

MRS Advanced Certificate in Market & Social Research Practice

Preparing for the Exam: Section 1 - Answer Guide & Sample Answers

This answer guide was developed to provide support for examiners in marking the **Section 1 Question**. It is not intended as a 'model answer' or a completely exhaustive list of all points which could be made. Instead, it summarises a range of points which candidates may be expected to include in answers.

The key to an effective answer is to provide information which is both relevant and clearly justified. If, when writing your practice answer, you have made points which are not included in this summary, don't worry. Examiners are briefed and trained to take into consideration all relevant points in their marking.

Similarly, don't worry if you have not included all the points mentioned in the answer guide. Again, the examiners will be looking for a range of points in which your rationale is clear. Credit will be given for all relevant points which you have made.

Section 1: Compulsory question	(Recommended time: 50 minutes)
---------------------------------------	---------------------------------------

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

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

A major supermarket chain operating in several markets across the European Union is considering ways to reduce the environmental impact of its business practices. One suggestion has been to stop the provision of plastic carrier bags in all of its stores. Instead, shoppers would be encouraged to buy a branded reusable bag made of cotton. However, the Chairman of the company is concerned that such a change in policy might have a negative impact on profit and sales.

Prior to making a decision, the supermarket needs to assess how the suggested change is perceived by customers and by key groups of opinion formers, such as consumer groups, environmental bodies, journalists and politicians. It has commissioned quantitative research to be carried out in the 4 countries which represent the largest or growing markets for the company (UK, Poland, Greece and Italy).

Your research agency, which has offices in each of the target countries, has won the contract for the project. The agency proposes to conduct a telephone survey using CATI (computer-assisted telephone interviewing), with each office taking responsibility for carrying out the fieldwork in its own country. The results will then be fed back to the agency's central office in London for analysis. The supermarket has given a deadline of 3 months for the completion and reporting of the research.

- a) Describe the benefits of conducting the fieldwork separately in each of the countries concerned as is proposed here, versus the benefits of conducting all the telephone interviews centrally from the UK.

(Weighting: one-third of total)

- b) Describe the main issues you would need to consider for the sampling and recruitment processes. Illustrate your answer with examples.

(Weighting: one-third of total)

- c) The supermarket chain is keen to get maximum benefit from the project and wants to make sure that reporting takes on the most appropriate form to achieve this. They are keen to use the results both locally, to influence shoppers in the individual countries, and globally, to reflect their international brand. Outline the approaches you could offer for reporting the results, giving reasons for the choices you have made.

(Weighting: one-third of total)

SECTION 1 - ANSWER GUIDE

Each of the three tasks in this section is equally weighted.

- a) Describe the benefits of conducting the fieldwork separately in each of the countries concerned as is proposed here, versus the benefits of conducting all the telephone interviews centrally from the UK.

(Weighting: one-third of total)

This question requires candidates to identify and discuss some key issues involved in designing international research. At pass level, candidates are expected to identify at least two benefits for locally conducted interviews and at least two benefits for UK-based interviewing. Weaker answers may provide lists of benefits with little in the way of commentary. Stronger answers are likely to provide a wider range of ideas, and/or greater depth of consideration of the issues they have identified.

The benefits of conducting fieldwork locally might include the following:

- Easier for local offices to draw appropriate samples for their country
- Greater depth of sensitivity to local issues than might be shown by a centralised approach
- Greater access to interviewers with the appropriate language skills
- Ensuring that appropriate translation of the questionnaire is undertaken

A more advanced answer may also include:

- 'Ownership' of the research seen to be resting within each country, rather than being UK-centric
- Possibility of collaboration with locally-based client, leading potentially to further projects at a local level

The benefits to central interviewing might include:

- Cost – if budget is tight, central telephone interviewing can be greatly cheaper than in-country work
- Control – a centrally co-ordinated survey can mean a tighter project team; fewer other fieldwork partners need to be briefed, the project can be more tightly managed
- Time -telephone fieldwork from a central telephone centre normally can be completed in a shorter space of time than if different agencies are involved
- Costs and time associated with the client having to travel to the interviewer briefing (if they want to attend) and agency to travel for the reporting will be lower
- Standardisation/consistency – briefing and managing one centralised team will limit the possibility for information to be interpreted/construed differently
- Timeliness of information – if centralised, project updates and communications are likely to be more immediate
- Problems may be identified, communicated, discussed and resolved more quickly, if centralised
- All centralised team members are likely to be English speakers, limiting the need for constant interpretation (and potential mis-interpretation).

Examiners should give credit for answers which provide well-justified ideas which are not included in the lists above.

- b) Describe the main issues you would need to consider for the sampling and recruitment processes. Illustrate your answer with examples.

(Weighting: one-third of total)

At pass level, candidates are expected to identify a minimum of two issues to be considered when sampling and recruiting for this particular project. Stronger answers may demonstrate clear understanding of a range of different issues, stemming from the international nature of the research and the range of groups to be involved. Weaker answers may fail to provide a range of issues, or to provide convincing illustration of their ideas.

Considerations might include some/all of the following:

- *Representativeness of the sample – in terms of Country (Poland, Greece etc) and in terms of type of Opinion Former (consumer groups, environmental groups etc)*
- *Identifying sample sources for customers, in each country*
- *What is the definition of a customer? Will this vary by country?*
- *Will different sampling/recruitment methods or solutions be needed in each country?*
- *Where to obtain the sample for opinion formers – can the client provide lists (in which case, how – electronically, hard copy, what “fields” – e.g. by type, name, country, how up-to-date/reliable the lists are, etc). Does the range of this type of sample vary by country?*
- *If the client cannot supply all or any of the sample, where might you find it in each country?*
 - *Yellow pages or equivalents*
 - *EU or environmental associations Directories*
 - *Internet searches*
 - *Others?*

Stronger answers may also include:

- *Ability to find and/or get through to the (busy) respondent (e.g. how to identify appropriate spokespeople, or navigate PAs etc)*
- *Respondents unavailable (e.g. travelling, busy with other issues)*
- *A focus on both opinion former and customer audiences*

- c) The supermarket chain is keen to get maximum benefit from the project and wants to make sure that reporting takes on the most appropriate form to achieve this. They are keen to use the results both locally, to influence shoppers in the individual countries, and globally, to reflect their international brand. Outline the approaches you could offer for reporting the results, giving reasons for the choices you have made.

(Weighting: one-third of total)

Credit should be given for the range of ideas included and the rationale provided for each point made. Poorer candidates will tend to focus on one aspect of reporting e.g. Delivery Mechanism, whereas better candidates will think of more aspects.

Delivery mechanism

- *Straightforward computer data tables (note that these alone would not be very good at getting maximum benefit out of the study, but for individual countries to work on they could be useful.)*
- *Executive Summary.*
- *Debrief charts - delivered as they are or delivered in person at a presentation or workshop.*
- *An overall presentation bringing together results from across the research study, followed by presentations/workshops tailored to, and possibly held, in each country.*
- *Number of presentations/workshops – would they need to be in different countries/languages?*
- *Stronger candidates may suggest priorities for items which should be delivered in multilingual versions. Candidates should note that this will have an impact on cost.*
- *Video-conference or something like Webex could be useful to facilitate a presentation/workshop if cost of travelling an issue.*
- *Written report.*
- *Press release for distribution or posting on company website....*

Content/cosmetics

- *Summary table of all questions. This could take the form of an annotated questionnaire (with totals written on it for quick scanning of "top lines"), but with a CATI survey, a questionnaire will not necessarily exist, and with 4 countries in the study you would want all results on same page not on different questionnaires.*
- *Tables would include coded answers for open ended questions (if any included on the questionnaire).*
- *Verbatim answers in raw format (uncoded) could add depth.*
- *Recorded answers (provided permission obtained in advance) could be particularly strong in helping to put across key points.*
- *Action Plan with key recommendations (just going a bit further than the Executive Summary).*

Underlying structure of data delivery

- *Ways in which results may be cross-tabulated – e.g. would the main focus be on comparisons across countries, or across topic areas within a country? Stronger candidates may indicate the benefits to both for different audiences.*

Constraints

- *Stronger answers might identify that the MRS Code of Conduct places parameters on how research results can be used in marketing. The company may need guidance if they are to use the results to inform their marketing strategies.*

Section 1

Sample answer 1: This answer was awarded a mark in the FAIL band.

Question 1a

Conducting the fieldwork separately in each of the countries would be better than conducting all the telephone interviews centrally from the UK.

Basing the interviews centrally would mean increased costs to call internationally whereas it would only be charged at a local or national rate from each of the four countries, bringing down call charges drastically. Spending less money on call costs mean the extra money can be spent elsewhere and aid in improving, possibly, the quality of research.

It is also better to base the interviews in the chosen countries due to the language barrier. If all interviews were conducted from the UK, it would mean having to recruit and train interviewers in Polish, Greek and Italian. This would not only prove to be costly but also very time consuming keeping in mind the deadline.

For these reasons it would be best to conduct the telephone interviews in each of the different countries where there is staff already available and call charges are lower. It will save the research agency time and money, which could be used elsewhere.

Question 1b

Sampling and recruitment process would prove to be a little more difficult than normal.

The issues that would need to be considered are if the respondents buy from, or have any association with the supermarket. To overcome this, if the supermarket has a loyalty scheme, they can use the customers that are signed up to it as possible respondents. This will ensure that calls are not being made to unnecessary people.

Sample would need to be from all demographic regions of the country to provide a representative result. It would also have to take into account different ages, gender and even possibly social class to get results that are a valid representation of the country.

The researcher must also find out from the supermarket how many people they wish to recruit to take part in the project as this is not mentioned in the case study and is vital to proceed with the project.

Question 1c

The agency could offer a number of ways in which to report the findings of the project.

We would have representative in each of the countries at hand for any enquiries throughout the whole three months. They would be fully trained research executives and have a vast amount of knowledge of the country that they operate in and sufficient knowledge of market in other EU countries. This would mean that they would be able to identify any anomalies that occur within the task and the data.

Once the results of the project are ready, the account director would have been sent cross tabulations of the data that he/she would then pass onto the client. They would also prepare a presentation to explain the main factors that they found from the research. This will enable the supermarket to highlight the main points and perceptions by customers and opinion formers which they then can act upon.

If they find any common views that occur quite frequently, they can use these points to reflect their international brand.

Section 1

Sample answer 2: This answer was awarded a mark in the **PASS band.**

Question 1a

Plan

Cost → Inflation rates, Fieldwork in separate countries not central, cultural issues, management fees

Time → Briefings, gathering updates, time differences, rules out expense of native speaking interviewers

Control → All on same wavelength, communication, dealing with issue, translation

Answer

The benefits of conducting fieldwork in each of the relevant countries fall into three main categories of cost, time and control. The first benefit is that when conducting fieldwork in the relevant countries they can take into account any cultural issues or problems related to their home country. For example in some locations there maybe different knowledge about environment, types of customers, rules about interviewing children, what stimulus material, subject matter or how you can and cannot conduct a project, or how to do it most efficiently and effectively. They have the local knowledge required to ensure the project runs smoothly. You also need to take into consideration MRS rules of conduct in relation to personal data, particularly if you are supplying them sample database. You need to check and ensure they are a bona fide company. If you were conducting the fieldwork centrally you would not have all this cultural knowledge. However it would overcome any problems regarding the sample database.

Conducting the survey in the individual countries can be expensive because you have the management and setup fees for each individual company. Also you are reliant on inflation rates, which can go up and down. So you need to take this into consideration when providing a quotation/proposal.

However you do not need to be concerned with the expense of recruiting native speakers if the survey was conducted centrally.

The disadvantages of conducting the surveys in each country is you loose the benefit of central control. It is more challenging to ensure that all researchers understand the aims of the research in the same way (to rule out any bias).

Another disadvantage if not conducting the survey centrally is the increased time involved in the survey. More time will be required to gather accurate updates (particularly with time differences). It is also more costly because the end client would have to travel to each country to conduct briefings and listen in on interviews (unless this was completely remotely).

Question 1b

The main issues to consider with sampling is ensuring that the data collected is reliable and valid. If you were to conduct a census, where every supermarket chain across the European Union then you can be sure that the data is reliable and reflects

the answers of the population. However this is not always possible due to cost, time and sample availability. Therefore a sample should be drawn to reflect the overall target population, with a margin of error, so data can be reliable and valid.

For the purpose of this study there are two sampling methods, non-probability and probability sampling methods.

Assuming there is a suitable sampling frame that is accurate and up to date a probability method can be adopted. There are various probability methods such as random, systematic and stratified. The best method would be a stratified approach to ensure that the correct proportion of each of the supermarkets are involved in the sample. If a purely random approach was taken it is likely that the smaller supermarket chains will not be represented accurately, and therefore will not give you reliable and valid evidence to meet the research objectives. In order to carry out this approach effectively details of the sampling frame need to be detailed to show location and size of the supermarket. Then analysing your research objectives a decision can be taken to put those supermarkets into different strata to ensure everyone is represented.

Finally when actually conducting the interviews it is likely that an in-store methodology could be used. This type of sampling approach required here is a non-probability convenience method as the sample frame of customers is not complete. You could try a telephone approach using the database of sample from loyalty cards, but this does not take into account any individuals who do not have a loyalty card. Therefore would add a level of error in the random sampling method and make the final data less reliable or valid. The approach would entirely depend upon the target population and objectives.

The non-probability convenience sampling problems are ensuring the data is valid of the total population in order to do this, interviewing should be conducted at varied times of day, week and also at various locations within the stores. Also quota controls can be set to ensure the individuals you interview reflect the target population, if this information is available. However caution should be applied as the more levels of sampling methods you add, the greater the sample error.

When deciding the appropriate sample size need to consider the confidence intervals the data will give.

When moving through the sampling plan you need to define the target population, identify a sampling frame, decide the sampling technique, decide the sample size, then finally produce sampling instructions.

Question 1c

When carrying out the reporting it is important to review the client brief. Have a full understanding of the business problem, research problem and research objectives. It is also important to discuss with client exactly what form the report should take to meet their needs and expectations. It is also important to consider how the results will be used and organise and present the report accordingly.

To ensure the results provided in the tabulations has the most accurate information it would be advisable for each individual country to work from the same code frame. Coding should be carried out in the local area, so any translations required can be

carried at code frame level. When actually providing the report I would recommend that analysis is carried out at top level (all results combined) and then individual country level. This can be the full report. Then a summary report could be carried out for each of the individual countries in their own language, or alternatively there could be an executive summary for each individual country depending on how you want to display the results.

The report should consist of a title, contents page, executive summary, methodological approach (details of method, sampling), research findings and then conclusions. The report should also be followed up with the client.

It might also be an idea to display the results in bar charts in the local stores to show the individuals. Or alternatively carry out some qualitative focus groups to discuss results and take the research further.

Section 1

Sample answer 3: This answer was awarded a mark in the MERIT band.

Question 1a

The client is a major supermarket chain operating in several markets across the European Union, therefore there are several benefits to the fieldwork being carried out separately in each of the countries. The main advantage is that with the offices in each of the target countries we have an understanding of the local culture and are able to conduct the telephone survey in the local language. This also helps the interviewer to build a rapport with the respondent more quickly. Another key benefit is that the local office will be able to brief the interviewers centrally and face to face, enabling any queries they have to be answered more quickly. Furthermore the local office is able to monitor the interviews to ensure that they are being carried out to a high and professional standard. Finally it may also be possible for a key person(s) from the supermarket chain within each country to be able to listen in on the interview, however it should be noted that the respondent should be aware of this in line with the Market Research Society Code of Conduct.

Some of the challenges to conducting the fieldwork separately within each country is that the interviewers may not all necessarily be briefed in the same way, as well as differences in the way that the responses are recorded. This could make it difficult to compare findings globally. This issue could be addressed by conducting all fieldwork in the UK, as all interviewers will have been briefed in the same way, to ensure that the quality of the findings are standardised. Another benefit to conducting the fieldwork from the UK is that any problems with the questionnaire will be flagged up sooner and can be taken into consideration for the remaining interviews. For example is the length of the questionnaire appropriate? Also is the language used appropriate for that particular country or target group? This will save both time and money in the long term.

Whether being conducted from each country or from the UK, clear and unambiguous briefing and interviewer instructions will enable us to uncover the attitudes and motivations of these key groups in relation to the use of reusable cotton bags, and their perceptions towards the store.

Question 1b

As the fieldwork is being conducted across several countries, it is important to design a sample that is not only reflective of the local customers and other key groups, but that at the same time allows us to make comparisons globally.

When considering the sampling, we need to consider who the target population is, for example do we want to interview regular customers only or also include potential customers. The second factor to take into consideration is the actual sample size. As we are conducting a quantitative telephone survey, the sample needs to be large enough for us to provide statistically significant findings to the client. After deciding the sample size, we will choose the appropriate sampling technique. Although there may be a lot of variability in the nature of the target population, in which case a random sample would be suitable, a quota sample would enable us to use information

provided by the supermarket and other secondary research to define the key characteristics that the sample should include. For example previous research may show that women tend to do the household food shopping more than men, or that the younger generation is more concerned about the impact of plastic bags on the environment than older generations. These findings can then be taken into account when putting together the sample.

After putting together a sample, we would construct clear and unambiguous recruitment instructions to ensure that the correct people within the target population are being recruited. There are a number of recruitment techniques that can be used. The 'lurk and grab' method would be most apt to recruit actual customers. This would involve the recruiter spending time at a place where there is a high incidence of the target population and in this case it would be at the actual supermarket. For the other key groups of opinion formers the 'snowball' method may be the best approach, where the recruiter would ask respondents if they know of other people who fit this target group that would be willing to participate. The risk of this approach however is that all respondents are likely to have overly similar characteristics or attitudes. I would also recommend that we ask respondents at the beginning of the interview if they would be happy for us to contact them to take part in further research at a later time. This may be especially useful with hard to find or expensive groups i.e. politicians.

Again, as the research is being conducted in a number of countries, the recruitment would need to take into account any cultural differences. It is also important that all respondents are informed of what the research will involve, as well as why it is being conducted, as stated in the Market Research Society Code of Conduct.

Question 1c

The reporting of this project should enable the client to apply the findings on both a local level, to influence shoppers, as well as on a global level to maintain international brand. I think it is important to report the results in both a written report as well as a face to face presentation within each country.

A written report will provide detailed findings about what these key audiences think about the suggested change and the impact it could potentially have. It will provide a clear and structured account of how the research was conducted and with who to ensure the client gains a broader picture.

I also would suggest that a face to face presentation is carried out to the key teams within each country to provide them with more local-specific information that they will find more relevant, to their culture.

Both methods should include interesting and relevant quotes from respondents to reflect specific points. However, no quotes (or findings!) should identify specifically with any respondent. It is important the reporting maintains respondent anonymity throughout, unless permission has been sought by the respondent.

The client should be adequately informed that if they are to publish the report (or even parts of the report), it would need to be checked by agency to make sure that it is being accurately presented. Inaccurate or misrepresentative reporting can cause harm to both the supermarket chain, as an international company, as well as the reputation of the research and the research industry.