

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.

Question A (*Scenario: 210 words*)

CITY NESTS is a hotel company with twenty apartment-hotels in city centres across the country. Each hotel contains a range of accommodation from studios to 3-bedroom apartments. Clients book with CITY NESTS via the company website or other accommodation booking sites. Since its launch 15 years ago, the company has developed a diverse client base, including business travellers and individuals, families with children and groups of friends travelling for leisure.

Recently, however, CITY NESTS' senior management team has become concerned about increasing competition from private homeowners who advertise apartments for short-term let. The company is now looking at ways of retaining its existing clients and attracting new customers. The senior management team is willing to invest in renovating its facilities but is unsure what types of improvements would bring most benefit to the company and for how long.

The senior management team has decided that they need more information before taking the next steps. They want to make sure they understand the market in which the business now operates, and how people decide what type of accommodation to book. They have commissioned your research agency to conduct a market research project.

- a) To understand what people think of its competitors, CITY NESTS senior management team leader has asked your agency to prepare a report based on an analysis of its competitors' online reviews. Outline how you would approach this task, making use of AI tools where appropriate. Give reasons for the suggestions you make.

(Weighting: one-third of total)

Minimum requirements

To achieve a Pass in this task, answers should include a minimum of three stages or steps in the approach to the task (see below) with at least a basic rationale and mention the use of AI tool/s in at least one stage. Stronger answers may identify specific business issues and/or research objectives for the project, and/or identify issues with the approach, e.g. quality issues or risks with the data, other limitations of the project and any mitigations, and/or provide a detailed rationale for steps included or the overall approach they recommend. Weaker answers may provide a very generic plan, and little or no critical evaluation of the data or the approach.

Outline plan

NOTE: Where candidates indicate AI usage, their answer should mention that AI is not to be solely relied upon i.e., AI outputs should always be checked and validated by a human (i.e., Practitioner-in-the-Loop)

- *Define the scope and objectives of the report – e.g. consult the senior management team, discuss how the findings are to be used, outline the advantages and limitations of the approach, agree report format*
- *Could use AI to prepare an outline of the steps in the project*
- *Identify relevant competitors using information from the client and/or AI*
- *Search for relevant sources of data, using AI if necessary*
- *Review/evaluate the quality of the relevant data*
- *Determine any potential ethical, legal and or data protection issues that might arise*
- *Gather relevant data, using AI if needed*
- *Make sure to choose appropriate AI tools e.g., search-connected, reputable AI tools/technologies for searching/gathering data*
- *Clean relevant data, using AI tools where appropriate*
- *Sort and organise the data, using AI tools where appropriate*
- *Analyse the data, e.g. compare and contrast the findings from reviews of different competitors, using AI tools if appropriate*
- *Review and verify the analysis/findings Prepare the report, using AI tools to plan layout, to draft etc*
- *Check and refine the report*

b) Further secondary research has revealed the importance of the 50+ age group to CITY NESTS, and to its key competitors. The senior management team now wish to conduct research to understand the leisure and travel habits of this age group, and how they choose where to stay. The agency has identified three options:

- (i) A programme of secondary research using internal and external data;
- (ii) A programme of in-depth individual qualitative interviews;
- (iii) A quantitative survey.

Evaluate the strengths and limitations for this project of each of the suggested options.

Which option or combination of options would you recommend to the senior management team? Give reasons for your recommendation.

(Weighting: one-third of total)

Minimum requirements:

To achieve a Pass in this task, answers need to identify in each case a minimum of one strength and one limitation of the suggested option in relation to the research problem.

Candidates also need to choose the option(s) they recommend. Options should be supported by clear justification and must be appropriate to meet the needs of the project.

Weaker answers may identify options but fail to consider their suitability for the project. Stronger answers may identify a wider range of approaches with the answer closely tied to the research problem and the client's needs.

Method	Strengths	Limitations
Secondary research using internal and external data	• Can use CITY NESTS' existing booking, enquiry, customer profile and repeat-stay data to identify current patterns among 50+ customers. • External sources, such as tourism statistics, competitor information, published reports and review data, can provide wider market context and highlight trends in 50+ leisure travel. • Likely to be relatively quick and cost-effective and can help refine later primary research questions.	• Internal data may only describe existing or past customers and may not represent potential new 50+ customers or competitor users and may miss the new trends or patterns emerging among this group. • Available data may not fully explain motivations, attitudes, or decision-making in sufficient depth. • External data may be out of date, not specific to apartment-hotels/private rentals, or based on different definitions of the 50+ market. • There may be other quality issues with the internal and/or external data.
IDIs	• Suitable for exploring in detail how 50+ leisure travellers think, feel and make accommodation choices.	• Findings will be based on a relatively small sample and the client should understand that a qualitative research project like this one is not designed to be generalisable in a statistical

	• Can uncover and explore in depth the underlying motivations, concerns, service expectations and barriers that may not be obvious from secondary data. • Can gather information on the decision-making group and map out the decision-making process. • Flexible format allows the interviewer to explore and probe issues such as trust, comfort, accessibility, value, location and comparisons with private rentals.	way and so cannot be assumed to represent all 50+ leisure travellers. • May not provide a robust enough evidence base for the client's investment decisions. • More time-consuming and costly per participant than a survey or desk research. • Quality depends on recruitment, skilled interviewing and careful analysis and interpretation; responses may also be affected by recall or social desirability bias.
Quantitative survey	• Can measure usage, attitudes, behaviours and preferences across a relatively large sample of the 50+ target group. • Allows comparison between sub-groups, for example SEG and age bands within the 50+ group, travel frequency, type of trip, or previous use of apartment-hotels/private rentals. • Provides the quantitative evidence that can help the senior management team prioritise investment decisions.	• Less suitable for exploring complex motivations in depth unless informed by earlier qualitative or secondary research. • Quality of the data/results depends on quality of the questionnaire design, sample quality and administration of the survey. • May be hard to reach a representative sample of all 50+ travellers, particularly if using online methods only.

To pass, candidates must recommend one option or a combination of options and this recommendation should be supported by a clear justification that is appropriate to the needs of the project – i.e., to help the client understand the leisure and travel habits of this age group, and how they choose where to stay in order for the client to make informed decisions about investment in its facilities. NOTE: As before, if candidates indicate AI usage (e.g., to create an IDI guide, or to analyse some survey data), their answer should mention that AI is not to be solely relied upon i.e., AI outputs should always be checked and validated by a human (i.e., Practitioner-in-the-Loop)

For example, for a combined approach the recommendation might be:

Begin with secondary research to map the market and identify knowledge gaps, use IDIs to explore motivations and decision-making, then use a quantitative survey to measure and prioritise the findings. Justification for this might be that using only one method would leave gaps in the client's understanding and limit confidence in the investment decision making: secondary research may not explain motivations, IDIs are not conclusive, and a survey alone may miss the reasons behind choices.

- c) The senior management team now wants to commission a short survey among 18–49-year-olds. Your agency has suggested conducting the survey using a sample drawn from its non-probability opt-in panel. The senior management team is unsure about this sampling approach.

Devise an outline sampling plan for the survey. The plan should identify the population of interest and the quota controls to be included. Explain how the sample will be drawn from the panel and set out what steps you will take to ensure that the sample delivers valid and reliable data.

(Weighting: one-third of total)

Minimum requirements:

To achieve a Pass in this task, answers are expected to mention the key elements of the sampling plan – the population of interest, credible suggestions for quota groups and size of groups and why quotas are important – as well as noting how the sample will be achieved using this approach.

Defining the quotas

At pass level, answers are expected to identify at least three groups to be included as quotas in the survey. Stronger answers are likely to identify a more refined range of quotas and provide rationale for their inclusion. Weaker answers may identify only a limited range, providing only limited rationale for their inclusion.

Suggestions may include:

- Population of interest includes those who stay in apartment-hotels and private short term lets.
- Quotas may include:
 - Splits in the age groups, e.g. 18-24, 25-34, 35-44, 44-49
 - Types of traveler and reasons for travel, e.g. business, leisure – with further possible breakdowns, families travelling with/without children, people who book for a group
 - Size of group
 - Duration of stay
 - Those who have stayed with CITYNESTS
 - Those who have only used private short term lets.

Quota sizes

At pass level, answers are expected to identify that quota sizes will depend on the overall representation of the different groups within the population of interest, and that overall sample size should ensure that each group is adequately represented in the sample.

Weaker answers may give blanket numbers for sample size with little or no reference to the different groups within the sample. Stronger answers may provide information on how quotas including interlocking quotas may be used to achieve a better quality sample and may provide more detail about the calculation of sample size.

Achieving the sample

At pass level, answers are expected to mention the agency's panel and its key features e.g. how it is recruited, managed, monitored etc. and the issues related to this being a non-probability opt in panel.

Stronger answers may identify that incentives may be needed to encourage participation and identify the types of incentives which might be appropriate, that the panel may be a suitable way of contacting/surveying this age group etc.

Candidates may include the use of AI, e.g. for creating/determining groups for quotas and for quota sizes, for monitoring quality throughout the survey and sampling process. However, AI should always have practitioner oversight and expertise to ensure outputs are valid.