MRS Advanced Certificate in Market & Social Research Practice

Preparing for the Exam: Section 2 Q2- Answer Guide & Sample Answers

This answer guide was developed to provide support for examiners in marking the **Section 2 Question 2**. 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.

In Section 2 there is a recommended time of 100 minutes and answers account for two-thirds of the total marks.

Candidates are required to answer any TWO questions from the six, giving a full answer to each of the questions you choose.

Section 2

QUESTION 2: ANSWER GUIDE

2. You work for T@3, a company which owns a small chain of teashops in London. The T@3 chain specialises in traditional afternoon tea, with a large menu of different teas and cream cakes. The company now wants to expand its business to one more city in the UK. It is considering three major tourist destinations – Edinburgh, Oxford and Brighton. However, it first needs to commission some market research to identify the most appropriate place to open its next teashop.

a) Outline the types of information which should be included in the brief in order to provide a basis for appropriate research. Give reasons for the suggestions you make.

(Weighting: one-half of total)

Candidates are expected to provide a minimum of three sections which should be included in the brief, and to provide convincing rationale for their inclusion. The sections should include some or all of the following:

- *Background: Giving both the company context, and information about its current range of products.*
- *A clear definition of the business issue or problem*
- *Project rationale: Information about why this project and the research are necessary, in order to help the potential researchers identify priorities.*
- *Objectives: Clarity of objectives may help the researchers to focus on the key issues to be investigated, thereby help improve the quality of the research.*
- *Suggestions for possible methods: If the company has a clear idea of the type of information it wants and how to get it, this will provide clear guidance for research provider.*
- *Sample: client may give details or have ideas on the audiences to be covered, sample sources, views on quotas and number of interviews.*
- *Reporting of findings: Having a clear idea of what type of information you want, and how it will be used, will help the proposal writer to offer an appropriate means of disseminating information*
- *Timing*
- *Budget*
- *Communication requirements: How often would you expect to be updated on the project?*

b) The marketing manager of T@3 has decided that money could be saved if the desk research for this project is carried out in-house. Outline a programme of secondary research which the company could undertake to find out about the potential market for its brand in each city. Give reasons for the suggestions you make.

(Weighting: one-half of total)

At pass level, candidates are expected to identify a minimum of two sources for secondary research, and to provide justification for their choices. Weaker answers will talk about using the internet in general terms without specifying the sort of information that might by sought.

Possible approaches:

- *Search to find any key competitors in each city – using restaurant guides, city listings etc. Compare their offering with T@3's.*
- *Search for any small business reports from each city – are there statistics on how small businesses are faring in each place?*
- *Visit each city to gather information about competitors and possible locations for siting T@3*
- *Search for press coverage of similar types of offerings – newspaper, magazine and journal websites*
- *If available, review current sales across existing T@3 shops in London to compare profiles of customers*
- *Search local Council planning sites to see if any barriers exist to opening new restaurants.*

Section 2 – Q2
Sample answer 1: This sample answer was awarded a mark in the Merit band.

Question 2a

In briefing a research/agency on this task, the client needs to provide a number of key indicators.

Firstly, any brief should review the current situation of the company/brand (specifically this might include turnover, clientele, brand values). This appraisal should also include two further critical details; firstly, what (if any) data sources inform this information. For instance, whether the researcher will have access to any custom database or 'point-of-sales' figures.

Secondly, the client should attempt to fully explain any criteria that 'must' be used in the evaluation work of the researcher. At a basic level, this may mean stating whether the new branch should 'replicate' the condition/position of current stores. At a detailed level, it may also mean specifying maximum ceilings on expenditure or minimum required footfalls for the new store.

As regards the delivery of the project; the brief should try to explicate any likely time-frame for action, as well as the costs that can be given to the project. This will necessarily inform the researcher's capacity to select and appropriate methodology for the project (and what, if any, bias might be required between primary and secondary techniques).

However, as importantly, the above issues will allow the researcher to create insight that can be related back to the initial business proposition. By using the brief to explain in detail the 'selection conditions' and significance of the decision the researcher can ensure time is not wasted on invalid options and that the research makes effective use of the existing knowledge of the business.

As regards the final project deliverables, any brief should also try to frame the format in which findings are to be presented – and the audience who will receive them.

For instance, if this project is to be delivered to a mix of sales, marketing staff – the brief might acknowledge a preference for and 'interactive' feedback session and not a more formal report.

In stipulating any of the above info, it should be noted that the brief – as the reporting – need not be a one-off/fixed event. Indeed, as here, a more deliberative session may allow the client (and the researcher) to arrive at a clearer definition of the problem.

Question 2b

In this instance a programme of secondary research would be a positive first-step in collating key data on each potential opportunity. This research could take a number of key forms, specifically:

a) Research into the General Business landscape of each destination:

Initial work could feasibly make use of general data from Chambers of Commerce in each location. This would provide some basic (+ relatively standard/outputs regarding population composition, premises costs and town-centre footfalls. It would also throw-up any legislative points of difference between locations.

It should be noted that, although data would be current, it might suffer for its generality. It would also be key to acknowledge any likely bias in data from an interested/partial trade group.

b) Research into the specific Tourist market:

As above, it is feasible that Tourist Boards could be used to inform some data on likely exposure from this market. Again, the benefit in such data would be in its currency and the standardised measures used. However, it should be noted that there may be little secondary data on patterns of expenditure etc. which would be of interest here.

c) Research into 'Teashop/Eateries' market:

If at all possible, it would also be good to quantify the levels of brand competition in each locale. It should be noted that 'general' consumer reports (Mintel for example) may not give this sort of granularity.

It must therefore be seen that website searches etc. could only ever be partial and might be obscured by 'marketed' data.

Section 2 – Q2
Sample answer 2: This sample answer was awarded a mark in the DISTINCTION band.

Question 2a

In order to provide a basis for appropriate research, the following types of information should be included in the brief:

Company information
T@3 should give an overview of their company, so that the potential researcher can understand why the business objectives are relevant.

Background
T@3 should include a little information about the market in which they operate and perhaps why they feel they have been successful so far. Again this will help the potential researcher to understand why the research is needed.

Business objectives
T@3 should clearly state what they want to get out of the research. This not only allows the potential researcher to know what is required of them and the problem they need to address, but it is also a key consideration in the MRS Code of Conduct: All clients must be 'transparent' – they must clearly and honestly state why they want the research conducted.

Outputs
T@3 need to specify what they expect from the research, e.g. a report, a presentation etc. This will allow the potential researcher to assess the resources and time needed to produce these. Also, this may affect the choice of methodology e.g. if T@3 want statistical testing and statistically significant results, then the potential researcher know to choose a fairly large scale, quantitative methodology, for example.

Budget
T@3 should specify how much they can afford to spend on the research, in order that the potential researcher can choose a research programme within their means.

Timings
T@3 should give an idea of how long they are prepared to wait for the research findings e.g. do they need the final report within a certain time period. This is important to the potential researcher as it allows them to consider the most suitable methodology e.g. a postal survey may be ruled out if results are needed quite quickly.

Contact details
T@3 should give details of how the proposal should be submitted, who to, in what format and by what date. They may also specify a word count. These details ensure that all researchers tendering are on an equal footing.

Question 2b

Secondary research (or 'desk research') is the process of analysing data which is already within the public domain. So that is data which was collected for a purpose other than those currently specified as research objectives.

A T@3 secondary research programme should first of all seek to define the kind of information which is needed. For example this may include information on the tourist industries within Edinburgh, Brighton and Oxford, the profile of the cities in terms of local residents, overall economic and market situation etc.

Next, T@3 should try to gain a broad overview of the cities, for example by reading very generally about them e.g. in tourist books or on travel websites.

To delve more deeply, T@3 needs to identify and investigate potential sources of information. These may be internal sources e.g. T@3 may look over its start up sales figures for its current tea shops, to identify what kind of environment and market they had the greatest success in. Mostly however, T@3 should look to external sources. These could be official statistics e.g. government census details for the cities of Oxford, Brighton and Edinburgh, or un-official statistics e.g. those produced by the National Tourist Board. Some of these sources can be accessed online, however it may also be useful to identify other physical archives. It may be possible to order Market, Trade or Syndicated reports from various organisations or research companies. It could also be useful to review the local press for each of the cities in question, to get an idea of the area.

T@3 should ensure that they allocate staff available to them into looking at different aspects of the research problem. They can each then identify the key points of what they have found. It would be useful to collate these findings so that they can be analysed as a whole. T@3 should then try to produce a report summarising the key findings of the secondary research. This will allow them to identify areas for further action and to make recommendations for way forward.

The benefit to T@3 of conducting secondary research is that it tends to be quicker and cheaper than primary research. It is suitable for T@3 as it is only a small chain, with a small research budget – thus the lower cost is good. This lower cost also ties in with the fact that T@3 do not need to recruit a professional researcher – they can do it for themselves in-house.

T@3 must be careful however to always evaluate the sources from which they get information – they should assess why that research was conducted, who by, and when. This should allow them to account for any bias in the research (e.g. if the data was for marketing purposes it may have been portrayed a certain way) and should ensure results are accurate, valid and in date (relevant).