



Advanced Certificate in Market & Social Research Practice

Assessment Specifications & Guidelines

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 Assessment Specifications & Guidelines
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MRS
15 Northburgh Street
London EC1V 0JR

Telephone: +44 (0)20 7566 1805
Fax: +44 (0)20 7490 0608
Email: profdevelopment@mrs.org.uk
Website: www.mrs.org.uk

Company Limited by guarantee. Registered in England No 518686. Registered office as above.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Candidates are required to complete 2 assessed components. These are:

- an internally assessed integrated assignment. This component is externally moderated.
- an externally-marked written examination (2hours 30 minutes).

1.1 Pass requirements

Examination

Candidates are given an overall band grade (Distinction, Merit, Pass, Fail). The overall grade is an aggregate of grades allocated over the three questions attempted in the exam. In order to achieve a Pass overall candidates will normally need to achieve a minimum of a Pass in each question. If one answer is awarded a Fail grade, candidates will normally be expected to achieve a Merit band or above in one of the remaining two questions in order to pass.

Integrated Assignment (IA)

Candidates are given a band grade (Distinction, Merit, Pass, Fail) for the IA.

Overall Result

No overall grade is awarded for the MRS Advanced Certificate. The Results Notification and Certificate give the level of achievement in each component.

Fail/Referred Candidates

A candidate who has failed to meet the pass criteria for both components of assessment is described as Fail.

Candidates who fail to achieve the **Pass** criteria in one component only will have their grade for that component **Referred**. They will retain the grade achieved for the remaining component. In these circumstances, candidates need only re-sit/re-submit the component in which they were referred.

- In order to be considered for the award, Referred candidates must retake the component in which they were not successful.
- In order to be considered for the award, Fail candidates must retake both components of assessment.
- Candidates may take each of the two components of assessment (Examination and Integrated Assignment) three times within a three-year registration period. Candidates who are unsuccessful on the third attempt must wait until the end of their initial three-year registration period before re-registering for assessment.
- Candidates who have been successful in one component but who have been unsuccessful three times in the second component are required to retake both components of assessment in any subsequent registration period.

2. INTEGRATED ASSIGNMENT: SPECIFICATIONS & ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

The aim of the Integrated Assignment is to enable candidates to demonstrate the extent to which they have developed a range of market and/or social research skills. To this end, they 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 Integrated Assignment requires candidates to demonstrate their 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

2.1 Assignment Specifications

Format

The Integrated Assignment can take the form of:

- a research brief and research proposal
- or
- a written critical evaluation of a research project completed by the candidate(s)

All assignments should 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.

Since preparing and/or developing a brief is part of the assessed Assignment process we suggest that those Centres who set a brief encourage candidates to re-work it and/or to develop it further. To this end it may be helpful to refer to the set brief as a 'research scenario' rather than as a brief.

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.

Centres may select the format which is the most suitable for their candidates. Centres are responsible for ensuring candidates receive written guidance on completing the assignment which both matches the chosen format and meet the detailed content specifications (below).

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.
- Sections within the assignment should be clearly indicated with headings.
- 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)

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
Within this task, candidates should:	
<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

2.2 Assessment Criteria for the Brief & Proposal format

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 	

2.3 Assessment Criteria for the Critical Evaluation format

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 evaluation of 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. evaluating the research objectives identified for the project c. evaluating the suitability of the research design selected for the project d. providing a clear rationale for their evaluation 	
<p>3. demonstrate their practical understanding of research practice:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. providing an evaluation of the sampling undertaken in the project b. providing an evaluation of the techniques and resources used for gathering data during the project c. providing an evaluation of the approach taken to the analysis of data in the project d. providing a clear rationale for their evaluation 	
<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 met or was likely to meet the client's objectives b. evaluating the approach taken to the reporting and/or presentation of findings c. evaluating the extent to which the research project was carried out within the constraints of time and cost and human resource d. providing a clear rationale for their evaluation 	

Guidance on the general assessment criteria for each grade can be found in the following Integrated Assignment Level Descriptors.

2.4 Integrated Assignment: Level Descriptors

	Pass	Merit	Distinction	Fail
Structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The structure of the assignment is appropriate to the chosen task format The organisation of information is appropriate to the chosen task format The language of the assignment is appropriate to a task written for a professional context <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The assignment respects the word limit 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The structure and organisation of information put strain on the reader The language of the assignment puts considerable strain on the reader The assignment is significantly in excess of the word limit
Content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The assignment meets most of the relevant assessment criteria. The candidate demonstrates an adequate overall awareness of the links between the various research processes described. The candidate can provide an appropriate rationale for most of the choices which s/he makes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The assignment meets all of the relevant assessment criteria. The candidate demonstrates a clear awareness of the links between various research processes described. The candidate can provide clear and appropriate justification for the choices they make. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The assignment meets or exceeds all of the relevant assessment criteria. The candidate demonstrates a high level of awareness of the links between the various research processes described. The candidate provides clear and appropriate justification for the choices they make and, where appropriate, can evaluate those choices. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The assignment fails to meet a significant number of the relevant assessment criteria. The candidate fails to demonstrate an awareness of the links between the research processes described. The candidate cannot identify key areas of strength and weakness in their work.

3. EXAMINATION SPECIFICATIONS & GUIDELINES

The aim of the examination is to enable candidates to demonstrate the extent to which they can apply the knowledge and skills developed while studying for the qualification to a range of market and/or social research scenarios and tasks.

The Advanced Certificate syllabus focuses on all stages of the research process, from problem identification to reporting research results. The examination requires candidates to demonstrate their ability to meet learning outcomes at different stages in the research process. Within each examination paper, a minimum of 80% of the learning outcomes within the syllabus will be tested.

3.1 Mode of assessment

Candidates are required to complete one examination which is set and marked externally.

3.2 Format of the examination

The 2^{1/2}-hour (150 minutes) examination is provided twice per year:

2009 – 2 Assessment Rounds in February & June

2010 onwards – 2 Assessment Rounds in January & June

Dates are available from the MRS website.

The examination comprises two sections:

- Section 1: Compulsory Section (one question in three parts)
- Section 2: Option Section (candidates must complete two out of six questions)

3.3 Section 1: Compulsory Question

This section contains a short case study with 3 associated questions, all of which the candidate must answer. The aim of this type of question is to test the candidate's ability to apply their knowledge of market research to a concrete situation and to offer clear and convincing solutions.

Section 1 questions normally follow the following format.

- A short case study (around 150 – 200 words), usually containing the following types of information:
 - Background information & secondary data;
 - Specification of the client's needs or problem;
 - Definition of the task for the researcher.
- There are three questions associated with the case study. Candidates must answer all three. The normal format for the questions is as follows:
 - One question requiring candidates to demonstrate their understanding of research methodology, make informed methodological choices and justify those choices.
 - One question requiring candidates to analyse an aspect of the market research process.
 - One question requiring candidates to apply their knowledge to an aspect of the market research process to produce an MR 'item'.

3.4 Section 2: Option Questions

This section contains 6 essay titles. Candidates select **two** out of six.

The questions are 'traditional' essay titles and are drawn from across the syllabus. The questions normally ask candidates to demonstrate:

- their knowledge of the given topic (e.g. through a descriptive element in the question);
- their understanding of the given topic (e.g. through analysis or evaluation);
- their ability to relate their knowledge and understanding to the practical application of market research principles.

3.5 Assessment weighting

All three questions which candidates must answer are equally weighted in their contribution towards the final result. Where questions are subdivided into 2 or 3 tasks, the weighting for each task within the question will be clearly indicated.

3.6 Assessment grading

Answers will be awarded a band grade (Distinction, Merit, Pass or Fail). In order to pass the examination, candidates will normally be required to achieve a minimum of a Pass grade in all three questions. Candidates who are awarded a Fail grade in one question will normally be expected to achieve a Merit grade or above in one of the remaining two questions to pass.

The work of candidates who achieve a Pass grade in two questions but who fail the third will automatically be selected for additional scrutiny.

Guidance on the general assessment criteria for each grade can be found in the following Examination Level Descriptors.

3.7 Examination: Level Descriptors

The document should be read alongside the **Examiner Answer Guide** for each examination question. The answer guide provides guidance on the core information required by each question.

	Fail	Pass	Merit	Distinction
Task achievement	<p>The answer:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> fails to recognise and/or address the key issues raised by the question demonstrates a significant lack of awareness or understanding of key issues 	<p>The answer:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> recognises and addresses the key issues raised by the question demonstrates a satisfactory level of awareness and understanding of the key issues 	<p>The answer:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> recognises and addresses the key issues raised by the question demonstrates a good level of awareness and understanding of the key issues 	<p>The answer:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> recognises and addresses the key issues raised by the question demonstrates an excellent level of awareness and understanding of the key issues
Content	<p>The answer:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> fails to covers many of the core information points identified in the answer guide fails to provide adequate rationale, where appropriate, for the points made 	<p>The answer:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> covers many of the core information points identified in the answer guide provides adequate rationale, where appropriate, for the points made provides some appropriate examples to illustrate points made 	<p>The answer:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> covers most of the core information points identified in the answer guide provides convincing rationale, where appropriate, for the points made provides a range of appropriate examples to illustrate points made demonstrates a good level of knowledge and/or understanding in either the range or depth of the points made 	<p>The answer:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> covers the core information points identified in the answer guide and may exceed these points provides fully convincing rationale, where appropriate, for the points made makes good use of examples to illustrate points made demonstrates a high level of knowledge and/or understanding in the range and depth of the points made
Structure & language	<p>The answer:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> is written in language which is inaccurate or inappropriate to the topic. puts inappropriate strain on the reader. 	<p>At PASS level and above, the answer:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> is written in language that is generally accurate, easy to read and appropriate to the topic. is generally clearly structured. puts little or no strain on the reader. 		