



Advanced Certificate in Market & Social Research Practice

Syllabus & Indicative Content (short version)

Effective From June 2007 Assessment

Guidance on realising the syllabus. The following grid provides guidance on core elements which may be covered in order to enable candidates to achieve the learning outcomes. The figures shown next to the titles indicates how much time might be devoted to each element over a programme. These do NOT indicate weighting within the elements of assessment.

ELEMENT 1: INTRODUCTION TO MARKET & SOCIAL RESEARCH (10%)

Element 1	Learning outcomes	Indicative content
<i>Topic 1</i> Introduction to Market Research	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Discuss the use of research in marketing and/or social contexts 2. Evaluate the usefulness of research to a given setting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How research is used to inform decision making • Contexts in which research is used • Overview of the research process • The roles of the research supplier and the research user (e.g. agency and client roles in the research process) • Who works in the research industry and what they do
<i>Topic 2</i> Defining the research problem	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Define the problem or issue to be researched within a given context 4. Identify the type of information which is needed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analysing business and/or social contexts to identify problems to be researched • Defining and refining the research problem • Definitions of, and differences between, primary and secondary information • Definitions of, and differences between, qualitative and quantitative information
<i>Topic 3</i> Starting a research project	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Define the research aims and objectives for a given research problem 6. Design and/or evaluate a research brief for a given research problem 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How to identify and form research aims and objectives • The links between the research objectives and the business/social problem • The role of the brief in the research process • How to create an effective brief
<i>Topic 4</i> Ethics and the practice of research	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 7. Apply the principles relevant to legislation and ethical codes, including the MRS Code of Conduct, to a given research problem or setting. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ethical principles underpinning good research practice • Key principles of professional codes, including the MRS Code of Conduct • Key principles of data protection and freedom of information, as they relate to the practice of research • How to ensure ethical practice

ELEMENT 2: DESIGNING A RESEARCH PROJECT (10%)

Element 2	Learning outcomes	Indicative content
<p><i>Topic 1</i></p> <p>Selecting & using secondary data</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Evaluate the usefulness of secondary data to given research problems 2. Design a plan for the collection of secondary data for a given research problem 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The uses and limitations of secondary data • The sources of secondary data • The quality of secondary data • Planning to gather and use secondary data
<p><i>Topic 2</i></p> <p>Selecting an appropriate research design</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Discuss the concept of validity in the context of research design 4. Evaluate the research design options available for a given research context 5. Select an research design appropriate for a given research context 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The purpose of a research design • Validity in the context of research design • Research designs available to researchers, including: cross-sectional; longitudinal; experimental & case-study approaches • The relationship between information needs and research design • The principles governing the selection of a research design for a given research problem • The options available for the given research problem
<p><i>Topic 3</i></p> <p>Preparing a research proposal</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. Design and/or evaluate a research proposal for a given research brief 7. Demonstrate an understanding of the link between the proposed research and research constraints (i.e. time and budget; human resource) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The role of the proposal in the research process • The relationship between the research proposal and the research brief • The contents of research proposal • Estimating cost and time requirements • The role of each of the research team within the project • The proposal writing process • How to evaluate the quality of a proposal

ELEMENT 3: SELECTING AN APPROPRIATE SAMPLE (15%)

Element 3	Learning outcomes	Indicative content
<p><i>Topic 1</i></p> <p>Introduction to sampling</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Identify suitable sample sources or sampling frames for a given population 2. Evaluate the suitability of a sample source or sampling frame for a given project 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An overview of sampling in qualitative and quantitative research • Defining the population of interest • When to use a census or a sample • The principles of generalizing from a sample to a population • Where to find your sample
<p><i>Topic 2</i></p> <p>Sampling approaches</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Discuss the principles underpinning the approach to sampling in given research projects 4. Select appropriate sampling approaches and techniques for given research problems 5. Identify potential sources of error in given research 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Random (or probability) and non-random (or non-probability) sampling • The theory underpinning random or probability sampling • Random, semi-random and non-random sampling techniques and their uses and advantages and limitations • Sampling and non-sampling error
<p><i>Topic 3</i></p> <p>Devising a sampling plan</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. Devise and/or evaluate a sampling plan for a given research problem 7. Demonstrate an understanding of the link between sample approach, sample size and research constraints (time and budget). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elements of an effective sampling plan, including definition of the population, choice of method, choice of sampling frame or sample source and recommended sample size • The implications of time and budget constraints on the choice of sampling plan • The implications of the choice of sampling plan on data/research quality.

ELEMENT 4: PLANNING & CONDUCTING QUALITATIVE RESEARCH (15%)

Element 4	Learning outcomes	Indicative content
<p><i>Topic 1</i></p> <p>Introduction to qualitative methods</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Evaluate the suitability of a range of qualitative methods for given research problems 2. Select an appropriate qualitative method(s) for a given research problem 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overview of qualitative research approaches including observation, interviewing, ethnography, semiotics and online approaches • Uses, strengths and limitations of qualitative approaches
<p><i>Topic 2</i></p> <p>Methods of data collection</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Evaluate the suitability of a range of approaches to qualitative data collection for given research problems 4. Select (an) appropriate approach(es) to data collection for given research problem 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key principles, features, uses and strengths and limitations of a range of methods for data collection including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ In-depth interviews ○ Group discussions or focus groups ○ Collaborative and deliberative methods including workshops, panels and juries ○ Online interviewing and online discussions ○ Projective and elicitation techniques.
<p><i>Topic 3</i></p> <p>Setting up a qualitative project</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Design and/or evaluate plans for qualitative research projects to meet given research objectives 6. Apply understanding of the MRS Code of Conduct and/or data protection legislation to a given qualitative research project in relation to qualitative research 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Setting up a qualitative research project: the methodological side, e.g. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The role of the interviewer/moderator ○ Recruiting the sample ○ Designing an interview/discussion guide • Setting up a qualitative research project: the practical side, e.g. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Choosing a venue ○ Ethical and MRS Code of Conduct issues ○ Stimulus material ○ Recording the proceedings ○ Observing and observers • Use of incentive

ELEMENT 5: PLANNING & CONDUCTING QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH (15%)

Element 5	Learning outcomes	Indicative content
<p><i>Topic 1</i></p> <p>Introduction to quantitative methods</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Evaluate the suitability of a range of quantitative methods for given research problems 2. Select an appropriate quantitative method for a given research problem 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overview of quantitative research approaches including interviewing, observation, technology-enhanced methods of data collection, • Uses, strengths and limitations of quantitative methods
<p><i>Topic 2</i></p> <p>Methods of data collection</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Evaluate the suitability of a range of quantitative data collection methods for given research problems 4. Select an appropriate approach to data collection for a given research problem 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key principles, features, uses and strengths and limitations of a range of methods for data collection including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Observation methods (e.g. mystery customer research; electronic records etc) ○ Interviewing methods (e.g. face-to-face, telephone, & online) ○ Self-completion methods (e.g. postal and email)
<p><i>Topic 3</i></p> <p>Setting up a quantitative project</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Design and/or evaluate plans for quantitative research projects to meet given research objectives 6. Evaluate plans for the collection of data 7. Apply understanding of the MRS Code of Conduct and/or data protection legislation to a given quantitative research project 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The stages involved in setting up and running a quantitative project • The range of roles involved in setting up and running a quantitative project (e.g. researcher; fieldwork team; data processing team) • Planning the data collection process (e.g. selecting & briefing the fieldwork team etc) • Ethical and MRS Code of Conduct issues including responsibilities to the respondent or research participant

ELEMENT 6: DESIGNING INSTRUMENTS FOR GATHERING DATA (15%)

Element 6	Learning outcomes	Indicative content
<p><i>Topic 1</i></p> <p>Key principles in uncovering data</p>	<p>1. Identify a range of key principles involved in gathering and recording data</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The concepts of opinions, attitudes, and behaviour and the connections between them • Identifying and exploring the concepts to be researched in a given project
<p><i>Topic 2</i></p> <p>Designing instruments for gathering and recording qualitative data</p>	<p>2. Discuss the strengths and limitations of a range of projective and/or elicitation techniques in gathering data on opinions, attitudes and behaviour</p> <p>3. Select and/or evaluate the suitability of projective/elicitation techniques for researching a given problem</p> <p>4. Design an interview or a topic guide for a given research brief</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The role, strengths and limitations of qualitative methods in gathering data on opinions, attitudes, and behaviour • Selecting the most appropriate qualitative research method for a given scenario • The uses, strengths and limitations of projective and elicitation techniques. • Issues relating to gathering and recording qualitative data
<p><i>Topic 3</i></p> <p>Designing instruments for gathering quantitative data</p>	<p>5. Discuss the strengths and limitations of questionnaires in gathering data on opinions, attitudes and behaviour</p> <p>6. Discuss the key principles and stages involved in effective questionnaire design</p> <p>7. Design and/or evaluate the suitability of a series of questions (with response formats) for researching a given problem</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The role of a questionnaire in collecting quantitative data • The role, strengths and limitations of quantitative methods for gathering data on opinions, attitudes and behaviour • Validity and reliability in question and questionnaire design • Designing the questions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Translating research objectives and information needs into questions ○ Selecting response formats (including the use, strengths and limitations of scales for researching attitudes) ○ Wording questions and responses ○ Checking validity of questions. • Putting it all together: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Deciding on question order and layout ○ Ensuring suitability for method of data collection and mode of administration ○ Interviewer/respondent instructions ○ Pilot testing and revising ○ Checking the reliability of questions

ELEMENT 7: ANALYSING RESEARCH DATA (15%)

Element 7	Learning outcomes	Indicative content
<p><i>Topic 1</i></p> <p>Analysing secondary data</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Discuss the links between research objectives, data gathering and analysis in secondary research 2. Select and/or evaluate the suitability of an approach to the analysis of secondary data in a given research context 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The links between research objectives, data gathering and analysis in secondary research • Storing and retrieving secondary and in-house data, including the use of databases • The principles and processes of data mining • The principles and processes of data fusion
<p><i>Topic 2</i></p> <p>Analysing qualitative data</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Discuss the links between research objectives, data gathering and analysis in qualitative research 3. Select and/or evaluate an approach to analysing qualitative data in a given research context 4. Develop an analysis plan and/or an analysis framework for a given research project 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The links between research design, data gathering and analysis in qualitative research • The role of note taking, recording and transcribing • Deductive, inductive and iterative approaches to analysis • Developing an analysis plan and an analysis framework • Key stages in the analysis process <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ getting to know the data ○ getting to grips with what is going on ○ making links, looking for relationships ○ pulling together the findings ○ verifying the findings • Technology in qualitative data analysis.
<p><i>Topic 3</i></p> <p>Analysing quantitative data</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. Discuss the links between research objectives, data gathering and analysis in quantitative research 7. Describe the process of preparing quantitative data for analysis 8. Develop a data analysis specification for a given scenario 9. Select and/or evaluate the suitability of a range of statistics and/or statistical tests for a given research context 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The link between data collection, data processing and analysis • Key stages in the quantitative data processing, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ editing, coding and data input ○ cleaning the dataset (including dealing with non-response and missing values) ○ specifying the output from a dataset • Doing univariate analysis (frequencies, proportions, percentages, summary and descriptive statistics – measures of central tendency: mean, mode, median; measures of dispersion: range, variance, standard deviation) • Doing bivariate analysis (cross tabulations, filtering, weighting the data) • Hypothesis testing and inferential statistics (including confidence intervals and significance testing). • The roles of technology in the data analysis process

ELEMENT 8: REPORTING RESEARCH FINDINGS

Element 8	Learning outcomes	Indicative content
<p><i>Topic 1</i></p> <p>Ensuring appropriate reporting on research findings</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Discuss the links between research findings and the problem being researched within a given research context 2. Develop a plan for evaluating the usefulness of research findings to the client or end user 3. Select and/or evaluate an approach to the development of a written research report for a given research context 4. Select and/or evaluate an approach to the presentation of findings for a given research context 5. Apply practical understanding of the MRS Code of Conduct and relevant legislation to the reporting and/or presentation of research findings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Looking at research findings from the research user/client's perspective, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ the links between the business problem, the research objectives and the research findings ○ identifying key findings in relation to the business problem and the research problem ○ identifying actionable recommendations • How to provide usable 'deliverables' at the end of a project, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ designing and delivering a presentation of key findings which adds value for the end user/client ○ planning and writing a research report which adds value for the end user/client • Ethical issues, including MRS Code of Conduct requirements, in reporting research findings