Advanced Certificate in Market & Social Research Practice

EXAMINATION ANSWER GUIDE

27th June 2018
10.00am – 12.30pm

Instructions given to Candidates

- Time allowed 2 hours 30 minutes
- Candidates must answer questions A, B, & C in Section 1
- Candidates must answer <u>TWO</u> questions from the SIX in Section 2
- All answers must be written in your Examination Answer booklet

Important Note: The requirement is for candidates to complete questions A, B & C in Section 1 and two questions from six in Section 2, failure to do this by either selecting more or less questions than the requirement may result in the paper being marked as non-compliant. Recommended times are detailed in each section to assist candidates in completing all the questions in the time available.

Instructions for Examiners

The following Answer Guide is not intended to provide a comprehensive guide to all possible points in response to exam questions.

Examiners should give credit for any points not included in the Answer Guides but which are credible responses to the question asked.

Examiners should note that the aim of many of the questions is to test the candidate's ability to apply knowledge to given contexts. However, candidates may fail to make full reference to the context in some cases. In these cases, examiners are required to assess the extent to which the information given meets the needs of the context. The following guidance has been produced for examiners:

- Credit should be given for information which is relevant to the question, even if it does not make overt reference to the context
- Some credit should be given for information which has some relevance to the context but which needs to be more focused to be fully effective
- Credit should <u>not</u> be given for information which is not relevant to the context

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MRS Advanced Certificate Examination Answer Guide
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Section 1: Compulsory question   (Recommended time: 50 minutes)

This section tests problem identification and problem solving using a number of skills. The section accounts for one-third of the total marks.

Read the following case study and answer ALL 3 questions below.

Orinoco is a major online retailer specialising in electrical household goods (e.g. washing machines, televisions, toasters). The company has become famous for its low prices and for finding ways of keeping its operating costs to a minimum. *Orinoco* has always sold its products exclusively via its website, where visitors must register (by supplying their name, address, and email address) to access special offers, such as its 'buy one, get one half price' offers.

In the past two years, *Orinoco* has seen a significant decrease in its market share and in its profits. Fewer people are visiting the company's website and those who do visit often leave without registering or making a purchase. There has also been a sharp decline in repeat custom and in the number of customers choosing the special offers. The senior management team feels that the market for online retail may be changing, and that *Orinoco's* business model may need to change if the company is to regain its profitability.

The senior managers have asked the company's own research team to carry out market research to inform discussions about the future direction of the company. They are keen to find out if and how the market is changing, why customers are no longer choosing *Orinoco* in the way they once did, and how the company might win back customers and repeat business.

Question A

The research team believes that a programme of desk research is a good place to start for two reasons: it will help build a sound understanding of the issues; and it will help define the objectives for primary research. They know there are useful secondary data to be found internally, in *Orinoco's* records, as well as externally. Outline the types of internal and external information that would be helpful, and describe where they might find that information.

(Weighting: one-third of total)

Candidates are expected to identify a range of sources of both internal and external secondary data which could be used in this project. At pass level, candidates should identify a minimum of three sources (two internal and one external OR one internal and two external) and provide a description of the type of information which they might gain from that source. Credit should be given for examples showing how this information might influence or might be used in the project.

Sources and types may include some or all of the following:

Internal
- *Historic sales figures*
- *Website analytics*
- *Advertising and PR spend data (i.e. £ spent promoting the company)*
- *Customer satisfaction reports*
- *Correspondence from customers and other stakeholders*
- *Previous research reports on the company and its market*
- *Competitor intelligence reports*
- *History of changes made to pricing structures and product offers*
- *User experience data reports*

External
- *Industry sector publications*
- *Annual reports published by competitors*
- *Competitor websites and social media presence*
- *Market Research Report Publishers reports on relevant market sectors (e.g. Mintel)*
- *Other sources such as syndicated projects*
- *Coverage in the press/media on activities of competitor companies*

Question B

The senior management team have asked for valid and reliable quantitative information about the attitudes to the company of current/ recent, former and prospective customers, and if their purchasing habits have changed in recent years.

Design a sampling plan to show how each group will be represented appropriately in the sample. The plan should outline:

- the sampling approach you have chosen for each group
- the sample sources or sampling frames you intend to use
- any ethical issues you need to take into account when drawing the sample for each group.

Give reasons for the suggestions you make.

(Weighting: one-third of total)

This question requires candidates to devise an ethically-robust sampling plan for three groups in the population of interest: current, former and prospective customers. Clear rationale is needed for the suggestions at each stage. Stronger answers may address the sampling of each group individually, identifying where ethical issues might need to be taken into account at each stage. Weaker answers may provide a 'blanket' solution, and may not take into account the differences between the three groups.

Current/ Recent Customers:	
Approach	*Candidates may suggest either quota or random sample here, using the customer database for their sample frame. If quotas, stronger answers may identify sub-groups (e.g. by age/ buying patterns etc)*
Sample source / frame	*The sample frame will be the online database of current customers.*
Ethical issues	*Need to ensure that no opt-outs for research purposes exist for contact with the customers in the sample, and that the data is up-to-date / has been cleaned.*
Former Customers:	
Approach	*Quota or random sample again could be used, using the database for the sample frame. Stronger answers may recognize the sensitivities which might exist in recontacting previous customers.*
Sample source / frame	*Sample could be drawn from the database. Also the potential to use any correspondence which has been received to identify any key groups of former customers.*
Ethical issues	*Issues with age of data and recontact especially sensitive here. Need to make sure that any data used is not beyond the date which it should be kept, and that there have been no withdrawals of permission to contact for research purposes.*
Prospective Customers:	
Approach	*It is likely that quota sample will be suggested here, as there is no sample frame for 'prospective' customers.*
Sample source / frame	*Possible to identify a range of sources: people who have registered but not purchased; people who are visiting the company's social media pages; inserting an invitation to*

	participate in a pop-up on the website to catch those who browse but don't register.
Ethical issues	*Precautions in place to ensure that participants are who they say they are – and, in particular, that they are adult participants. If using social media, ensuring that contact conforms to MRS guidelines on online research – e.g. ensuring informed consent, no 'lurking' etc.*

Question C

One of the junior executives in the research team has been tasked with creating an online self-completion questionnaire which will collect information from recent customers. Below is an extract from a section of the first draft, starting at Question 5. How could the questions in this section be improved? Give reasons for the suggestions you make.

(Weighting: one-third of total)

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5. How often do you visit the Orinoco website?
    a) Regularly (once a week)
    b) Often (once a month)
    c) Occasionally (once every two to three months)
    d) Not often (less than once every two to three months)

6. If you have made a purchase from Orinoco using the website what would you say was the best thing about the experience?
    a) Easy to find what I wanted
    b) Convenient
    c) Value for money
    d) Good related special offers

7. Do you agree or disagree with the following statements about Orinoco?
    a) It offers good value for money   Yes/No
    b) It offers a good range of products   Yes/No
    c) It's seen as a good retailer   Yes/No
    d) The special offers are a good idea   Yes/No

Candidates are required to identify how the questions in this extract could be improved. Stronger answers are likely to identify a good range of issues, and provide justification for the changes they suggest. Weaker answers are likely to identify a much more restricted range, and justification may be missing.

The weaknesses identified may include some or all of the following:

Question 5
- *There may be no regularity to visits to the website. Also reliant on memory over a long period. Best to ask about number of visits 'in the past six months'*
- *Time periods are too wide, if someone visits 2-3 times per month, what do they respond?*

Question 6
- *Question wording long and potentially confusing*
- *How many of these options can the customer choose? Need for instructions*
- *Not sure what information is actually wanted here. Is it an overall impression or do we want to gather opinions on all of these options? A Likert scale would yield more – and probably more accurate – information*
- *'If you have bought'… unnecessary as routing on online questionnaire will eliminate the 'never' group*
- *The question is asking about a single experience, but if customers have purchased items more than once which occasion are they being asked about? Could ask about the most recent experience*

- *May be none of these options. Need to add an 'other: please specify' option*

Question 7

- *Response format does not match question – we don't know what yes/no refers to as 'agree or disagree' are asked in the question*
- *Unlikely for responses to be yes/no, more likely to have grades of agreement. Again, a Likert scale will offer better responses*
- *No 'don't know' option for those who have no opinion*
- *Repetitive wording - use of 'good' to describe everything - means there is very little meaning /value in the options*
- *Placing of question problematic, following as it does from Q6. Would have expected a question about what could be improved to follow on from 'what was the best thing?'*

Section 2: Optional Questions   (Recommended time: 100 minutes)

This section accounts for two-thirds of the total marks.

Answer any TWO questions from the SIX in this section. Give a full answer to each of the questions you choose.

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Question 1

Recent news stories about companies' misuse of personal data is starting to make some small businesses nervous about using their customers' data for research purposes.

Your research agency specialises in research projects for small businesses, and the local Chamber of Commerce has asked you to speak at an event for small businesses. They would like you to do a presentation on 'Using Customer Data Safely in Research'.

a) Describe at least three steps a small business should take before they allow the researcher access to customer data and explain why each step is important.

(Weighting: one-half of total)

Candidates are asked to demonstrate their understanding of data protection as it applies to the use of client databases and other customer records. At pass level, candidates need to identify three steps the client should take and provide some rationale for each step. Stronger answers may provide a wider range of steps or provide greater depth of rationale. Weaker answers may simply provide a short list (e.g. get informed consent) but with no evidence that they fully understand what this means in practice.

Some of the steps include:
- *Discuss and agree with the research team what data is actually needed (review the research objectives and the sampling plan to see what is needed in order to conduct the project and contact customers)*
- *Agree the role of data controller and data processor for the purposes of the research (to be included in the contract)*
- *Check that data is clean and records are up to date*
- *Remove any records where customers have opted out of being contacted by the company for research purposes*
- *Prepare the records in a format that contains only the required data*
- *Inform customers that research has been commissioned, and that they may be contacted (although this is not a legal requirement, this would be good practice)*
- *Give customer an easy way to exclude themselves from the research (such as a Freephone telephone number)*
- *Provide a point of contact for more information about the research*

b) Describe at least three steps a researcher should take to ensure that the customers' rights regarding their data are upheld during the research process. Explain why each step is important.

(Weighting: one-half of total)

This question looks at the researcher's responsibility relating to the protection of participant data. At pass level, candidates are expected to identify three steps they should take and provide some rationale for each step. Stronger answers may refer directly to the MRS Code of Conduct or Data Protection legislation, and may provide strong explanation for the steps they suggest. Weaker answers may provide only generic suggestions with limited description and/or no explanation of their importance.

Some steps include:
- *Explaining clearly the aims of the research, how their data will be captured, used and reported, and their right to exclude themselves from the research before asking for consent to interview*
- *Providing clearly-written information about the above in the introduction to questionnaires*
- *Ensuring that permission to recontact (if registered) is gained at the initial interview stage*
- *Ensuring safe, confidential storage of personal data*
- *Reporting findings anonymously*
- *Destroying data in line with agreed timelines*
- *Allowing participants to withdraw from the research at any time during and after data collection*
- *Ensuring that all assurances, such as anonymity or confidentiality, are honoured*
- *Clearly identifying who is undertaking the research*
- *Ensuring that permission is gained for any storing of the research data with other parties*

Question 2

A chain of coffee shops has recently invested in staff training to help staff increase sales of items such as biscuits and cakes when customers place their order for drinks. However, three months after the training programme, the sales have not increased significantly. The Marketing Director thinks that this is due to staff not applying their training when working with customers. The Marketing Director has commissioned your company to carry out mystery shopping research to find out why sales are not increasing as expected.

a) Identify the strengths and limitations of mystery shopping research in identifying why sales have not increased. Give examples for the points you identify.

(Weighting: one-half of total)

At pass level, candidates are expected to provide at least one strength and one limitation of mystery shopping to help the company identify if staff lack of 'upselling' is at the heart of the company's failure to increase sales. Stronger answers are likely to give consideration to issues that might not be uncovered by mystery shopping, and to provide clear rationale for their points. Weaker answers may focus on generic strengths and limitations of mystery shopping without giving enough consideration to the context.

Strengths might include:
- *Can provide clear evidence if training is being applied*
- *Can ensure that the shopper's interaction with staff is constructed to identify other issues which might prevent upselling (e.g. shopper could ask additional questions about the goods; ask for additional services etc)*
- *Shopper might identify if/how the staff are adapting their skills to different customers*

Limitations might include:
- *'Hawthorne' effect if staff know there is mystery shopping going on – will this drive a change in behaviour?*
- *Limited usefulness in uncovering issues which might not be down to staff behaviour, e.g. price of goods; location of coffee shops; space within the shop to eat etc.*
- *How many need to be in the sample to uncover if the problems are due to training? This is a large chain so would probably involve quite a large sample*

b) Outline the steps you would take before the research starts to ensure that this mystery shopping research is carried out in an ethical and professional manner. Give reasons for the steps you suggest.

(Weighting: one-half of total)

Candidates are expected to demonstrate that they know how the MRS Code applies to mystery shopping research, and how to ensure that the field force is appropriately supported and briefed. Stronger answers are likely to demonstrate a clear understanding of areas of the Code relating specifically to mystery shopping, and how to brief the field force so that the data gathered is reliable and valid. Weaker answers may fail to recognise specific issues relating to mystery shopping, and may fail to recognise issues relating to the briefing of the field force in contexts such as this.

Before the research begins

The Code of Conduct requires the researcher to:
- *Agree the reporting requirements with the employer (i.e. is it at the level of the individual staff member, store level, etc?)*
- *Ensure that the employer has informed staff about:*
  - *the period during which mystery shopping will be taking place*
  - *the purpose and scope of the mystery shopping*
  - *the level to which reporting will be completed*
  - *how the results will be used (e.g. will results affect an individual's terms and conditions?)*
- *Agree if the mystery shopping activities are to be recorded and if so to ensure that employees are aware that recorded mystery shopping may take place*

The researcher also needs to:
- *Brief the mystery shoppers to ensure they understand the aim of the research, the data collection tool, and what is/is not appropriate behaviour within the scope of the research*
- *Ensure that mystery shoppers understand the implications of undertaking the mystery shopping exercise, particularly if their personal details might be stored by staff in the areas where they are shopping (e.g. if they use a storecard)*
- *Ensure that the client understands how the field force will be briefed and monitored*
- *Ensure any recordings from the mystery shopping are only used for the purposes which staff have been informed of e.g. research*

Question 3

Eastern General is a large hospital employing more than 1,200 people. Following news reports of low morale among healthcare staff across the country, the governing Board of the hospital has asked the management team to run a staff satisfaction survey of *Eastern General* staff. The Board wants to know how satisfaction rates compare with those at national level, and which groups of staff are the most and least satisfied. They also want to know what should be done to improve satisfaction. To address these aims, an online questionnaire has been sent to all staff. It includes questions about the participants' age, gender, department, professional role and length of service. It also contains questions about their satisfaction with different issues related to their work, and their views on a range of suggestions for improvements to working conditions.

Staff satisfaction is a very sensitive issue and the management team wants to be confident that the results are a reliable reflection of the views of the staff as a whole. They also want to be as specific as possible about the staff groups who are the most and least satisfied.

You are a member of the research team responsible for gathering and analysing the data.

a) Describe the steps you could take before and during the data collection to make sure that the data provides the information that the management team needs. Give reasons for your suggestions.

(Weighting: one-half of total)

This question requires candidates to identify some of the steps they can take to ensure the relevance and quality of data being collected. At pass level, candidates are expected to identify at least one step they could take before data collection starts, and one during the data collection, each supported by a clear rationale. Stronger answers are likely to provide a wider range of suggestions and/or provide greater depth of rationale. Weaker answers may simply list ideas with no supporting rationale. They may also fail to identify steps at one or other of the before/during stages.

Steps could include:
Before:
- *Check that the questions in the questionnaire cover all the required areas appropriately*
- *Source any previously used questionnaires for the purpose of comparison*
- *Check the sampling plan to ensure that:*
  - *the population of interest is analysed appropriately and that sub-groups have been identified*
  - *the target sample size takes into account the relative sizes of the sub-groups that you need to investigate*
- *Promote the survey in advance, to motivate participation, to highlight confidentiality, aim to improve things, make sure target groups are of sufficient size, etc.*
- *Review the research objectives with the client to ensure they are accurate/clear and agreed*
- *Pilot the survey*

During:
- *Monitor returns to see if any groups are not meeting the required response rate*
- *Send out reminders to encourage participation*
- *Target reminders to groups which are in danger of being under-represented in the results*

b) The survey closed last week and 40% of staff participated. The data has now been cleaned and is ready for analysis.

Identify at least three techniques you could use in the analysis of the survey data so that the results provide the information that the management team needs. Give reasons for your suggestions.

(Weighting: one half of total)

This question asks candidates to demonstrate that they can select the most appropriate analysis techniques to meet the client's needs. At pass level, candidates are expected to identify three appropriate techniques and to provide some rationale for their choice. Stronger answers may identify more or more complex techniques such as various multivariate tests, and provide clear rationale for their choices. Weaker answers may fail to identify even basic techniques, or may simply list them without providing evidence of understanding why they might be used.

Some basic techniques that could be identified include:
- *Weighting to address any under-representation of groups in the sample*
- *Confidence testing*
- *Creating a range of cross tabs*
- *Average scores by sub-group for satisfaction questions (testing of these scores for significant differences i.e. t-tests, ANOVA)*
- *Presentation of most popular / least popular suggestions for improvement*

Question 4

A major business supplies company occupies a large office block in the city centre. The office is near transport links, which is convenient for staff, and also near to the offices of many of the company's clients. Now, however, rising city-centre rents mean that the company Directors are considering a move to an out-of-town business park. However, they are worried that such a move could lead to the loss of experienced staff and valued clients.

The Directors have asked for research to help them understand how employees and clients might be affected by the move. You are a member of the in-house research team tasked with carrying out the research project.

a) One of your research colleagues thinks that the project should begin with a phase of qualitative research to help identify some issues which might need to be explored in a larger study. She suggests that this qualitative research could be carried out with two small focus groups, one of employees and one of clients. Describe the strengths and limitations of this approach for this situation.

(Weighting: one-half of total)

Candidates are expected to demonstrate a practical understanding of the appropriateness of this approach to this particular situation. At pass level, a minimum of three points should be identified. This could be one strength and two limitations, or vice versa.

Stronger answers may identify that there are different strengths and/or limitations according to the group (i.e. employees or clients) being considered. Weaker answers are likely to provide more generic strengths/limitations without taking into consideration the potential sensitivities of the context.

Strengths may include some or all of the following:
- *Could help to uncover a range of views and attitudes to inform development of wider research Would help identify some key challenges and allow options to be developed prior to wider research*
- *Could help identify potential differences between employees and clients – possibly to inform different approaches to follow up research*
- *Could help with the design of follow-up work (e.g. study design, method choice, questionnaire design, question wording, areas to cover, response formats and codes)*

Limitations may include some or all of the following:
With employees -
- *There may be pressure to conform with the ideas of more dominant participants in the group*
- *Some may be inhibited by presence of in-house facilitators*
- *Some may be reluctant to be negative as they might be seen differently as a result*
With clients -
- *May be sensitive as this is a company dealing with sensitive financial business – may not wish to discuss any issues in front of others*
- *The move is a potentially sensitive issue – if discussed with clients at too early a stage it could serve to create unease/panic*
With both groups -
- *Practical point of view – difficulty in getting them together at one time. Individual interviews would allow researchers to work round the work routines of the participants.*
- *Questions themselves may create unease within participants unless handled well*

b) The research team has decided to conduct this initial qualitative research via a short series of individual interviews with five members of staff and five longstanding clients. The aim of these interviews is to identify attitudes and opinions about the current office location and the proposed new location.

Create two outline topic guides, one to support interviews with employees and one to support interviews with clients. Each outline topic guide should identify the main topic areas you need to explore with participants in the respective groups, and include some key questions you can use to gather information in each area. Provide a clear rationale for the topic areas you choose to include in your outline.

(Weighting: one-half of total)

Candidates should identify a minimum of 3 topic areas with a <u>rationale</u> for choosing each. Credit should be given for range of awareness. We are not expecting a full discussion guide, simply a framework. Topic areas may include some of the following:

Employees	Clients
Introduction: *to establish the facts about how the participant gets to the current location; to ease the participant into the interview* • *How long worked in this office?* • *How usually get to and from work?* • *How far travelled in distance and time?* • *Mode of transport? Usual or unusual journey?*	***Introduction:*** *to ease participant into the interview; to gain an understanding of the participant's own context* • *Tell me about your business: what do you do; where are your offices?*
	Current relationship with supplies company • *How long have you been a client?* • *How do you usually contact the supplies company?* • *How often do you visit the supplies company office?*
Discussion: *to explore attitudes to current location and potential impact of move* • *Pros and cons of this location for your work?* • *What are the key benefits/disadvantages of the office itself?* • *Would a change to the new location make significant changes to your work day?* • *Probe possible changes* • *Probe each for advantages, disadvantages* • *What difficulties would colleagues have (3rd person probing)* • *How could difficulties be overcome?*	***Discussion:*** *to explore attitudes to current location and potential impact of move* • *What made you choose the supply company? How important was office location in that choice?* • *What are the key benefits/disadvantages of the current supplies company office?* • *Would a move of the supplies company office to the new location make significant changes to your own business?* • *Probe possible changes* • *Probe each for advantages, disadvantages* • *What difficulties would other businesses have (3rd person probing)?* • *How could difficulties be overcome?*
Closure: *to round off interview and to allow any additional views to emerge* *Summary of advantages and disadvantages of new location, and how disadvantages could be overcome.*	

Question 5

The value of a primary research project is usually measured in terms of its usefulness to the client.

a) Identify *at least* three factors which might limit the usefulness of a research project to the client who commissioned it and explain how each factor might affect the usefulness of the research.

(Weighting: one half of total)

This question requires candidates to look at projects from the client's perspective and to identify key areas of importance to the client. Candidates should identify at least three factors to be based firmly in the Pass band.

Areas which they might identify include:
Flaws in objective setting -
- *Lack of understanding of business needs/ business objectives and the decisions to be made based on the research*
- *Lack of clarity in the definition of the problem to be researched – perhaps trying to cover too many bases rather than focusing on key issues*
- *Lack of precision or agreement around the research objectives – the client may not be fully aware of how the business objective has been translated into research objectives*
- *Inappropriate research approach (perhaps based on inappropriate objectives)*

Flaws in design -
- *Flaws in the sample – not reaching the target population*
- *Poorly structured questionnaire (or other data collection instruments) creating confusion for the participants and, potentially, resulting in poor data*
- *Poorly worded questions resulting in data that can be misinterpreted and/or has less value*
- *Data processing errors, resulting in flawed data analysis*
- *Inappropriate choice of analysis tools, based on unclear understanding of objectives*
- *Key issues not addressed in the primary data collection*

Flaws in analysis and reporting -
- *Little depth to findings / limited exploration of the data*
- *Presentation and /or report poorly constructed and delivered*
- *Inappropriate language for the client audience (e.g. incorrectly assuming they have previous research experience / or that they have a full understanding of the background to the research)*
- *Not agreeing contents and tone of outputs with key client contact.*
- *Limited / no conclusions*
- *Results not presented in the context of the topic/client issues – or with no sensitivity to the impact they, or recommendations etc, could have*
- *Lack of understanding or guidance about the implications of the information gathered to the business problem – the client may not be able to see the links*
- *Lack of guidance on potential ways forward – client may need guidance on how to implement recommendations*

b) You are a member of a research team who has carried out a piece of research for a new client. As the team leader, your role is to write the final report. Outline the steps you would take to maximise the usefulness of the report to the client.

(Weighting: one half of total)

Candidates are expected to provide evidence that they understand not only how to produce the 'finished product' (i.e. write a report) but also how to ensure that it is of maximum benefit to the client. Weaker candidates are likely to provide a list of steps for report writing, without considering the usefulness of each step to the client. Stronger candidates are likely to look for ways to add value (particularly as this is a new client).

Answers might be expected to address the areas of limitation identified in part a), and credit should be given for making links between the two parts of the question.

Possible steps could include:
- *Go back to original brief and proposal to find out what was originally asked, and what was promised in terms of deliverables*
- *Make sure that you are fully aware of the business objectives and the decisions which need to be made as a result of the research*
- *Check that you understand the relevance of each part of the research project to the problem and research objectives, and that you have identified any limitations*
- *Check that you understand how the client accesses, stores and uses data (e.g. central database, summary reports, visual presentations, how much detail?) Generally, how well does the researcher understand the culture of the client organisation?*
- *Do you know the limits of the research – i.e. what you can say for sure based on this data, and what the information doesn't tell you*
- *Do a 'common-sense' check – are the recommendations you suggest practicable?*
- *Establish who the audience is going to be*
- *Establish preferred format/s*
- *Is an executive summary required?*
- *Will recommendations be welcomed?*
- *Discuss content as well as the above with client in advance*
- *Review the contents as a draft before sending as final version – preferably with a colleague and then with key client contact*
- *Establish what actions will be taken once report received*
- *Contact the client and run through what you are proposing to cover and to check if there is anything relevant you have not considered*

Question 6

Benbarra is an area of natural beauty in the mountains of Scotland. The area is popular with hikers and mountain bikers. Recently, however, more tourists have started to visit in minibuses, creating long traffic jams in the hills. The regional authority which is responsible for the local environment including tourism is worried that the increase in traffic will spoil the wild appeal of the area, and result in a decline in the numbers cycling and hiking. One possible solution to these problems is to introduce an electric cycle hire scheme to encourage people out of minibuses. Although the scheme would be expensive to establish, the regional authority proposes to cover the costs with the revenue raised through the hire fees. However, in a time of cuts to budgets, there is considerable opposition to the introduction of a scheme which is seen to be expensive. Before going ahead, the regional authority needs to have confidence that the electric cycle-hire scheme would address the needs that have been identified.

a) Describe the potential benefits to the regional authority of carrying out market research. Illustrate your answer with examples.

(Weighting: one-half of total)

This question requires candidates to identify and discuss the usefulness of market research to the type of business problem described. In order to pass, candidates should identify at least two potential benefits, each with convincing illustration.

Stronger answers may identify a wider range of benefits relevant to this particular business problem. Weaker answers are likely to identify more generic benefits of research, or may fail to make clear connections with the research problem under discussion.

Possible benefits of market research:
- *To gauge the acceptability of the scheme to the population - both local and visitors*
- *To identify possible challenges/problems which have not been anticipated*
- *To gauge if access to cycles would encourage people to change their transport options*
- *To inform processes such as price setting (what would be acceptable?); placing of hire facilities; design of promotional messages and product design (e.g. child seats) etc.*
- *To provide 'timely' information on a topic – particularly if primary research is being conducted*
- *To test if original hypothesis is valid (i.e. providing electric cycle hire scheme to ease traffic congestion) – introducing the scheme may have the opposite effect if it appeals only to people who currently hike or walk by increasing the number of people on the roads thereby slowing the traffic down as a result*

b) The regional authority has decided to commission a research programme, and has asked you to devise a brief for circulation to research agencies. Outline the information which should be included in the brief to ensure that the research agencies understand what is required in the project. Give reasons for the suggestions you make.

(Weighting: one-half of total)

This section of the question requires candidates to demonstrate understanding of the importance of the brief in guiding the research project. In order to pass, candidates need to demonstrate that they are aware of the information which a brief should contain and how it should be structured, along with some justification for their suggestions. Weaker answers are likely to provide a list of the information to be included, with little or limited rationale. Stronger answers are likely to provide greater depth of rationale linked to the context. Very strong answers may also identify possible options for information to be included, with rationale for how those options might be selected.

The answer should touch on the following issues:
- *Background information: what does the agency need to know about the proposed scheme and reasons for its possible introduction?*
- *Business problem: what does the agency need to know about the business problem facing the regional authority?*
- *Research problem: what are the objectives for the research agency*
- *Suggested methodology: are there any recommendations for how the problem should be approached?*
- *Timing*
- *Budget (budget at their discretion – many clients choose not to divulge it at this early stage).*
- *Any reporting requirements?*
- *Contact names*
- *How results will be used?*
- *Details for core agency team members (including their skills and relevant experience for handling the project*