



Advanced Certificate in Market & Social Research Practice

EXAMINATION PAPER

25th June 2014
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.

Section 1: Compulsory question (Recommended time: 50 minutes)

This section tests problem identification and problem solving using a number of skills. The section accounts for one-third of the total marks.

Read the following case study and answer ALL 3 questions.

SoarAway Air is an airline company specialising in offering low cost short-haul air travel. The company has become famous for its low ticket prices and for finding ways of keeping its operating costs to a minimum. *SoarAway Air* has always sold its products exclusively via its website, where visitors must register to access details of ticket offers. The company has also introduced charges for a range of optional 'extras' which are not included in the ticket price. This means that customers pay additional fees for a wide range of services, including charges for check in, checking bags into the hold, booking specific seats and printing boarding passes at the airport.

In the past two years, *SoarAway Air* has seen a significant decrease in its market share and in its profits. Fewer people are visiting the company's website and those who do visit often leave without registering or making a booking. There has also been a sharp decline in repeat custom and in the number of customers choosing to pay for the optional 'extras'. The senior management team believes that the market for budget travel is changing, and that *SoarAway Air's* business model may need to change if the company is to regain its profitability.

The senior managers have asked the company's own research team to carry out market research to inform discussions about the future direction of the company. They are keen to find out if and how the market is changing, why customers are no longer choosing *SoarAway Air* in the way they once did, and how the company might win back customers and repeat business.

Question A

The research team believes that a programme of desk research is a good place to start for the following two reasons: it will help build a good understanding of the issues; and it will help define the objectives for primary research. They know there is useful secondary data to be found internally, within *SoarAway Air*, as well as externally. Outline the types of internal and external information that would be helpful, and describe where they might find that information.

(Weighting: one-third of total)

Question B

The senior management team have asked for quantitative information about the attitudes to the company of recent customers, lapsed customers and prospective customers. They define 'recent' customers as those who have flown with the airline in the last three months; 'lapsed' customers as those who have flown with the airline but have not done so in the last year; and 'prospective' customers as those who would consider flying with the airline at some time in the future.

Prepare an outline sampling plan for achieving a sample of each of the three groups of SoarAway customers, recent, lapsed and prospective.

The plan should outline:

- the sampling approach you have chosen for each group
- the sample sources or sampling frames you intend to use
- any ethical issues you need to take into account when drawing the sample for each group.

Give reasons for the suggestions you make.

(Weighting: one-third of total)

Question C

One of the junior executives in the research team has been tasked with creating an online self-completion questionnaire which will be used to collect information from recent customers. Below is an extract from a section of the first draft questionnaire, starting at Question 5. How could this section of the draft questionnaire be improved? Give reasons for the suggestions you make.

(Weighting: one-third of total)

5. How many times have you flown with *SoarAway Air*?

- a) Once
- b) 2 - 5 times
- c) 6 - 10 times
- d) More than 10 times
- e) Never

6. If you have flown with *SoarAway Air* what would you say was the best thing about the experience?

- a) Comfortable
- b) Easy booking
- c) Value for money
- d) Convenient time

7. Do you agree or disagree with the following statements about *SoarAway Air*?

- a) It offers good value for money Yes / No
- b) It offers a good range of destinations Yes / No
- c) It's seen as a cheap airline Yes / No
- d) It's too crowded Yes / No

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.

Question 1

A junior colleague has prepared a research proposal for a new client and has asked you to comment on it. You feel that the research objectives are unclear, and you need to provide some guidance for your colleague.

- a) Identify 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)
- b) What steps should your colleague take to ensure that the research objectives fully address the client's needs? Give reasons for the steps you suggest, and illustrate your answer with examples.

(Weighting: one-half of total)

Question 2

A major chain of coffee shops has recently invested in staff training to help its staff increase sales of items such as biscuits and cakes when customers place their order for drinks. However, three months after the training programme, the sales have not increased significantly. The Marketing Director thinks that this is due to staff not applying their training when working with customers. The Marketing Director has commissioned your research company to carry out mystery shopping research to find out why sales are not increasing as expected.

- a) Identify the benefits and limitations of mystery shopping research in identifying why sales have not increased. Give reasons for the points you identify.
(Weighting: one-half of total)
- b) Outline the steps you would take to ensure that you undertake this mystery shopping research in an ethical and professional manner at the following stages in the research process:
- (i) Before the research starts
 - (ii) Reporting the research results

Give reasons for the steps you suggest.

(Weighting: one-half of total)

Question 3

A major national charity which provides support for elderly people is concerned that many people find it difficult to access help when they need it. The charity has commissioned a qualitative study to explore the best ways of helping elderly people to access their services. You are leading the team of moderators who will be conducting a series of face-to-face group discussions with people aged 70+ across the country.

- a) Describe the steps you will take to ensure that valuable, consistent and ethically-robust insight is gathered from the study. Give reasons for the steps you suggest.

(Weighting: one-half of total)

- b) Devise an outline discussion guide for this series of group discussions, listing the topic areas you would cover. Give reasons for the elements you include.

(Weighting: one-half of total)

Question 4

Six months ago, a local gym set up a research programme to find out if gym members who attended exercise classes were more likely to lose weight than those who exercised alone. A census of all participants was conducted. These were the results they recorded:

	Exercise class	Gym-only workouts
<i>Participants</i>	43	57
<i>Mean weight loss over 6 months</i>	1.8 kgs	2.3 kgs
<i>Mode weight loss over 6 months</i>	1.6 kgs	1.8 kgs
<i>Standard deviation</i>	1.04	1.34

You have been asked to brief the gym staff on these results. However, none of them has a background in statistics.

- a) Describe what is meant by each of the statistical terms above (mean, mode & standard deviation) and the benefits and limitations of each when reporting results. Illustrate your answer with examples.

(Weighting: one-half of total)

- b) The staff at the gym want to know which type of exercise – gym-only workouts or attending exercise classes - is most effective in helping individuals lose weight. Prepare a short report which summarises and interprets the findings, using all of the statistics given in the table.

(Weighting: one-half of total)

Question 5

Your organisation regularly commissions research from a medium-sized agency. The agency has recently set up a training programme for junior researchers and has asked if you would be a guest speaker on the programme. They have asked you to speak to the trainees about the key things which clients look for in oral presentations of findings. The agency is particularly keen for you to speak about the three areas below. What key points would you cover in each area? Illustrate the points you make with practical examples:

- a) Structuring and illustrating research findings in presentations.
(Weighting: one-half of total)

- b) Ensuring that ethical practice is adhered to in presentations.
(Weighting: one-quarter of total)

- c) Dealing with clients' questions.
(Weighting: one-quarter of total)

Question 6

In recent years, there has been a marked reduction in the number of 18 – 21 year olds engaging with political parties. A general election is due to take place in the near future and the Government is keen to understand young people's attitudes to politics and to voting in elections. Knowing the high incidence of use of social media among the 18 – 21 year old age group, the Government department responsible for the research is keen to use social media to help them gather the information they need. They have asked for your help as an expert in social media research.

- a) Prepare a paper for the Government department outlining the strengths and limitations of doing social media research to find out about attitudes to political engagement and to voting in elections among the 18 – 21 year old age group. Illustrate your answer with examples.
(Weighting: one-half of total)

- b) The government department has commissioned the research. It needs to ensure that this social media research is conducted in an ethical manner. Outline the steps you will take to ensure that the information gathering is conducted in an ethical manner, giving reasons for the steps you suggest.
(Weighting: one-half of total)

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