Advanced Certificate in Market and Social Research Practice

24th June 2009
10.00am –12.30pm

EXAMINATION ANSWER GUIDE

NOTES TO EXAMINERS

Candidates must answer ALL questions in Section 1
Candidates must answer TWO questions from Section 2

Section1 accounts for one third of the final result.
Section 2 accounts for two thirds of the final result.

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 not be given for information which is not relevant to the context

MRS is the world's largest association for people and organisations that provide or use market, social and opinion research, business intelligence and customer insight.

MRS is the awarding body for market and social research qualifications in the UK. It offers a range of government-approved qualifications suitable for different interests and levels of experience

MRS Advanced Certificate Examination Answer Guide
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MRS
15 Northburgh Street
London EC1V 0JR

Telephone: +44 (0)20 7566 1805
Fax: +44 (0)20 7490 0608
Email: profdevelopment@mrs.org.uk
Website: www.mrs.org.uk

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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 answers in this section account for one-third of the total marks.

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

SUN APARTMENTS is a holiday company with ten holiday complexes across the UK. Each complex is by the sea and has 250 apartments which provide self-catering holiday accommodation for holidaymakers. The apartments can sleep between 4 and 6 people, and each is equipped with a small kitchen and a shower room. In addition to the accommodation, each holiday complex has 2 swimming pools and 2 gyms, children's play areas and other facilities including shops, bars and restaurants. The complexes are open throughout the year, and holidaymakers can book for a weekend, a week or for a two week-period.

Over recent years, there has been a slow but steady decline in the numbers of people choosing to stay in a SUN APARTMENTS complex. However, with the economic downturn leading to more British people staying in the UK for their holidays, SUN APARTMENTS' owners feel that they now have an opportunity to attract and keep new customers. They are willing to invest in new facilities and attractions for next year's season but are unsure what types of improvements would bring most benefit to the company and for how long. They have never commissioned market research before, but have contacted your research agency to find out if and how you might help them.

a) What types of secondary data could be useful in addressing SUN APARTMENTS' business problem? Identify at least three types of useful secondary data, describe where each might be found and explain why each is important.

(Weighting: one-third of total)

This part of the question requires candidates to consider what secondary data might be used to address the business problem. A minimum of three sources of information are sought. Stronger answers may provide a wider range of sources, or a detailed rationale for the sources they recommend. Weaker answers may provide very generic or non-specific sources (e.g. the internet) without identifying exactly the type of information required and why it might be useful.

Types of data might include some or all of the following:

- *profiles of current and returning customers – from company records*
- *patterns of bookings, again from company records*
- *main competitors and what they offer – from competitors' websites, magazines and events such as holiday shows*
- *industry websites / trade press*
- *complaints (to find out why people did not come back) – from company records, or more general complaints from the press*
- *profiles of the areas in which the complexes are situated – from tourist leaflets, guides etc*
- *customer satisfaction questionnaires (if the company has these)*
- *results from the "suggestions box" (if the company has one)*

b) You advise that SUN APARTMENTS needs to understand what motivates people to decide to holiday in one of their complexes, and what encourages them to return. They also need to identify why people have chosen not to holiday at a SUN APARTMENTS complex. Identify three methods of data collection which might be used to address these needs, and evaluate their usefulness. Identify which option or combination of options you would recommend. Give reasons for your recommendations.

(Weighting: one-third of total)

Candidates need to provide 3 distinct methods of data collection to pass. Options suggested need to be supported by a clear justification, and must be appropriate to meet the needs of the project for at least two of them.

Credit should be given for creativity and for identifying the parameters placed on the project by this being exploratory research. Weaker answers may identify options which are appropriate but have significant cost implications. Stronger answers may identify mixed methods.

Some areas which may be discussed include the following:

Method	***Advantages***	***Disadvantages***
Postal questionnaire to returning customers and those who have contacted the company for information	• *Easy and relatively cheap to administer* • *All questions are presented to respondents in an identical way* • *May get to a wide range of people who are otherwise hard to get to (e.g. due to their geographical location or lack of access to the internet, etc)* • *Company will already have addresses of existing customers*	• *Depending on number of questionnaires, need to consider how to analyse info* • *Possible low response rate* • *Can be slow* • *Inability to probe ambiguous answers to any more open-ended questions* • *Will be more difficult for respondents who have a poor grasp of the English language or who are illiterate*
F2f interviews with a sample of customers and non-customers	• *More possible to probe to get qual & quant data* • *May make info more manageable to analyse* • *There are a number of holiday complexes. Interviews (with customers) could be held on site* • *Response rates with customers could be higher than for the other methods because of having a potentially readily-available audience*	• *Who will do the interviewing? Geographical spread means you may need a large team which could be costly.* • *How will you ensure sample is representative? How will it be chosen?* • *How will you reach non-customers?* • *May be difficult to co-ordinate – times and places of interviews*
Group discussions	• *May be easier to organise than one-to-ones: could arrange as part of a free entertainment evening for example* • *Can get qual data / insights / new ideas* • *Same advantages of using complex locations as above*	• *How will you ensure an appropriate balance of types of holidaymaker (e.g. families; older people; long v. short hols)? Representation may be affected by the time of year the sample is taken.* • *How will you encourage people to come along during their holiday?* • *How will you reach non-customers?*

Phone interviews with customers and non-customers	• *Current list of contacts as a start of sampling frame (c/f postal surveys)* • *May get better response than postal* • *Speedy* • *May be less costly than f2f*	• *Possible resistance to cold calling – e.g. are people on TPS?* • *Interviewers need to be well-trained in order for interviews to be standardised* • *May be harder to get in-depth data*
Web-based interview (URL sent to customers and enquirers in a letter)	• *Can be quicker and easier than post / faster turnaround* • *Possibly more cost effective because analysis is 'built-in' to programme* • *Accurate routing on questionnaire* • *Easy to supply interim data and on-line reporting* • *Respondents can do at their own convenience* • *Stimulus material can be used* • *No interviewer bias*	• *Excludes people with no access to web* • *Don't know who is answering – people may respond more than once* • *Likely to have lower response rate than phone interviewing / would need reminders to optimise response rate* • *More difficult to control sample profiles* • *Inability to probe any vague answers provided to open-ended questions* • *Longer lead time for programming and testing script*

c) SUN APARTMENTS' owners are happy to accept your recommendations for data collection. Devise a sampling plan for the project, giving reasons for the suggestions you include.

(Weighting: one-third of total)

Candidates are expected to include a consideration of the population of interest and to identify and justify a chosen approach to sampling based on the data collection methods they selected at (b). Consideration should also be given to a sampling frame and/or how the sample will be recruited.

Some of the issues which may be taken into consideration include:

- *Collecting from current customers versus collecting former or non-customers*
- *Consideration of sources for non-customers*
- *Sample sizes relative to customers and relative to non-customers*
- *Representativeness of sample*
- *Ease of recruitment*
- *Degree to which you want to analyse the results from the different subgroups*
- *Approach to sampling (i.e. random vs quota, etc)*

Weaker answers may provide a very limited view of the population of interest and may fail to make appropriate links between the sampling approach and their chosen approach(es) to data collection. They may also fail to identify ethical constraints on the selection of the sample. Strong answers are likely to give more attention to the definition of the population of interest (e.g. identification of groups of non-customers or sub-groups of customers who might be included) and to provide a well-reasoned argument for an appropriate sample.

Section 2: 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.

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1. You have been asked to deliver a training session entitled 'An introduction to quantitative data analysis' as part of the graduate training scheme in your research agency. The aim of the session is to help the trainees understand some key techniques in data analysis, and how these are applied in practice. You have decided to focus on the three following techniques:

i. weighting
ii. correlation
iii. multivariate analysis

a) Describe each technique and explain why each might be used in analysing quantitative data. Illustrate your answer with examples.

(Weighting: one-half of total)

In order to pass this section, candidates are expected to demonstrate a good understanding of at least two of the three terms and provide a convincing illustration of why at least two of the techniques are used in analysis.

Candidates may choose to provide a short definition of each term as part of their answer. If a concise definition is not provided, answers should provide enough information to demonstrate that the candidate understands the key principles of the technique.

Stronger answers for this section will provide clear and accurate definitions and examples which demonstrate a depth of understanding of why each is used. Weaker answers may provide only partial explanations or fail to provide examples which demonstrate a clear understanding of why the techniques might be used and what differentiates them from other techniques.

The basic information sought within definitions and descriptions include some or all of the following:

Weighting

- *Procedure which is used to adjust sample data in order to make them more representative of the target population on particular characteristics.*
- *Mechanism to ensure that each element is given its required level of importance.*
- *Where there is an imbalance, weighting is used to reflect the balance required.*
- *The weighting factor is calculated by dividing the population percentage by the sample percentage.*
- *Any weighting procedure used should be clearly indicated and data tables should show unweighted and weighted data.*

Correlation

- *A technique that tries to establish a statistical relationship between two variables. An example of a correlation would be the relationship found between smoking and cancers.*
- *The correlation coefficient ('r') is used to measure the strength and direction of the linear relationship between two variables, ranging from -1 to +1 showing either strong negative or strong positive correlation. When* r *is zero it means there is no linear relationship between the two variables.*
- *Can be represented graphically by the closeness of data points to a 'best fit' straight line.*

Multivariate analysis

- *Multivariate data consists of observations for each of which the values of three or more variables are recorded.*

- *Multivariate statistical methods are those which simultaneously examine the relationships among a number of variables.*
- *Multivariate analysis identifies a predictive variable, unlike univariate where the researcher needs to select this in advance.*
- *There is a range of multivariate statistical procedures (e.g. factor analysis, cluster analysis, CHAID analysis, conjoint analysis, mapping (i.e. correspondence analysis and principal component analysis) and multiple regression). These are used in market research for a wide variety of purposes e.g. determining which features of a product drives preference, market segmentation, forecasting, etc.*

b) The trainees need to understand that each technique has its limitations. Select <u>two</u> of the techniques and describe the limitations of using them in analysing data for a research project. Illustrate your answer with examples.

(Weighting: one-half of total)

Candidates are expected to select only two of the techniques from the selection of 3. The range of limitations identified will depend on which is chosen. However, answers are expected to demonstrate a clear, practical understanding of the implications of the limitations identified for the research project. Limitations could include some/all of the following:

<u>Weighting</u>

- *Main limitation is that weighting can distort (rather than re-calibrate) the resulting data from the survey if particular sub-segments of the population being surveyed are over- or under-represented when the survey is completed. This can occur especially if a weight of 2 or over is given to any individual respondent or unit – if you had any respondent acting as the equivalent of two in the sample (i.e. their answers are double counted) then sometimes you can make the data skewed, in particular if the sample cell is not that large, so any over-extrapolation is risky.*
- *Samples need to be of a reasonable size for weighting to work.*
- *It takes time, because a new set of tables are produced and analysed and must be compared with unweighted.*
- *If you do not accurately know the incidence in the universe of the various samples, or if for any other reason the weighting regime is not accurate or wrongly applied, then data can be inaccurate, and there is more chance of things going wrong..*
- *Clients can get confused between the two sets of data (unweighted and weighted). All charts showing data must make clear if data is unweighted or weighted.*

<u>Correlation</u>

- *It can take more time as a new set of data needs to be run.*
- *Depending on the variables being correlated, it can be difficult to interpret accurately.*
- *It is important to identify that correlation doesn't necessarily imply a causal relationship.*

<u>Multivariate analysis</u>

- *If all the variables are NOT included, will give an inaccurate picture of what the drivers are.*
- *May over-represent some issues if there was unequal mention in the questionnaire to some areas.*
- *Large samples are needed for it to be robust.*
- *Takes more time/effort (and money) to complete, therefore making the project more expensive to run.*
- *Multivariate analysis is also hindered by the subjectivity involved in choosing between different software packages e.g. neural networks can give rise to very different answers according to the algorithms used. Additionally, the results are frequently less than conclusive.*

2. You are a researcher working for a public-sector (i.e. government funded) organisation. You recently sent out a detailed research brief for a new project. You have received proposals from three agencies and now need to identify the most appropriate for the project**.**

a) Identify the key issues you would need to consider when deciding which proposal to choose, and describe why each issue is important.

(Weighting: one-half of total)

Candidates are expected to give a minimum of four suggestions, from a minimum of two sections and with convincing rationale, to pass this section.

Problem definition

- *How well does the proposal analyse and identify the problem, and how well does it link to the objective/decision required? It needs to demonstrate that the researcher fully understands the context and the issues.*

Research design

- *Will the research design provide the type of evidence which is required? Does the proposal provide appropriate justification of the approach to be taken?*
- *Has the researcher identified the population of interest appropriately and will the approach to sampling provide a representative sample?*
- *How will data be collected? Will any aspect of this be outsourced and, if so, why and to whom?*
- *What quality control mechanisms are followed?*
- *Have any limitations of the proposed methods been identified in relation to the objectives? How will they be addressed?*
- *How will data be handled and by whom? How will it be analysed? Is this appropriate to the research objectives?*
- *What will the outputs be? Are they appropriate to your needs?*

Costs & timing

- *Is the timeline in line with your own, and is it achievable?*
- *Is there a clearly costed plan? Are all of the costs justified and justifiable? Does it fall within your budget (or within allowable parameters)?*
- *Is it value for money?*
- *Are contingencies budgeted for?*
- *Does it cover all the costs or will out-of-pocket expenses be extra e.g. travel and stimulus material?*

The agency team

- *Do the researchers have an appropriate level of this kind of research?*
- *Is the staffing appropriate e.g. numbers of staff and level of seniority/experience?*
- *Have any outsourced areas been identified clearly and justified?*
- *Has a project leader been identified?*
- *How often would you expect to be updated?*
- *Does the agency and team inspire your trust and confidence; are these people you want to work with and feel they will do a good job?*

Added value

- *Is the proposal convincing – well-prepared, detailed and providing an appropriate balance of information and justification?*
- *Has the proposal provided more than you expected, e.g. in terms of insight into the problem?*

b) What steps could you take to ensure that the chosen research project really meets the needs of your organisation before, during and at the reporting stage of the project? Illustrate your answer with examples.

(Weighting: one-half of total)

Candidates should identify and describe at least one step from each of the 3 stages in order to pass this section, with detailed rationale to meet pass level. Candidates with more steps may provide more limited rationale. Stronger candidates may identify sequential steps which can be taken and will provide clear justification for their suggestions.

Before the project starts

- *Identify a key contact at the agency who will handle your project*
- *Set up a meeting to discuss the stages of the project and identify the points where you would like to have update meetings e.g. topic or questionnaire design*
- *Ensure that you provide any materials/information which are necessary*
- *Discuss and agree the outputs your organisation wants/needs, including any access to raw data as this information is needed when collecting the data*
- *Agree any other regular forms of update (e.g. weekly/fortnightly reports depending on the project)*

During the project

- *Keep in touch with your internal clients throughout the project to see that objectives are being met and materials are appropriate.*
- *Ensure that regular updates actually take place, and that you identify any emergent trends/findings which relate to the objectives.*
- *During updates, identify if there are any emergent issues which impact on the path of the project and how these might be dealt with.*
- *Monitoring that assumptions made during the proposal stage were accurate and reasonable.*

At the reporting stage

- *Ask for a preview of findings before any formal presentation, to allow time for consideration of the findings*
- *Ensure any final report/presentation identifies clear actions which are recommended on the basis of the findings*
- *Ensure that the limitations of any possible recommendations are identified on the basis of the findings*
- *Arrange follow up meeting(s) in order to support the planning of action based on the research findings.*

3. Individual interviews are an important data collection tool for both qualitative and quantitative research projects.

a) Describe the key differences between individual interviews undertaken for qualitative research studies and those undertaken for quantitative research studies. Illustrate your answer with examples.

(Weighting: one-half of total)

Candidates should make at least 3 clear comparisons between the two types of interview. They may choose to organise their ideas either by 'differences' or by focusing on first one type of interview then the other. In both cases, the focus should be on the comparison of the two types of interview. Credit should be given for the range of points identified and clear and convincing examples that clearly illustrate the points made.

Qualitative interviews	***Quantitative interviews***
• *Good for exploring issues in-depth* • *More freedom for interviewer to explore issues* • *Setting can be important, with sensitivity of topic a key determiner in whether phone interviews can be used* • *Can be more than one-to-one (e.g. paired)* • *More time consuming than quant (therefore also more costly per interview, and possibly lower sample sizes)* • *More open questions* • *Less directive than in quant* • *Use of projective or enabling techniques*	• *Good for directional, conclusive and robust data gathering* • *Standard questions (no interviewer freedom)* • *Wide range of settings possible* • *Generally one-to-one* • *Can ask remotely, e.g. by phone. May not involve an interviewer – e.g. web-based surveys may be viewed as interviews* • *Usually shorter than qual* • *More closed questions* • *Pre-coding restricts range of possible answers* • *Some probing possible, but less than in qual* • *Cost per interview usually lower, therefore larger sample sizes more achievable, therefore more scope for analysing sub-groups*
The interviewer: • *Must listen and respond to subtle clues* • *Must be skilled at reading non-verbal info* • *Recorded on video/audio, may be transcribed*	***The interviewer:*** • *Must question efficiently and effectively* • *Listening skills important but less than qual* • *Many ways to record (CAPI, CATI, CAWI)*

b) You are lead researcher on a qualitative study designed to explore the impact of debt on an individual's wellbeing. You and your team of 4 qualitative researchers are about to conduct an extensive series of individual interviews across England. Describe the steps you would take, with rationale to ensure that valuable and consistent insight is gathered from the study.

(Weighting: one-half of total)

Candidates are expected to identify a minimum of two steps, with detailed rationale, to meet pass level. Candidates with more steps may provide more limited rationale. Stronger candidates may identify sequential steps which can be taken and will provide clear justification for their suggestions.

- *Review the research objectives: Ensure that there is shared understanding of the aims and the type of information required.*
- *Interviewers to have early sight of/involvement in discussion guide development to ensure all are clear and comfortable with content and sequence.*
- *All interviewers briefed at the same time to ensure all have sufficiently similar understanding*
- *Review the discussion guide: Do all interviewers agree on the aim and interpretation of the questions? Do all feel it can be covered in the time given for the interview?*
- *Discuss the approach and structure of tasks. How are respondents going to be warmed up? What types of techniques are to be used (e.g. projective techniques)? What (if any) materials are to be used and how will they be used?*
- *Give approximate times to be spent on each section of the discussion to ensure consistency across interviews*
- *Ensure agreement on how data will be recorded. Also what data will be recorded – e.g. are you going to record non-verbal behaviour?*
- *Review the make-up of the sample (i.e. geographical spread, age groups etc): What similarities and differences are there? Can possible impacts on the data collection be anticipated?*
- *Arrange meeting/communication following the first round of interviews if possible to discuss and resolve any problematic issues, and to do a debrief of early findings and examine their impact.*

4. Your organisation has carried out some research for a new client and you have been asked to write the final report.

a) Outline the steps you would take to maximise the usefulness of the report to the client, explaining why each step is important.

(Weighting: two-thirds of total)

Examiners should note that this section accounts for two-thirds of the marks allocated in this question. Candidates are expected to provide at least 3 steps as 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).

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*
- *if you are not the principal contact with the client, talk with the person who is, to find out if needs/requirements have changed during the life of the project*
- *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*
- *talk through the findings that are emerging with the client to see if they can provide further insight that you could explore in the data*
- *if relevant, check if any external events could have influenced the data that would be worth examining and commenting on (e.g. if your client received some bad publicity while the interviewing was in progress that may have influenced the views of those respondents who were interviewed after the bad news became known)*
- *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?*
- *check who the report is going to – are all their needs from the research being met?*

b) Outline the checks you would make to ensure the MRS Code of Conduct and ethical practice are adhered to in the writing up of your report. Explain why each check is important.

(Weighting: one-third of total)

Although there may be fewer points to make in this section, candidates need to be aware of respondents' rights and researchers' responsibilities and how these have been incorporated into the project. Candidates should identify a minimum of two justified checks in order to meet pass level for this section.

Checks they could make include:

- *Check how respondents were briefed before presenting findings*
    - *Research data including recorded data can only be used for the purpose for which it was collected*
    - *Can't use direct, attributable quotes unless respondents have agreed that these can be used*
    - *Can't provide personal details of respondents unless prior agreement has been obtained*
    - *Respondents have to have given permission to be re-contacted for any follow-up research that the client may wish to conduct as a result of this research*
- *Check that all conclusions presented are supported by the findings, and that facts are clearly differentiated from interpretation*
- *Check that the report makes clear which data is being used to support interpretation*
- *Check that quotes are reflective of the research as a whole*
- *Check that graphs of respondent responses include the sample size, and that statistically significant differences are made clear*

- *Check that data tables include sufficient technical information to enable reasonable interpretation of the validity of the results*
- *In the case of a qualitative report that it accurately reflects the findings of the research in addition to the practitioners' interpretations and conclusions*
- *Check that information regarding sample source(s) and possible bias is provided*
- *Check that they have not incorporated data from other clients' surveys (unless agreed with those clients)*

5. Your research agency has been asked to carry out some research on behalf of a supermarket chain. The company wants to monitor whether the current economic downturn will lead to a sustained long-term change in customers' spending habits. Three different approaches to the research have been proposed:

a) Discuss the strengths and limitations of each of the approaches for this research problem shown below.

i) a repeated study, using semi-structured questionnaires repeated 4 times over 12 months with the same sample

(Weighting: one-quarter of total)

ii) a repeated study, but using structured questionnaires repeated twice over 12 months with a larger sample

(Weighting: one-quarter of total)

iii) a longitudinal study, requiring a panel of respondents to keep a spending diary and engage in regular group discussions over the course of 12 months

(Weighting: one-quarter of total)

Examiners should note that Part a) of the answer carries 75% of the weighting for this question. At pass level, candidates should identify a minimum of two strengths and two limitations for each option. Credit should be given for candidates who reference the context.

Candidates may identify some or all of the following points:

i) repeated study with semi-structured questionnaire and same sample
Pros
- *use of semi-structured questionnaire would allow more qualitative features to be explored, whilst allowing for figures to be gathered and compared*
- *reporting at 4 intervals in the year with the same respondents can help to identify and track new or emerging trends*
- *could be delivered in a number of ways: in-store interviews; phone interviews; online*
- *can use tactically, e.g. the open questions could focus on something of topical/specific interest for that point in time (e.g. a new initiative that may be introduced or about to be trialled /feedback sought on)*

Cons
- *much more costly than bi-annual quant study – both in terms of number of times it is repeated, and the need to gather and analyse qual data*
- *lot of management needed*
- *three-monthly intervals may be too long for people to remember how things have changed*
- *inclusion of qual elements will lengthen time required for interview – meaning that sample size is likely to be smaller than with structured questionnaire*
- *recruiting new sample to replace respondents who can no longer participate depends on matching the sample closely*

ii) bi-annual quantitative study
Pros
- *less costly than (i) or (iii)*
- *number of options for delivery – in-store interviewing; self-completion by quota recruited in-store*
- *since less costly in field may be able to spend more on a longer q'aire – more breadth*
- *more manageable/control*
- *link findings to that point in time*
- *larger sampler size per reporting period*
- *sample management easier*

Cons
- *two snapshots – know nothing about intervening period*
- *as delivered only twice, the factors affecting spending may be very different (e.g. if delivered near Christmas holiday time, spending patterns may change)*
- *use of structured questionnaire means that some more affective factors may be missed – less possibility to explore any emerging motivating factors for any change in spending*
- *need good sample control to ensure quotas are matched to allow comparison as and when sample needs replacing over time*
- *reliant on respondents' memory over a long period*

(iii) Continuous panel
Pros
- *can follow changes in individuals' behaviour/attitudes*
- *uses more detailed/accurate recording devices e.g. the diary*
- *more in-depth (qualitative) information about how and why spending is changing*

Cons
- *most expensive option*
- *harder to recruit a representative sample:*
    - *certain groups (e.g. occasional users) harder to reach*
    - *validity depends on participants being no different from non-participants*
- *need to maintain continuity*
  need rewards/incentives – direct cost on top of study
  need to maintain degree of interest in participation – maintain contact (personal visits, newsletter etc)
- *need to keep task manageable to maintain goodwill – diary entries need to be straightforward and group discussions must not be too frequent*
- *panel members may become conditioned (e.g. more loyal to the supermarket) and therefore no longer representative*
- *may need running-in period – discard behaviour from first few reporting periods*
- *panel maintenance costs*
- *risk of drop off/resignation – would need more recruitment to fulfil sample profile*
- *if repeating with the same people and with too great a frequency, nothing may have changed from one period to the next ➲ little to say, and possible low response*
- *should have a maximum no. of times/duration panellists asked to participate*

b) State which option you would recommend, giving reasons for why this option is more appropriate for the client than the others, and how you would minimise or eliminate the limitations you have identified. Alternatively, outline another approach for addressing the client's brief, with reasons for your choice.

(Weighting: one-quarter of total)

Candidates should provide a clear indication as to which option they have selected and give a convincing rationale which links this option to the context. Alternatively they should provide a different approach with appropriate justification, (e.g. monitoring internal company data on average spend and items bought to see if customers are spending less per visit and/or trading down to cheaper brands or items, or buying into syndicated research to gather intelligence about the industry sector so one can determine if the customers of this particular chain are any different from those of other chains, etc.).

6. You are planning a quantitative research project for a new client. The client has heard that errors can occur in research, and is keen to find out how you will prevent these.

a) Describe what is meant by non-sampling error. Identify where it might occur in the research process and describe the possible effects that non-sampling error might have on a research project. Illustrate your answer with examples.

(Weighting: one-half of total)

Candidates are expected to provide a clear and convincing definition of non-sampling error and to be able to identify areas which need to be considered when looking for sources of non-sampling error. At pass level, answers should identify at least three areas which need to be considered in relation to non-sampling error, and to provide examples which demonstrate a practical understanding of the issues. Weaker answers may simply provide a list of places where error can occur without considering the practical implications, or may focus on a very restricted area of the research process. Stronger answers are likely to provide wide-ranging suggestions across the process, and/or to provide informed insight into the effects of error in practice.

Suggestions may include some or all of the following:

- *errors in the research design, e.g. inaccurate definition of problem*
- *errors in the design of questions*
- *interviewer errors*
- *respondent error (e.g. dishonest answers; incomplete answers)*
- *data processing errors (e.g. missing data)*

b) Describe the practical steps you might take to prevent the errors you have identified occurring**.**

(Weighting: one-half of total)

The strength of answers to this section will depend on the range of ideas identified in section (a). Candidates should supply a minimum of two steps, described in depth, or three steps with limited justification/illustration in order to pass. Stronger answers are likely to identify clear links between this section and section (a), and include a range of steps across the research process, with clear justification for each. Weaker answers may fail to make links between this section and areas identified in section (a). They are likely to restrict their focus on a narrow range of stages within the research process, and/or a limited range of practical ideas.

Some examples of suggestions include:

- *checking research objectives against the problem and business objectives, and checking each stage against the research objectives*
- *using CAI can reduce respondent/interviewer/input errors*
- *using pre-existing validated/reliable scales*
- *piloting the questionnaire/topic guide*
- *thorough training of interviewers/moderators*
- *clear and thorough briefing of interviewers/moderators*
- *back-checking of respondents*
- *clear and thorough briefing for data processors*
- *checking of inputted data etc.*