research brief and your sample.
- 2) **Specify clearly how you will collect your data**. You do not need to design a whole questionnaire or interview guide. However, you should provide examples of:
 - the types of questions which will be asked;
 - the topics which will be covered;
 - other information about the respondents which will be required to solve the research problem.
- 3) Write up your **proposal for data collection**. Remember to include information about:
 - The types of questions/topics to be covered
 - The data collection techniques you propose to use.

Stage 5: The Proposal: Data Analysis

- 1) **Decide how you are going to analyse the data and how you are going to transform data into information**. Make specific recommendations in this section. For example, you may decide to:
 - include excerpts from focus group transcripts (N.B. check the MRS Code of Conduct for restrictions on this); or
 - outline the types tests you will carry out on quantitative data and the implications they will have for your findings.
- 2) Make sure that the **data analysis procedures** which you suggest **are appropriate** both to the type of data and to the research problem.
- 3) **Write up your recommendations for the data analysis procedures and techniques** to be used in this research project.

Stage 6: The Proposal: Time to Completion and Budgets

- 1) Decide on the **time required to complete the research**. Remember to check the brief for completion dates. Decide whether an interim report or quarterly reports etc. are going to be necessary/ useful for your client, as well as the end-of-project report.
- 2) Identify the **tasks** in the research project **which need to be costed** (e.g. interviewers, CAPI instruments, travel time, etc.).
- 3) **Calculate the costs** of carrying out the research.
If you do not work in market research, you can try various approaches to identifying likely costs. For example, you could:
- 4) Look at the jobs and news articles on websites such as Research Live (www.Research-Live.com). This will give you some insight into the salaries of research personnel. More web addresses can be found in the **Recommended Reading & Reading Sources**.

N.B. When your assignment is assessed, your costs will not be judged specifically on how realistic they are. Rather, you will be assessed on the comprehensive budget list you draw up and how accurately it reflects the data collection tasks you propose.

- 5) Provide a **time schedule of project tasks** and who will be responsible for carrying them out. Provide a budget for all the tasks and indicate when interim reports [if any] will be issued. Indicate if presentation of the report findings will be given along with how many copies of the report you intend to provide.

Stage 7: The Proposal: Human Resource Involved

- 1) Indicate **who is to carry out the research**. Apart from their name you will need to provide details of their length of experience dealing with this kind of research together with appropriate academic and professional qualifications

Indicate clearly which areas each person would be responsible for within the project.

Appendix 1: Content Specifications & Assessment Criteria – Brief & Proposal

The following grid outlines the expected content of an integrated assignment, and how the specified content maps against the learning outcomes of the qualification.

Content Specifications	Relevant learning outcomes
Candidates should: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Design a programme of research to meet the needs of the brief <i>or</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Critically evaluate a research project with which they were involved, in relation to the needs of the brief 	2.6 1.7
<i>Within this task, candidates should:</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Describe a clearly-defined research problem and identify appropriate research objectives 	1.3 1.4 1.5
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Outline an appropriate research design, providing a rationale for their choice(s) 	2.1 2.5 2.7
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Select and describe a sampling plan which is appropriate to the research objectives and design, giving reasons for their choices 	3.1 3.4 3.6
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Select and describe the data collection methods most appropriate to their stated objectives and chosen sample. 	4.2 and/or 5.2 and/or 5.4 and/or 5.5 4.6 and/or 5.7
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Design/select and describe the data collection tool(s) most appropriate to their stated collection methods 	6.1 6.3 and/or 6.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Select a form of analysis appropriate to the data collected, the sample and the research objectives 	7.2 7.3 and 7.4 and/or 7.7 and 7.8
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Select an approach to the reporting and/or presentation of findings which is appropriate to the client needs, the data collected and the research objectives 	8.2 and/or 8.4 8.5

Assessment Criteria

Details the areas of knowledge, skills and understanding which you are expected to demonstrate.

At PASS level, the candidate can	At DISTINCTION level
<p>1. present an assignment which is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. written in a style which is generally accurate, clearly ordered and does not impose unnecessary strain on the reader b. uses terminology appropriately 	<p>The candidate meets the criteria specified opposite AND can</p> <p>5. Provide evidence of being outstanding in a minimum of two of the following areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. depth of understanding of the research problem b. depth of rationale for the choices made at the various stages in the research process c. understanding of any particular strengths and limitations of the chosen approach
<p>2. demonstrate their understanding of the research problem by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. providing a clear discussion and definition of the problem to be researched b. defining the research objectives for the project c. selecting a suitable research design for achieving the research objectives d. providing a clear rationale for the choices they make in relation to the proposed research 	
<p>3. demonstrate their practical understanding of research practice:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. providing an appropriate plan for identifying and drawing a sample for the project b. identifying appropriate techniques and resources for gathering the required data c. providing a clear plan for the analysis of the data d. providing a clear rationale for the choices they make in relation to the proposed research 	
<p>4. demonstrate their understanding of the client's needs by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. identifying the extent to which the proposed research is likely to meet the client's objectives b. describing how findings and recommendations will be reported back to the client c. demonstrating how the proposed research will meet the constraints of time and cost and be completed with available human resources 	