Advanced Certificate in Market and Social Research Practice Examination

June 14th 2006
10.00am –12.30pm

EXAMINATION ANSWER GUIDE

Instructions for Candidates

Time allowed 2 hrs 30 minutes

Answer ALL questions in Section 1
Answer TWO questions from Section 2

Section 1 accounts for one third of the final result.
Section 2 accounts for two thirds of the final result.

All answers must be written in your Examination Answer Booklet.

<u>Section 1</u>: 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.*

You belong to a long-established community association for people living in your neighbourhood. The annual membership fee is £20 per year. The main aim of the association is to ensure that local facilities are appropriate for the needs of the community. It is run by a committee of volunteers from the neighbourhood who organise a range of activities, including:

- meetings held once a month which members can attend
- a monthly newsletter, sent out by post to all members
- social events and activities throughout the year to raise funds for community projects. These are open to members and non-members.

Although the population in the neighbourhood has increased in the past two years, membership of the association has fallen in the same period from 586 to 272. The meetings and events are now poorly attended.

Your next-door neighbour is the chairperson of the association committee. She has asked for your advice in designing and conducting research to find out why membership and attendance have fallen, so that the association can take action to stop the decline and/or increase membership and attendance.

The association has limited funds and cannot employ a research agency. However, the Chairperson says that committee members would be happy to help with data collection. She assures you that the association is able to use its membership database to contact people for research purposes.

a) You believe that a programme of desk research to find out about other community organisations might be a good place to start. Outline the types of information that you think would be helpful to the association and describe the ways in which that information might be gathered.

(Weighting: one-third of total)

Candidates are expected to identify a range of sources of secondary data which could be used in this project. At pass level, candidates should identify a minimum of two sources 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 the current project.

Sources may include some or all of the following:

- *Web search for residents' associations: Some associations may have their own webisites. These could provide information on membership, events, how the association communicates with the members and other residents.*
- *Local council may have lists of associations. These could indicate if the associations have input in local developments.*
- *Local press may cover association events or carry ads. for events. Could provide ideas for fundraising.*
- *Local library or other meeting places may carry information about meetings or events*

b) The committee would like to find out more about the views and behaviour of both members and non-members living in the neighbourhood. One committee member has suggested running group discussions with each type of resident. Another believes that a telephone survey is a better approach. Describe the strengths and limitations of each approach in getting the sort of information the association needs.

(Weighting: one-third of total)

Candidates are expected to demonstrate a practical understanding of the appropriateness of each approach to this particular situation. At pass level, a minimum of one strength and one limitation should be identified for each approach.

Strengths and limitations may include some or all of the following:

	Groups	**Telephone survey**
Strengths	• *Can access a good range of views of why people are not involved* • *Discussion may actually encourage interest in association* • *Recruitment restricted to association catchment area – may be easy to target respondents* • *Can provide a range of in-depth incites* • *Interaction in group may generate a range of new ideas for the society*	• *Local phone book, accessed online, could provide a sample frame for non-members* • *Easier to administer if questionnaire is well designed* • *Possible to access a more varied range of ideas if a random sample of residents is contacted* • *Individuals not affected by the views of other respondents, as could be in the case with groups.* • *Easier to speak to people at a time which suits them* • *Requires less time of the respondents*
Limitations	• *May not be able to recruit respondents – who will want to give up time?* • *Those who do attend may not represent the range of opinion required* • *Need to identify appropriate place/time to meet – may not be able to include everyone* • *Need for an impartial, skilled moderator – who will this be?*	• *Difficult to contact residents with no landline (e.g. those with mobiles only)* • *There may be reticence to talk on the phone – need to build trust* • *Need to ensure that data is protected – who will brief the interviewers and ensure that the interviews are handled appropriately?*

c) The committee has decided to conduct six group discussions but would like guidance. Identify at least three issues which the committee should consider before the group discussions begin to ensure that the discussions meet the needs of the project. Give reasons for the suggestions you make.

(Weighting: one-third of total)

Candidates should identify a minimum of 3 issues with a rationale for choosing each, and provide a rationale for the inclusion of each. Credit should be given for range of awareness (e.g. for identifying issues related to different areas of set-up, as outlined below).

Issues may include some of the following:

- *What are the objectives for the groups: Have the committee identified the type of information they want and what it might be used for?*
- *Location & timing: finding times/place suitable for all who want to participate – ensuring accessibility for all in the community*
- *Incentives: If potential participation is low, should an incentive be given? If so, what?*
- *Drawing a sample: How can you ensure that the respondents are drawn from residents as a whole?*
- *Make up of groups: Should the groups contain a mix of respondent types (e.g. members and non-members) or not?*
- *How to ensure ethical conduct, e.g. making sure that respondents give informed consent for information to be used; clarity about how any recorded data will be used etc.*
- *Who moderates, and how is the information recorded? Need to identify how approach to data gathering is kept consistent.*

<u>Section 2</u>: Optional Questions **(Recommended time: 100 minutes)**

The answers in this section account for two-thirds of the total marks.

*Answer any **TWO** questions from the six listed below. Give a full answer to each of the questions you choose.*

1. A group of trainee researchers have joined your organisation. You have been asked to run a training session for them on sampling in quantitative research, and to provide a written guidance document for some trainees who cannot attend the session. Prepare a document which gives the trainees guidance on each of the areas below. Illustrate the points you make with practical examples.

a) Why we conduct research among samples

(Weighting: one-third of total)

Candidates are expected to give a clear and convincing rationale for the use of sampling for research projects. At pass level, candidates are expected to identify a minimum of two key reasons for using sampling, and provide a clear explanation of each. Stronger answers are likely to provide clearly-defined issues, illustrated with examples. Weaker answers may fail to define key terms (e.g. representative)

Key points might include some or all of the following:

- *Limited resources – population often too big, too diverse or too widely spread to collect data from each member of it; often too expensive to gather info from everyone*
- *Notion of representativeness – how can we ensure that a sample is representative of the population as a whole?*
- *Research projects are usually time-limited – gathering data from everyone may take too much time*
- *Ability to generalize from the sample to the population*
- *Large-scale sample or census does not necessarily produce more accurate data. It can lead to increased non-sampling error, which might lead to more inaccurate data than that collected from relatively small sample (with sampling error)*

b) The key characteristics of random (probability) sampling, and why this approach might be used.

(Weighting: one-third of total)

Answers should provide a clear definition of random sampling, with appropriate examples of times when it is an appropriate approach. At pass level, candidates should identify a minimum of two key features of random sampling and one convincing reasons for its use. Stronger answers may identify and discuss a range of different random sampling methods, with reasons given for their use.

Key features include:

- *all members of the population have an equal probability of being selected*
- *depends on knowing the extent of the population of interest and where they are – but no further information is needed*
- *selection of respondents depends on a mathematical formula*
- *in a random sample, the respondents cannot be replaced by others not chosen by the same method – you need to contact the person on your list*
- *variations allow respondents to be grouped or clustered for sampling purposes, thereby ensuring an appropriate spread across the population of interest*

Reasons for use:

- *when you need data which is highly representative of the spread of the population*
- *when you have little or no information about the make-up of the population (e.g. age; traits)*

c) The key characteristics of quota sampling, and why this approach might be used.

(Weighting: one-third of total)

Answers should provide a clear definition of quota sampling, with appropriate examples of times when it is an appropriate approach. At pass level, candidates should identify a minimum of two key features of quota sampling and two convincing reasons for its use. Stronger answers may provide clear examples to illustrate its use

Key features might include.

- *selects the sample based on known variables or characteristics present in the population, therefore depends on having extensive knowledge of these variables*
- *key variables include age; gender and socio-economic group*
- *sample consists of groups or quotas of the different types of respondents identified within the population.*
- *Quotas set by the researcher*
- *doesn't rely on the participation of respondents identified by the sampling method, unlike random sampling. Interviewers are free to select respondents as long as they fit the quota. However, this can lead to error.*

Reasons for use:

- *more cost-effective than random sampling as it doesn't depend on the willingness of pre-identified respondents to participate*
- *can provide information more quickly than random sampling because of flexibility described above*
- *suitable for projects which need clear information about the different segments in their market – random sampling cannot guarantee to provide this as members of different segments may be missed*
- *can access ?????????????*

2. Well-designed questionnaires should lead to data which are both valid and reliable.

a) Describe what is meant by (i) validity and (ii) reliability in the context of questionnaire design. Illustrate your answer with examples.

(Weighting: one-third of total)

Examiners should note that this section accounts for one-third of the total mark. In order to pass, candidates need to provide a generally accurate definition for each of the two concepts. Stronger candidates may describe different types of validity, and may provide a variety of clear, practical examples. Weaker answers may give generic definitions of the concepts with no reference to questionnaire design.

<u>Validity</u>

- *Refers to the ability of specific measures or questions to measure what they claim to measure.*
- *Three types of this 'measurement' validity:*
    - *<u>Construct validity</u> is about what the question is measuring. It has to do with how it was constructed. Why did we choose to build the question in that way? On what concept is it based?*
    - *<u>Content validity</u> is about the suitability of the question to measure the concept that it claims to measure. It is more subjective than construct validity.*
    - *<u>Criterion validity</u> is about how well a new question works in comparison to a well-established one, or how well a question works in relation to other questions that are considered meaningful measures of the characteristic or attitude being studied.*

<u>Reliability</u>

- *Refers to the consistency of research results. If research is repeated or done by different interviewers – will you get the same results?*
- *Perfect reliability relies on same conditions holding each time research repeated*

b) You have been commissioned to develop a questionnaire for a client. Outline the steps you would take to ensure that the questionnaire delivers valid and reliable data. Provide clear justification for each step you suggest.

(Weighting: two-thirds of total)

Candidates are expected to discuss how to ensure that questions and the questionnaire overall produce reliable and valid data. Strong answers may tie each step to issues of validity and reliability. Weaker answers may only discuss 'how to develop a questionnaire' without showing how each step enhances validity/reliability. In order to pass, answers must demonstrate some awareness of the links between steps and issues of validity/reliability.

Steps could include some or all of the following:

- *ensure that client information needs are being met and that all questions are relevant*
- *wording and structure of question need to be clear and unambiguous – its role and what it is testing needs to be clear. In particular, individual questions should not test more than one concept*
- *when trying to uncover attitudes, more than one question is required on the same attitude – this allows comparison across questions*
- *questions need to be ordered so that they do not lead the respondent to a particular conclusion*
- *instructions and routing should be clear. This helps ensure reliabilty in the administering of the questionnaire*
- *questionnaires should be piloted to ensure that they will deliver the data which are required*
- *for CATI/CAPI/Online surveys, run preliminary analysis on randomly generated data to test all questions have been answered.*

3. A furniture retailer is considering a self-completion survey of customers who receive its mail-order catalogue, to discover what they think of the range of products on offer. The company is unsure whether the survey should be conducted by post or online.

a) Outline the benefits and limitations of each approach which the company is considering for this research. Illustrate your answer with examples.

(Weighting: 50% of total)

Candidates are expected to outline a minimum of two benefits and one limitation to each approach for this project. Stronger answers are likely to provide a wider range of ideas, and provide clear examples related to the context. Weaker answers may simply list generic advantages and disadvantages of each, with little or no reference to the context and limited exemplification.

	Benefits	**Limitations**
Postal	• *already has a mailing list, so clear sample frame to work from* • *know that the customers expect mail from them so may be more willing to respond* • *easy to administer – no complex setting up beyond the design of the questionnaire, and could be inserted in a brochure or normal mailing*	• *postal surveys are notorious for low response rates – perhaps incentives are needed* • *how up-to-date is mailing list? customers may have moved away etc* • *as with all postal surveys, can take time. Problematic if information is needed about current range of products* • *costs could increase if pictures/photos are required* • *costs may be higher than first expected when printing/envelope stuffing/ costs of return envelope are taken into account* • *do not know who completed the questionnaire (same limitation applies to online. If answer identifies this as limitation of both, an additional limitation of either post or online is required to pass)*
Online	• *if there is an email newsletter for customers, a link could be included in that* • *quick return and analysis of results – can get info on current product range almost immediately* • *customers may want to contribute because it's easy* • *pics/photos of products can be shown* • *routeing through questionnaire is easy* • *can monitor fieldwork progress instantaneously*	• *may not have email contact for all customers – those contacted by mail may find it too much bother to go online to respond* • *depending on the customer profile, there may be limited numbers who have access to internet* • *more difficult to control sample – those who are contacted may forward the weblink to the survey to others. Very difficult to control who is responding.*

b) The company has decided to use an online survey. Outline the steps which they could take to maximise response rates. Give reasons for the suggestions you make.

(Weighting: 50% of total)

In order to pass, candidates are expected to identify a minimum of two steps which the researcher can take to maximise response to the survey and to provide a clear and relevant rationale. Credit should be given for a wider range of suggestions, particularly where these are related clearly to the context. Weaker answers may provide only generic suggestions with little or no justification for their inclusion.

Possible steps include:

- *advance warning to customers of survey, contained in one of the company's regular mailings or email newsletters*
- *clear and easily-followed links to the questionnaire – minimise time taken to get to it*
- *bright and attractive layout (with graphics?) to attract respondents*
- *easy-to-follow instructions and clear time frame for completion*
- *reassurances about 'how much is left to go' on screen – to prevent respondents abandoning the questionnaire*
- *email or postal reminders in advance of the closing date*
- *incentives for completion – prize draw for new furniture?*
- *allow respondents to save partially-completed questionnaires to complete later – again to prevent abandonment of the interview*

4. A major mobile phone company is interested in measuring the attitudes towards the mobile phone market among people aged over 50. However, the marketing director is unsure if quantitative research can provide a true measurement of the attitudes held by this group of consumers.

a) Identify and discuss the difficulties which researchers can face when trying to measure attitudes.

(Weighting: 50% of total)

Candidates are expected to demonstrate an understanding of a range of issues which affect the gathering of quantitative data on attitudes. In order to pass, candidates are expected to identify a minimum of two difficulties, each supported by a convincing discussion, or three difficulties with limited discussion. Stronger candidates are likely to provide a clear definition of 'attitude' and provide difficulties from across a range of areas. They may also reflect on issues of validity and reliability. Weaker candidates may demonstrate only vague awareness of what is meant by 'attitude' and identify a limited range of issues which need to be addressed.

Possible difficulties include:

- *Attitudes v. complex and multifaceted -can't be uncovered by a single question*
- *Attitudes are not necessarily stable – they may vary according to circumstances*
- *Difficult to identify what the range of possible attitudes are – normally requires qual research to generate an item bank of attitude statements*
- *Scales may not provide appropriate measure – can be difficult for respondents to interpret, e.g. issues of central tendency*

b) Describe the steps which the company's researchers could take to ensure that the planned quantitative study produces accurate and reliable data on the attitudes of the target group. Give reasons for the steps you suggest.

(Weighting: 50% of total)

Candidates are expected to identify a range of steps and provide justification for the inclusion of each. In order to pass, candidates are expected to identify a minimum of two steps with convincing rationale or three steps with more limited discussion. Stronger answers are likely to provide a range of steps in a logical sequence, identifying how each links with the next. Weaker answers may identify suggestions which are not organised sequentially, and with only limited recognition of their importance to the overall process.

Possible steps include:

- *Conduct an initial qual stage to generate a bank of possible items*
- *Organise items to identify which match/conflict with each other*
- *Ensure a balance of selecting enough statements to ensure validity/reliability, and limiting them so the questionnaire doesn't grow too long*
- *Select an appropriate response format for each item or set of items, and ensure that it gives an appropriate range of responses so that respondents can find a response which matches their own*
- *Pilot the questions to ensure that they provide the information and range of options required*

5) You are a market researcher working for a major charity. One of your colleagues in the marketing department is about to commission research for the first time. He has asked for your help in both preparing a brief to be sent out to research agencies and in assessing the resultant proposals. Outline the guidance you would give to your colleague to help him with the following tasks. Give reasons for the suggestions you make.

a) Devising a sound and comprehensive brief.

(Weighting: 50% of total)

Candidates are expected to identify the steps which the client who is commissioning the research needs to take in preparing the brief. In order to pass, candidates are expected to identify a minimum of three key steps, and provide a clear rationale for these steps. Stronger answers are likely to provide a range of steps, with rationales which demonstrate clear understanding of issues from the client's perspective. Weak answers may identify a limited range of steps, or may simply list the information expected in a brief, with no consideration of the action which the clientside researcher needs to take.

Possible steps include:

- *discuss with the stakeholders/decision-makers exactly what is needed – ensure you have a very clear understanding of the business problem and why they need the information*
- *find out as much as possible about the background to the problem to help define the research objectives*
- *find out if any relevant research has already been done by the organisation – does this provide information which can inform the problem?*
- *find out about the time and money available for research – this will dictate much of what can and can't be done*
- *identify the type of information which is needed – do the decision makers want qual or quant info?*
- *what is the make up of the population of interest?*
- *does an appropriate sample frame exist and/or can a sample be provided?*
- *what deliverables are needed?*
- *what qualiity assurance is required?*
- *is there time to meet with researchers before they submit a proposal to discuss needs in greater depth?*
- *who should the brief be sent to and what is the return date for the proposal(s)?*

b) Evaluating the proposals that are submitted in response to the brief.

(Weighting: 50% of total)

Candidates are expected to provide evidence that they understand the criteria which might be used to evaluate proposals, and why they are used. In order to pass, candidates should identify a minimum of three criteria and justification for their inclusion.

Criteria might include some or all of the following:

- *evidence that the researcher has understood the sector, the business context and the business problem*
- *evidence that the problem has been explored and that research objectives clearly address the problem to be solved*
- *the research design, the methods selected, the sampling approach and the approach to analysis all clearly link to the research objectives, with a clear rationale*
- *there is acknowledgement of any issues which may limit the possible scope of the research*

- *the proposed research has a viable time plan and is realistic about what can be done within the budget*
- *the proposal communicates clearly the plan proposed by the supplier*
- *the deliverables are appropriate for the intended audience*
- *there is evidence of 'added value' – regular communication and updates; assistance to translate findings into actions etc.*
- *the agency and personnel have relevant experience and can give assurances that the project with be handled properly*

6. HRW General Stores own a small chain of independent supermarkets in the north of the country. Although business is generally good, the owners are concerned that sales of some types of goods (e.g. fresh fruit and vegetables) are falling. They feel that poor store layout could be to blame, and would like to re-organise the departments to help maximise sales.

   The company has recently installed closed-circuit television in each supermarket, and would like to use the equipment to observe how customers are shopping.

a) Outline at least two benefits and two limitations of using this type of observation to address HRW's problem. Illustrate your answer with examples.

(***Weighting: 50% of total)***

In order to pass this question, candidates should identify a minimum of three points – two benefits and one limitation, or vice versa. Stronger answers may identify the potential for observation data to be analysed qualitatively or quantitatively, and may provide clear examples as illustrations. Weaker answers may list only a restricted range of points, with little or no illustration to demonstrate understanding.

Benefits include:

- *uses existing resources – no need to invest in new equipment*
- *can provide valuable quant data – e.g. number of times customers by-pass certain areas etc.*
- *can be analysed for qualitative information – e.g. how customers appear to react to certain items/areas in the shop*
- *as equipment is on throughout the day, extracts can be taken from different times/ days to see if patterns change (e.g. when shop is busier etc.)*
- *can carry out research in all branches at the same time, leading to consistency and comparability*

Limitations include:

- *ethical issues – the shop owner cannot conduct a 'covert operation' . MRS Code of Conduct stipulates that participants must be informed that the data is being collected and being used for this purpose.*
- *although it may be interpreted qualitatively, the interpretation is itself open to interpretation. Motivations may be implied but cannot be ascribed without speaking with the participants.*
- *There may be too much data: where to start? Careful planning is required to know which times/days are most representative.*

b) Identify one further approach to data collection which the company could use, and outline its benefits and limitations in relation to this project.

(Weighting: 50% of total)

Candidates may offer a wide range of alternatives. In order to pass, the answer must identify an appropriate alternative and justify its use within this context. Stronger answers may provide creative or combined approaches, with clear analysis which relates directly to the context. Weaker answers may identify an appropriate approach but fail to relate it to the research problem.

Alternative approaches may include:

- *in-store interviews*
- *customer focus groups*
- *accompanied shopping*
- *shopping diaries, in which respondents note the aisles they visit and the order in which they select goods*