Advanced Certificate in Market and Social Research Practice

EXAM ANSWER GUIDE

29th June 2011
10.00am –12.30pm

Instructions given to Candidates

- Time allowed 2 hours 30 minutes
- Candidates must answer questions A, B, & C in Section 1
- Candidates must answer TWO questions from the six in Section 2
- All answers must be written in your Examination Answer booklet

Important Note: The requirement is for candidates to complete questions A, B & C in Section 1 and two questions from six in Section 2, failure to do this by either selecting more or less questions than the requirement may result in the paper being marked as non-compliant. Recommended times are detailed in each section to assist candidates in completing all the questions in the time available.

Instructions for Examiners

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

The research problems contained in this material are fictional, any similarity to any real-life organization, company or business is entirely unintended.

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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. This section accounts for one-third of the total marks.

Read the following case study and answer ALL 3 questions below.

Central University, based in the south of England, has gained an excellent reputation for its postgraduate courses. As a result, in recent years the University has attracted a large number of international postgraduate students. The fees paid by these students make an important contribution to the University's annual budgeted income. To support the recruitment of international students, the University has established a small department to promote its courses overseas and to liaise with education institutions in key countries.

However, this year there has been a noticeable reduction in the number of applications from international students. The University authorities are unsure if this is because of the global economic downturn, or if there are other factors causing this reduction. They have decided to conduct research to investigate how studying at Central University is now perceived by potential students and by key groups of opinion formers, such as education bodies and major employers. It has commissioned quantitative research to be carried out in the 3 countries which have, until now, represented the largest international markets for the University (China, Russia and Brazil).

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

Question A

What types of secondary data could be useful to inform the development of the questionnaire? Identify at least three types of useful 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 inform the collection of primary data. A minimum of three sources of information are sought. Stronger answers might 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 or why it might be useful.

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

Type of data	***Possible source(s)***	***Rationale***
• *Recruitment to other universities*	• *University websites*	• *To see if this trend is mirrored elsewhere*
• *Results from student satisfaction surveys / complaints data*	• *Internal records*	• *Has there been a drop in satisfaction reported by international students*
• *Reports from promotional activities carried out by international dept*	• *International dept records*	• *To see if there have been changes in activities/ responses recently*
• *Informal feedback/chat from current/prospective student communities*	• *Social media sites*	• *To see if there are perspectives on study choices being reflected*
• *Changes in education policies in target countries*	• *Websites/ policy docs*	• *To identify any changes in policy which might affect choices*
• *Changes in what is being offered in students' own countries*	• *University prospectuses/policies*	• *To identify changes in home country offer which might affect choices*
• *Employment changes in target countries*	• *Major employer websites; employment stats where available*	• *Are changes in employment chances driving changes?*
• *Info on relevant questions, scales etc.*	• *Academic Papers*	• *To produce tried and tested questions, ideas for questions etc for questionnaire*

Question B

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

(Weighting: one-third of total)

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

The benefits of conducting fieldwork locally might include the following:

- *Easier for local offices to draw appropriate samples for their country*
- *Greater awareness/depth of sensitivity to local issues/cultural factors than might be shown by a centralised approach*
- *Greater access to interviewers with the appropriate language skills*
- *Ensuring that appropriate translation of the questionnaire is undertaken*
- *Potential cost savings (local telephone rates)*
- *Not having to overcome different time zone problems*

A more advanced answer may also include:

- *'Ownership' of the research within each country, rather than being UK-centric*
- *Possibility of collaboration with locally-based client re. greater/deeper understanding of the issues (leading potentially to further projects at a local level)*

The benefits to central interviewing might include:

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

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

Question C

Describe the main issues involved in sampling and recruiting from each of the populations of interest for this project, the potential students and the opinion formers. Illustrate your answer with examples.

(Weighting: one-third of total)

At pass level, candidates are expected to identify at least two issues to be considered when sampling and recruiting each of the target groups. Stronger answers may demonstrate clear understanding of a range of different issues, stemming from the international nature of the research how to identify and source members of the populations of interest, and what issues in relation to representativeness might be encountered.. Weaker answers may fail to provide a range of issues, or to provide convincing illustration of their ideas.

Considerations might include some/all of the following:

- *Representativeness of the sample – in terms of Country (Brazil, Russia, China) and type of potential student, type of Opinion Former (employers in the main areas –e.g. Business and Health & Social Care; education bodies, etc)*
- *Will different sampling/recruitment methods or solutions be needed in each country?*
- *Where to obtain the sample for e.g. opinion formers – can the client provide lists, for example, of links with education bodies and employers (in which case, how – electronically, hard copy, what "fields" – e.g. by type, name, country, how up-to-date/reliable the lists are, etc). Does the range of this type of sample vary by country?*
  - *If the client cannot supply all of the sample, where might you find it in each country?*
  - *Educational institutions from which students are usually drawn*
  - *Government agencies promoting UK abroad (e.g. British Council)*
  - *Information gathered from current/previous students (e.g. are groups of students sponsored by employers in their own country?)*

Stronger answers may also include:

- *Achieving the interview, e.g. the ability to find and/or get through to the (busy) respondent (e.g. how to identify appropriate spokespeople, or navigate PAs etc), recognising that respondents may be unavailable (e.g. travelling, busy with other issues) and having strategies to deal with this.*
- *A focus on both opinion former and potential student audience*
- *Weighting the data if sufficient samples cannot be achieved*

Section 2: Optional Questions (Recommended time: 100 minutes)

This section accounts for two-thirds of the total marks.

Answer any TWO questions from the SIX in this section. Give a full answer to each of the questions you choose.

Question1

A major UK travel company operates a number of call centres in the UK to support its holiday booking activities. The company would like its call operators to gather quantitative information from callers who have just purchased a holiday, to establish their satisfaction with the service they have received. This is to be done at the end of the call. The travel company has engaged your research agency to advise them.

a) Outline the strengths and limitations of the approach the company wishes to take. Give reasons for the points you make.

(Weighting: one-half of total)

This section of the question requires candidates to identify the pros and cons of incorporating customer satisfaction research into the end of a sales call. At pass level, candidates should be able to identify at least one advantage and one disadvantage and provide convincing explanation of these. Stronger answers will identify a wider range of strengths and limitations, whilst weaker answers may highlight only strengths, or weaknesses.

Strengths include:

- *An inexpensive way of gathering information, as customers are already on the phone*
- *Quotas could be agreed, so that not all customers are asked the questions*
- *Answers can be easily recorded as most operators are likely to use electronic systems*

Weaknesses include:

- *May not get accurate information, as customer's responses may be coloured by information they have just received and by the fact that they have just booked a holiday*
- *Amount of info you can gather will be limited, as customer is unlikely to want to be engaged in a long interview*
- *May have limited experience of the travel company e.g. it could be a first call*
- *Asking a respondent to give feedback on the service they have received to the person who has given the service – respondent may be reticent to give low scores*
- *Call operator would need appropriate training, otherwise may administer questions inappropriately (e.g. re-wording, inappropriate probing and prompting etc) or record responses inaccurately if the caller is less than complimentary about the performance of the call operator.*

b) The company has instructed operators to ask each customer a set of structured questions about their level of satisfaction with the telephone booking service they have just used. You have been asked to provide advice for the design of these questions. Outline the information which should be included in this advice, giving reasons for the suggestions you make.

(Weighting: one-half of total)

This section of the question focuses on the candidate's understanding of question design for questions which are being administered on the phone. At pass level, candidates should identify a minimum of two pieces of guidance for the design of the questions, with a rationale for each. Stronger answers might identify a wider range of issues to be addressed in question design, and/or provide particularly strong rationale for their suggestions. Weaker answers might provide limited or generic description of the principles of question design, with no reference to the context in which the questions are being asked.

Some suggestions include:

- *Ethical/Code of Conduct issues*
- *A clear introduction at the beginning of the questioning, so customers understand what they are being asked and why*
  - *The need to get informed consent*
  - *The need to inform the customer how long the interview will last, if asked.*
- *Research design/research objectives issues*
  - *Clear understanding of what information is needed and how it will be used to ensure that questions designed are valid and reliable*
- *Design issues relating to method of data collection/context of the research*
  - *Number of questions should be limited – this is a telephone interview happening at the end of what might be a long call*
  - *The benefits of closed questions/scales*
  - *Response choices should be clear, meaningful and should also be limited in number*
  - *Questions themselves should not be long or overly complex*
- *Need to identify if a customer has been asked the questions before to prevent over-surveying*
- *Appropriate screening/qualification question/s – so only those who qualify are asked the questions*
- *Allow response categories such as "don't know", "none of these" and "other" etc to ensure respondents are not forced to give an inappropriate answer*
- *Piloting to ensure questions and answer categories are understood by both call operators and respondents*

Question 2

Five years ago, a Government organisation responsible for health promotion conducted a major research study to investigate attitudes to healthy eating among young people aged 18-24 years. The study involved both quantitative and qualitative primary studies among students at five universities across the UK. The quantitative research took the form of a self-completion pen and paper questionnaire. The qualitative research comprised a series of traditional, face-to-face group discussions. The organisation now wishes to carry out further research to investigate if and how young people's attitudes have changed.

a) The Government organisation is aware that developments in communication technologies mean that there are other ways of collecting data than those they used in the original study. Identify two methods of data collection which might replace the self-completion pen and paper survey and one method which might replace the face-to-face group discussions. Outline briefly the advantages and limitations of using each of the methods you have identified.

(Weighting: one-half of total)

At pass level, candidates should be able to identify two replacement methods for the quantitative element and one for the qualitative element and should be able to describe at least one relevant advantage and one relevant limitation for each one. Stronger answers might consider a wide range of different methods including the use of 'social media' (blogs, social networking sites, and perhaps interactive websites); might describe more than one advantage and limitation for each method; and stronger answers might link their choices to the research objectives, the target audience, the topic and the previous research approaches. Weaker answers might be more generic in nature with no links made to these key elements.

Candidates may mention that using a different methodology will mean direct comparisons with earlier research will be potentially compromised

b) The organisation is interested in examining the current attitudes of the original sample of 18-24 year olds. A re-contact question was included in the original survey and the organisation has asked the research agency who conducted it to re-interview all those who agreed to be re-contacted. Identify the issues that might be encountered in conducting this re-contact survey. Would you recommend that the client goes ahead with it or not? Give a rationale for your recommendation.

(Weighting: one-half of total)

At pass level, candidates should be able to identify at least two issues, practical and/or methodological and must present a recommendation with at least one relevant reason for that recommendation. Stronger answers might identify a greater number and/or discuss the issues identified in greater depth. Stronger answers might present a sound recommendation with a clear and relevant rationale. Weaker answers might show a lack of awareness of the key practical and/or methodological issues, and/or fail to present a recommendation and /or a rationale for that recommendation.

Sample/validity

- *If the re-contact question was asked, how many of the original sample agreed to be re-contacted? What is the make-up of this group?*
- *Is there a sufficient sample size to make this re-contact survey worthwhile?*
- *How representative is the re-contact sample? What implications does the make-up of the re-contact sample have for the validity and reliability of the follow-up research?*
- *What sample size is likely to be achieved in a re-contact survey?*

Cost-benefit/practicalities

- *Five years have elapsed and given that respondents were at university at the time contact details may be out of date and so useless*
- *How would previous respondents be re-contacted? If an online method being used, would email addresses have been collected 5 years ago?*

- *Would those who had agreed to be re-contacted remember this so long after the event?*
- *What is the cost vs the benefit to the client in going back to this sample? It may be expensive to even attempt to re-contact them*
- *Resources/money involved better spent elsewhere*

Question 3

You have been asked to run an introductory seminar on data editing for new recruits to the quantitative team in your organisation. The training manager is keen to ensure that the recruits understand the importance of effective data editing for data which has been gathered by either paper-and-pen and or computer-based methods.

a) What is 'data editing' and how can it be carried out effectively? Describe the data editing process, illustrating your answer with examples.

(Weighting: one-half of total)

Candidate should state aim of process and must mention some of the types of errors which are being checked for. They should note that there are differences in the process depending on pen or paper interviewing or computer aided methods and must make some mention of points at which the checks are done.

Aim of process

- *to ensure accuracy*
- *to deliver error-free, 'clean' data*

Approach to editing

- *report, review and decide how to edit*

Looking for…

- *inconsistent answers*
- *routing instructions not followed correctly/mis-routing*
- *extreme answers*
- *answers that are not valid or are outside the range of possible answers*
- *numeric accuracy*

When to check?

- *as data is being recorded*
- *as soon as the interview is completed*
- *after the first day's fieldwork has been completed*
- *at end of the fieldwork period*
- *prior to or during data entry*

Who makes checks/editing?

Pen and paper	***Computer-aided data capture***
Interviewer *Supervisor* *Editor* *Data entry person* *DP Executive/Spec Writer* *Researcher*	*(CATI, CAPI, CASI, CAWI or web-based methods)* *Computer program – editing and logic checks* *Must check that it works properly prior to fieldwork*

Candidates may describe additional checks which can be made on accuracy and/or consistency. Credit should be given for additional checks which are clearly described and justified.

b) You need to ensure that the new recruits can deal effectively with 'missing data'. Explain what is meant by the term 'missing data', how it occurs and how it can be dealt with. Illustrate your answer with examples.

(Weighting: one-half of total)

Candidates should provide a clear and convincing definition of 'missing data' and give some examples of how it arises. They should describe a range of ways of handling missing data during data processing. Better answers will use examples to provide clear illustrations of their understanding of the process.

Definition

- *If a response has been left blank it is known as a 'missing value'.*

How do they arise?

Can occur for a wide variety of reasons:

- *errors arising as a result of not pre-testing the questionnaire*
- *the question may not apply to the respondent*
- *he or she may not know the answer*
- *he or she may refuse to answer*
- *the interviewer may have inadvertently forgotten to record a response*
- *the response may be recorded in the wrong place.*
- *there may be a fault in the CAPI/CATI programme*
- *the question or an answer code is skipped/missing*
- *routing errors on PAPI questionnaires*
- *language difficulties (by the respondent)*
- *interview negligence – poor interviewing technique*

Why is it important to deal with them?

- *so that they do not contaminate the dataset and mislead the researcher or client*
- *so that the data set is complete*
- *so that it is known if the answer is not given because the respondent does not know or is not given for another reason.*
- *to ensure that everyone involved in the project understands the business implications for the agency and the client if poor or wrong data is provided.*
- *to ensure the research profession maintains a high level of integrity in all aspects of its work and reduces the chance of 'errors' such as those that occur through the deliberate actions of others*

How are they handled? (Basic approaches)

Fieldwork

- *checking with respondent at the end of the interview*
- *checking with respondent by calling back (quality control call-backs)*

Data processing

- *Adding a code (or codes) to the data entry program that will allow a missing value to be recorded*

Better answers will demonstrate understanding of a range of approaches to dealing with missing data, such as:

- *Casewise deletion*
  Remove from the dataset any case or questionnaire that contains missing values.
- *Pairwise deletion*
  Use only those cases without missing values in the table or calculation.
- *Substitution*

Replace the missing value with a real value. Two ways of doing this:. 1) Calculate the mean value for the variable and use that; or 2) calculate an imputed value based on either the pattern of response to other questions in the case (on that questionnaire) or the response of respondents with similar profiles to the respondent with the missing value.

In some cases, candidates may also discuss the importance of using measures to prevent the occurrence of missing data (e.g. through thorough briefing of the field force). Also ensuring "don't know", "none of these" and "other (specify)" response categories are included. Credit should be given for clearly-explained preventative measures.

Question 4

Your organisation has been asked to carry out a programme of qualitative research for a company that produces battery-powered scooters for transport around city centres. The company wants to know if and how the public's perceptions of its brand have been affected by environmental concerns and increases in fuel prices.

a) Identify 3 methods of primary data collection by which the information the company requires could be gathered. Outline the strengths and limitations of each approach you suggest.

(Weighting: one-half of total)

Examiners should note that candidates have been asked to consider a range of approaches, rather than individual techniques. The question has been designed to encourage candidates to consider data collection issues at the design stage of a project.

Candidates are required to identify a minimum of 3 areas with rationale to be in the pass band.

The data collection methods identified could include some or all of the following:

- *Individual in-depth interviews*
- *Group discussions or mini group discussions (face to face)*
- *Online group discussions (bulletin board, email etc)*
- *Workshops (or other extended sessions)*
- *Observation/ethnography*

b) Choose one of the approaches that you have identified. Describe the steps you would take – from the research design stage onwards - to ensure that it produces the type of information that the company needs.

(Weighting: one-half of total)

Answers to this section should link to the previous. Candidates are expected to focus on one of the techniques mentioned in the previous section, and to demonstrate their practical understanding of how to use the technique effectively. The steps described will vary according to the technique chosen.

Some of the steps which may be described include:

- *reviewing the research objectives to identify the type of information required*
- *preparing any relevant material (topic guides; stimulus material)*
- *if working with a team of researchers, establishing exactly how the information gathering is to be carried out e.g. staging; questions and techniques to be used etc*
- *ensuring that respondents receive clear instructions about the approach*
- *trialling the approach and reviewing results of the trial*

Question 5

Owing to cuts in funding, a local council is considering closing a number of public amenities such as libraries, leisure facilities and children's play areas. However, they are keen to understand what the likely impact of closure will be on communities using these facilities. Your research agency has proposed a project which uses quota sampling, based on age, gender, employment status and residence, and face-to-face interviews conducted in the street. Although the authority is impressed by the proposal, they are concerned that the costs are too high. They have asked your agency to consider making the following changes to the proposed research in order to reduce costs.

a)	Reduce the sample size	**(Weighting: one-third of total mark)**
b)	Reduce the number of quota controls in the sample	**(Weighting: one-third of total mark)**
c)	Shorten the questionnaire	**(Weighting: one-third of total mark)**

What is the possible impact of each of the above changes on the usefulness of this quantitative survey? Identify the issues which the client needs to understand before any cost-cutting measures are taken. Illustrate your answer with examples.

<u>Examiners should note that each section is equally weighted</u>. *At pass level, candidates should identify a minimum of two limitations in each section. Credit should be given for the range of ideas included and the level of justification given for the inclusion of each.*

a) *Reduced the sample size*

Will reduce fieldwork cost – almost pro-rata. But little effect on other elements of cost, although less sub-sample analysis will reduce other costs to some extent.
If sample is too small:

- *Reduced statistical confidence in accuracy of measurements (larger sampling error – greater variability)*
- *Potentially less representative:*
    - o *more likely to miss full range of views/behaviours*
    - o *more likely to overstate/understate certain views/behaviours*
    - o *results may not be accepted/believed/taken seriously*
    - o *apparent differences between sub-groups are less likely to be real/statistically significant.*
- *Inability to look in any detail at subgroups/analyse data further – limits understanding/interpretation*
- *Increase in potential for interviewer effect – likely to have fewer interviewers/each interviewer becomes more influential*
- *Increase in potential for regional effects – likely to have fewer sampling points (if face-to-face)/increased pressure for points to be representative*
- *Increase in potential for timing effects – smaller sample likely to be conducted over shorter fieldwork period – may be atypical*
- *Particularly important for repeat/tracking studies where want to be able to attribute differences in data to real world rather than changes in sample*

b) ***Reduce the number of quotas***
Will reduce cost, because of reduction to finding time – but interviewing time stays constant and other costs not affected at all.

If sample is too broad:

- *Some respondents may not have sufficient knowledge to answer all questions:*
  - *reduced sample size for certain questions – less confidence in reliability of answers*
  - *more routing needed on questionnaire – greater potential for errors/hinders flow and hence rapport*
  - *data analysis more complex if greater routing*
- *Probably less able to ask detailed questions – data potentially too general to be actionable*
- *If original quotas are interlocking changing to non-interlocking could help reduce costs*
- *May reduce the amount of sub-group analysis that can be done if these sub-groups have not been quota'd for/not present in sufficient numbers*
- *May end up with skewed samples (eg too many non-working respondents etc, too few younger men) which one may or may not be able to adjust with weighting*
- *Need to carefully consider what are the most important criteria to set quota controls on, and how best to collapse the quotas would otherwise have in place*

c) ***Shorter questionnaire length***
Will reduce cost at all stages of research process. A shorter questionnaire may allow more interviews to be conducted.

Need to focus - necessity to omit questions:

- *Insufficient level of detail – too general – less actionable*
- *Insufficient depth of exploration of any issue – limits understanding/potentially too superficial to be actionable*
- *Inability to interpret a piece of data – needed to know more about respondent to put finding into context, especially demographic/classification*
- *More need to focus on proving/disproving current hypotheses – less flexibility to explore alternative hypotheses based on speculative/exploratory questions*
- *May not allow any/so many open ended questions so pre-codes have to be predetermined with resulting diminution in breadth/spontaneity of response*
- *Balance of breadth and depth may affect respondent*
  - *if depth is lost in favour of breadth respondent may feel questionnaire is too superficial and treat it less seriously esp. professional/business respondents*
  - *if focusing on depth, questions may be 'harder' for respondent – fewer 'easy'/general questions as increased pressure to provide more detailed information*
- *Reductions may mean full/original information requirements will not be met*
- *Need to carefully consider and prioritise what question areas must be retained and what can be left out*
- *May mean respondents don't have an opportunity to say all they would wish to*

Better responses at c) may suggest:

- *Some questions are asked of just one in N respondents, with different respondents being asked a different set of such questions (will reduce sample sizes for these questions, but will provide data / insight not otherwise provided at all). A system would be required to ensure respondents are randomly or systematically routed to specific questions to ensure questions and responses not skewed*
- *Respondents to have be given an opportunity to add further comments at the end of the interview to mention things not already covered*

Question 6

You are an Insight Manager for a leading confectionery manufacturer. A new member of the marketing team has prepared a research brief. You feel that the research objectives within the brief are unclear, and you have been asked to provide some feedback for the team member before he amends the brief and sends it to the research agency.

a) Describe the potential problems which can arise at different stages in the research process when research objectives are not clearly defined. Illustrate your answer with examples.

(Weighting: one-half of total)

Examiners are reminded that this section is worth half of the total marks for this question.

Candidates are expected to identify the importance of research objectives to all stages in the research process.

At pass level, candidates are expected to identify problems at a minimum of three stages and provide some illustration of those problems. Candidates who identify problems at only two stages are expected to provide thorough explanation and illustration of those problems in order to pass. Stronger candidates may provide a wider range of points across the various stages of the research project and/or more convincing description of the practical implications of the problems.

Potential problems:

In research design	*Unclear objectives can lead to wrong choice of basic design – e.g. does the client need exploratory or conclusive research, what type of data (see qual or quant below;) what sampling approach; what method of data collection?*
Qual or quant	*Clear objectives needed to be able to identify if qual or quant – or both – data are needed.*
Sampling	*Unclear objectives could lead to inappropriate sampling*
Questionnaire/topic guide design	*Questions should be relevant to the research objectives. Unclear objectives mean that important questions may be missed.*
Analysing data	*Unclear objectives mean that data may not be analysed appropriately – research objectives will determine the variables which need to be explored*
Interpreting data	*Research objectives will guide what is looked for in the information – unclear objectives will mean that inappropriate information is focused on.*
Reporting results	*Inappropriate objectives will mean that the researcher will be unable to give the client appropriate guidance. May be unable to provide appropriate info or, worse, give wrong info*

b) What steps would you expect the research agency to take to ensure that the research objectives set out in the brief fully address your research needs? Give reasons for the steps you expect, and illustrate your answer with examples.

(Weighting: one-half of total)

Candidates should demonstrate that they recognise the need to understand and question the brief. At pass level, candidates should identify a minimum of two steps they can take, along with a clear justification for the steps they suggest.

Steps which candidates might suggest include all or some of the following:

- *Read and re-read the brief so you are thoroughly familiar with it.*
- *Do some research into the background of the problem so you understand it*
- *Take opportunity to talk further with client if possible e.g. face-to-face meeting with internal client and/or the research contact. Find out:*
    - *What is the business problem? What is its wider context?*

  - *What research, if any, was done before on the same topic/issue/problem?*
- *Identify a primary contact to ensure that there is ongoing understanding of the research process*
- *Ask yourself questions in order to help define the research objectives e.g.:*
  - *What is the research problem?*
  - *How will the data be used? What sort of decision is to be made?*
  - *What types of data are the decision makers expecting/used to/prefer?*
  - *Make sure that the business objectives and the research objectives relate to each other but are clearly delineated*

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