Advanced Certificate in Market & Social Research Practice

EXAMINATION ANSWER GUIDE

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.

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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MRS Advanced Certificate Examination Answer Guide
25th June 2014

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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 section accounts for one-third of the total marks.

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

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)

Candidates are expected to identify a range of sources of both internal and external secondary data which could be used in this project. At pass level, candidates should identify a minimum of three sources (two internal and one external OR one internal and two external) 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 or might be used in the project and for relating the data/information to/setting it in the context of helping to build a good understanding of the issues and helping to define the objectives for primary research.

Sources and types may include some or all of the following:

Internal

- *Historic sales figures for tickets and for optional 'extras' (NB given the issue is decreased market share/profits over time, trend data will be important)*
- *Website analytics*
- *Customer demographics derived from booking information*
- *Advertising and PR spend data (i.e. £ spent promoting the airline)*
- *Customer satisfaction reports*
- *Customer complaints log*
- *Correspondence from customers and other stakeholders*
- *Previous research reports on the airline and its market*
- *Competitor intelligence reports*
- *History of changes made to pricing structures and product offers*

External

- *Demographic and geodemographic data*
- *Economic data, e.g. disposable income, discretionary spend*
- *Industry sector publications*
- *Annual reports published by competitors*
- *Market Research Report Publishers reports on relevant market sectors (e.g. Mintel)*
- *Trade bodies (Travel associations etc)*
- *Other sources such as syndicated projects*
- *Academic output*
- *Coverage in the press/media on activities of own and other airlines*

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)

This question requires candidates to devise an ethically-robust sampling plan for three groups in the population of interest: recent, lapsed and prospective customers. Clear rationale is needed for the suggestions at each stage. Stronger answers may address the sampling of more than one group within the same sampling design/plan, identifying where ethical issues might need to be taken into account at each stage. Weaker answers may fail to take into account the differences between the three groups and the implications these differences mean for the approach to be taken.

Recent Customers:	
Approach	Candidates may suggest either quota or random sample using SoarAway's customer database for their sample frame. It should be possible to identify date of last trip from this database. If quotas, stronger answers may identify sub-groups (e.g. by age/ buying patterns etc). An issue with the database may be the difference between those who book the flights and those who fly/are passengers; those who are guest users and those who are registered users. An alternative approach would be to conduct fieldwork on board the flights, first of all selecting a sample of the airline's routes/flight times, and then selecting a sample on a random or a quota basis on board the flight.
Sample source / frame	The sample frame will be the company database of customers
Ethical issues	Need to ensure that no opt-outs exist for contact with the customers in the sample, and that the data is up-to-date / has been cleaned. For in flight data gathering, main issue may be voluntary participation - passengers not feeling obliged to take part. Contact from databases should be with named customers only – family members may not be aware of travel.
Lapsed Customers:	
Approach	Quota or random sample again could be used, using the database for the sample frame. Stronger answers may recognize the sensitivities which might exist in re-contacting previous customers.
Sample source / frame	Sample could be drawn from the database. See above for possible issues with the database. Also the potential to use any correspondence which has been received to identify any key groups of former customers.
Ethical issues	Issues with age of data and recontact especially sensitive. Need to make sure that any data used is not beyond the date which it should be kept, and that there have been no withdrawals of permission to contact. Contact from databases should be with named customers only – family members may not be aware of travel.
Prospective Customers:	
Approach	It is likely that quota sample will be suggested as there is no sample frame for 'prospective' customers. An alternative approach here might be to ask questions on a general public omnibus survey or to design a bespoke survey on airline travel – it could be used to gather data on all three groups - the ability to gather a robust enough sample of recent, lapsed and prospective customers will depend on the incidence of airline travel, the incidence of use of SoarAway etc
Sample source / frame	Possible to identify a range of sources: people who have registered but not purchased; people who are visiting the company's social media pages; inserting an invitation to participate in a pop-up on the website to catch those who browse but don't register.
Ethical issues	Precautions in place to ensure that respondents are who they say they are – and, in particular, that they are adult respondents. If using social media, ensuring that contact conforms to MRS guidelines on online research – e.g. ensuring informed consent for data collection, no 'lurking' etc.

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

Candidates are required to identify how this extract could be improved. Stronger candidates might recognise that the questions do not focus fully on the types of information needed, and are likely to suggest improvements to both the questionnaire as a whole and to individual questions. Weaker candidates may not recognise this wider context, focusing instead on weaknesses within individual questions. They may also fail to provide convincing suggestions for improvement.

The weaknesses identified may include some or all of the following:

Overall:

- *This is a self-completion questionnaire but there are no instructions for respondents on how to complete the questions*
- *Data is not being collected at the optimum level in any of the questions*
- *The senior team want to know changes in people's flying habits. Although there is a question about how often people have flown with SoarAway Air, there is no reference to when people have flown. Should give a time frame – and follow this with a question finding out if this has changed in last year.*
- *There is no sense of 'flow' – we don't know how the questions relate to each other*

Question 5

- *There is no time frame for the number of flights taken – each customer might have a different length of 'history' with the airline. Also reliant on memory over a long period. Best to ask about 'in the past year' or 'in the past 2 years'*
- *Need to clarify whether you are asking for a round trip or a single journey (outward or return)*
- *Instructions needed.*

Question 6

- *Question wording is unnecessary if structure/filter used at Q5*
- *Could be deemed to be leading – how were the variables used identified and selected?*
- *Option d) is ambiguous*
- *How many of these options can the customer choose? Need for instructions*
- *Not sure what information is actually wanted. Is it an overall impression or do we want to gather opinions on all of these options (and others)? A Likert scale would yield more – and probably more accurate – information*
- *'If you have flown'… unnecessary as routing on online questionnaire will eliminate the 'never' group*
- *The question is asking about a single experience, but if customers have flown more than once which occasion are they being asked about? Could ask about the most recent experience*
- *Time frame reference required to set answer in context, e.g. Thinking about the last time you flew with SoarAway Air, (could also ask when that was, what route it was on), what was ….*
- *May be none of these options. Need to add an 'other: please specify' option*

Question 7

- *Response format does not match question – we don't know what yes/no refers to as 'agree or disagree' are asked in the question*
- *Unlikely for responses to be yes/no, more likely to have grades of agreement. Again, a Likert scale will offer better responses*
- *Could compare attitudes to competitors as well as to SoarAway*
- *No 'don't know' option for those who have no opinion*
- *Placing of question problematic, following as it does from Q6. Would have expected a question about what could be improved to follow on from 'what was the best thing?', 'What was the worst thing?'*

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)

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 qualitative or quantitative below;) what sampling approach; what method of data collection?*
Qualitative or quantitative	• *Clear objectives needed to be able to identify if qualitative or quantitative – or both – data are needed*
Sampling	• *Unclear objectives could lead to inappropriate sample design, problems with choice of sampling frame, issues in defining the population of interest etc*
Questionnaire/topic guide design	• *Questions should be relevant to the research objectives. Unclear objectives mean that important questions may be missed, that it may be difficult to understand or interpret or analyse or use the data collected*
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 information or, worse, give wrong info*

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)

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*

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)

At pass level, candidates are expected to provide at least one strength and one limitation of mystery shopping to help the company identify if staff lack of 'upselling' is at the heart of the company's failure to increase sales. Stronger answers are likely to give consideration to issues that might not be uncovered by mystery shopping, and to provide clear rationale for their points. Weaker answers may focus on generic strengths and limitations of mystery shopping without giving enough consideration to the context.

Strengths might include:

- *Can provide clear evidence if training is being applied*
- *Can ensure that the shopper's interaction with staff is constructed to identify other issues which might prevent upselling (e.g. shopper could ask additional questions about the goods; ask for additional services etc)*
- *Can assess if the sales approach is effective; the approach being used may be putting people off from spending more rather than encouraging the purchase of additional items*
- *Can observe/comment on the setting (e.g. the counter, the display, the availability of cakes and biscuits, the ease of moving from counter to seating with more than a coffee cup, the availability of seating, the tidiness/cleanliness of the shop in general and the seating area in particular, the time of day*

Limitations might include:

- *'Hawthorne' effect if staff know there is mystery shopping going on – will this drive a change in behaviour?*
- *Limited usefulness in uncovering issues which might not be down to staff behaviour, e.g. price of goods; location of coffee shops and target market, type of customer using a particular shop; space within the shop to eat etc.*
- *Limitations of sampling; if the problem is with specific branches and/or staff all of the relevant issues may not be identified during the mystery shopping exercise*
- *Need to train mystery shoppers to maximise validity and reliability of data collected*

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)

Candidates are expected to demonstrate that they know how the MRS Code applies to mystery shopping research, how to ensure that the field force is appropriately supported and briefed, and how to report results from a project like this one. Stronger answers are likely to demonstrate a clear understanding of areas of the MRS Code relating specifically to mystery shopping, and how to brief the field force so that the data gathered is reliable and valid. They will also recognise the need to report findings in a way which does not infringe data protection. Weaker answers may fail to recognise specific issues relating to mystery shopping, and may fail to recognise issues relating to the briefing of the field force in contexts such as this.

Before the research begins

The MRS Code of Conduct requires the researcher to:

- *agree the reporting requirements with the employer (i.e. is it at the level of the individual staff member, store level, etc?)*
- *ensure that the employer has informed staff about:*
    - *the purpose and scope of the mystery shopping*
    - *the level to which reporting will be completed*
    - *how the results will be used (e.g. will results affect an individual's terms and conditions, bonus etc?)*
    - *whether recording equipment will be used as part of the exercise*

The researcher also needs to:

- *brief the mystery shoppers to ensure they understand the aim of the research, the data collection tool, and what is/is not appropriate behaviour within the scope of the research*
- *ensure that mystery shoppers understand the implications of undertaking the mystery shopping exercise, particularly if their personal details might be stored by staff in the areas where they are shopping (e.g. if they use a loyalty card registered in their name)*
- *ensure that the client understands how the field force will be briefed and monitored*

Reporting the results

The researcher needs to adhere to all aspects of the MRS Code relating to required practice in reporting, e.g.:

- *ensuring that reports reflect accurately the data which has been collected*
- *making clear which data items are being used to support interpretations*
- *ensuring that tables etc provide enough information to enable reasonable interpretation of the validity of the results*
- *use of any recordings highlight the relevant issues and are reflective of the research as a whole.*
- *Individual staff members identities are protected if any recordings form part of the reporting e.g. voices disguised, tables blurred, etc.*

Specifically, the researcher needs to ensure that reporting complies with the information about reporting levels given to employees before the research project began.

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)

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.

Steps may include some of the following:

- *Construct and Review the research objectives: Ensure that there is shared understanding of the aims and the type of information required.*
- *Design and agree on the recruitment criteria.*
- *Design and agree an approach to recruitment and selection of respondents.*
- *Ensure that requirements for recording respondents' personal data are clear, including any sign-offs for recontact.*
- *Moderators to have early sight of/involvement in discussion guide development to ensure all are clear and comfortable with content and sequence.*
- *All moderators briefed at the same time to ensure all have sufficiently similar understanding.*
- *Review the discussion guide: Do all moderators agree on the aim and interpretation of the questions? Do all feel it can be covered in the time given for the group discussion?*
- *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?*
- *Identify potential issues which may arise with older respondents (e.g. concentration span; specific needs from the physical environment; illness or energy levels which might affect how long they will remain engaged).*
- *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.*
- *Review the make-up of the sample (i.e. geographical spread, gender mix etc): What similarities and differences are there? Can possible impacts on the data collection be anticipated?*
- *Arrange meeting/communication following the first round of groups if possible to discuss and resolve any problematic issues, and to do a debrief of early findings and examine their impact.*
- *Conducting research locations, such as NHS premises, may trigger DBS (formerly CRB) checks for moderators.*

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)

To achieve Pass level, candidates should identify a minimum of three issues with a rationale for choosing each. We are not expecting a full discussion guide, simply a framework or topic list.

Stimulus material could be used and might include copies of publicity for the charity's services, or past copies of newsletters etc.

Stronger answers are likely to be those that identify a range of issues/topics that relate to the research scenario and that present these in a clear and appropriate structure.
General areas in the guide may include some of the following:

Introduction:

- *Background to the project & informed consent for participation*
- *Recording arrangements*
- *Respondent introductions*
- *Inform respondents about what is going to happen*
- *General warm up questions relevant to topic*
- *Charity's role and remit*
- *General information on current services on offer*

Discussion / main body:

- *Perceptions of the services*
- *Use copies of charity magazines/website/other materials which carried information about the services offered*
- *Which services they have used/never used*
- *If never used, why never used*
- *If used, why*
- *If used, what issues arose*
- *How were these services accessed in the past*
- *How might they access these services in the future*
- *Factors that make access easier or more difficult*
- *Look at the list – are there any services which they need which aren't there? What would those services look like? How would they access them?*
- *If you were in charge of the charity, what would you do?*
- *Gather suggestions*

Close:

- *Summary of feelings, opinions, ideas, areas that could be improved etc*
- *One thing that you would tell the charity/main thing that they should learn from the group discussion*
- *Ensure respondents understand how information will be used; ensure consent for recontact if needed*
- *Thanks and close*

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
Participants	*43*	*57*
Mean weight loss over 6 months	*1.8 kgs*	*2.3 kgs*
Mode weight loss over 6 months	*1.6 kgs*	*1.8 kgs*
Standard deviation	*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)

Candidates are required to provide an accurate definition of each term. Stronger answers are likely to provide clear explanation of when each might, or might not, be useful, along with convincing illustrations. Weaker answers may provide only brief definitions and may fail to identify possible benefits and limitations.

Key information

The statistics – the mean and the mode - are averages or measures of central tendency.

The mean is calculated by adding all the observations (weight lost by each gym member in the group) together and dividing by the total.

Benefit: *If there is a limited range of observations, the mean can provide a useful 'shorthand' for understanding a general weight loss*
Limitation: *Because the mean is worked out this way, using all of the observations, outliers – extreme values – can have an effect on it*

The mode is the observation which appears most frequently in the group

Benefit: *Because the mode is worked out this way, outliers do not have an effect on its value. The mode can be a useful indicator of the average weight loss*
Limitation: *It cannot be used in further calculations and it does not take into account the range or distribution of weight loss*

The standard deviation is a measure of the spread or distribution or variability of the values around the mean.

Benefit: *Because it is used in connection with the mean, it can give a good indication of the range of observations or the spread of them around the mean and the variability of weight loss within the sample.*
Limitation: *When working with clients who may not be familiar with statistics, it will be important to provide clear guidance on understanding the standard deviation to guide any interpretation.*

In this case, exercise classes have a smaller standard deviation or lower variability at 1.04 compared to gym-only workouts at 1.34. This means that there is likely to be greater variation in the sample of gym-only workouts and <u>*may*</u> *indicate that there is perhaps a subset of more or less weight loss among this sample. This may be worth investigating further.*

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)

Candidates are required to bring together all of the statistics so that they can help the staff understand the extent to which the information answers their question. Stronger answers will provide a clear interpretation of the findings, showing how much they can safely say and identifying what isn't known. Weaker answers may simply reiterate the findings with little or no interpretation, or may look at each statistic in isolation to report what it says.

The summary report may contain some/all of the following points:
Gym-only appears at first glance to be better for weight loss than exercise classes. The mean or average weight loss is greater, at 2.3kgs. However, when we look at the modes, there is less of a difference between gym-only and exercise classes. The most usual amount to lose in gym-only workouts was 1.8kgs, compared with 1.6kgs for the exercise class participants. This is accounted for when we look at the range of weight loss. The standard deviation of 1.04 for exercise class participants shows that there is less variation in the weight loss of the people included in this group. There is much greater variation in the gym-only group, indicating that some may have lost a lot more than the 2.3kg average, and some may have lost a lot less. It would be important to look at the sample to see if, for example, the gym-only group contained people who had higher weight-loss goals.

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)

Candidates may or may not begin with a general statement about the importance of effective presentations for clients. Stronger answers may reflect on the importance of seeing the presentation from the client's perspective, and tailor their points accordingly. Weaker answers may provide a shorter list of generic points for good presentations, with little consideration of what the client needs.

Candidates should identify a minimum of two suggestions, and provide a convincing justification for its inclusion and/or illustration of why each is important. Stronger answers are expected to provide a wider range of justified suggestions.

- *Bear in mind at all times the information needed by the client (what were the research objectives).*
- *Consider the client audience and the time they have available for the presentation.*
- *Identify the clients' levels of market research expertise and ensure presentation is tailored accordingly.*
- *Identify any potential ethical issues, e.g. at what level the data can be reported.*
- *Identify which findings are key to the problem and the proposed solution – select and highlight these as a point of focus.*
- *Ensure a logical flow through presentation – think about the narrative thread.*
- *Set the scene briefly and clearly (tell them what you're going to tell them, etc).*
- *Use appropriate visual aids (e.g. graphs and diagrams) to illustrate findings.*
- *Keep amount of detail on slides to a minimum.*
- *Ensure that the presentation is do-able in the time available – i.e. make sure number of slides are manageable.*
- *Ensure an appropriate balance of 'project history' (i.e. what we did) and findings – if there's too much background, clients may switch off by the time you get to findings.*
- *Discuss results with key client contact in advance, and agree appropriate structure and format for presentation.*
- *Agree/decide whether to start with conclusions and recommendations and then cover the detailed findings that lead to these, or start with findings and end with conclusions and recommendations.*
- *Rehearse before the actual presentation.*

b) Ensuring that ethical practice is adhered to in presentations.

(Weighting: one-quarter of total)

Although there may be fewer points to make in this section, candidates need to be aware that they need to be able to give clients assurances of ethical practice, including of respondents' rights and researchers' responsibilities. They need to know how these have been incorporated into the project. Candidates should identify a minimum of two justified suggestions in order to meet pass level for this section.

- *Need to be aware of how respondents were briefed about the research project and its aims and the end use of the data before presenting findings*
  - *Research data including recorded data can only be used for the purpose for which it was collected*
  - *Direct, attributable quotes or video/audio clips can only be used if respondents have agreed that these can be used*
  - *Personal details of respondents can only be used if with the prior agreement of respondents*
- *Must ensure that all conclusions presented are supported by the findings*
- *Quotes used must be reflective of the research as a whole; if atypical answers are quoted, this must be pointed out*
- *Do not use data from other clients' surveys (unless agreed with those clients)*
- *In dealing with clients' question or requests for follow-up research re-contacting of respondents can only be conducted with the prior agreement of the respondents*
- *If the recorded data is passed to the client the data must only be used for research purposes*
- *Recorded data can only be passed to the client with the informed consent of all the respondents involved in the recording*

c) Dealing with clients' questions.

(Weighting: one-quarter of total)

Candidates should identify a minimum of two suggestions, and provide a convincing justification for its inclusion and/or illustration of why each is important.

Preparation: Ensure that you:

- *are fully familiar with the different stages of the research project and how they interlink*
- *can justify why particular approaches were taken*
- *understand the parameters of the sample and how representative it is (quantitative research)*
- *understand the parameters of the sample for qualitative research stages*
- *understand how data was analysed, and any other possible approaches which could be taken to analysis*
- *can identify any potential limitations on findings and recommendations, and how these might be offset*
- *can distinguish between factual data and interpretation*
- *ask colleagues to observe a run-through of your presentation and identify potential questions*
- *ask the client if they know of any questions that might be raised prior to the presentation*
- *decide at what point/s during the presentation you will invite questions*

In the presentation:

- *structure presentation to give space for questions*
- *tell the audience when you will take questions - set the ground rules at the start e.g. questions throughout or at the end*
- *careful listening – ensure you understand the question fully before answering*
- *know the parameters of your authority – do not promise further actions which you are not in a position to deliver*
- *think of ways to deflect/delay questions which you cannot answer on the spot e.g. answer truthfully if you do not know; avoid jumping to an answer just because the client has asked the question*
- *project calmness and confidence – avoid fidgeting and moving around, choose an appropriate place to stand/sit; make appropriate eye contact etc.*
- *be familiar with research findings, as may be asked about things not covered in the presentation, or asked for more detail on things only covered in part*
- *be prepared to say that you can't answer a question there and then and ensure answer given asap after presentation*

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)

At pass level, candidates should identify at least two strengths and two limitations of social media research. Stronger answers are likely to provide a wider range of strengths and limitations; weaker answers are likely to give fewer strengths/limitations and those of a more generic nature.

At pass level, candidates should mention that the population of users of social media is not the same as the population of young adults, that is, not all young adults use social media and so users are not representative of the population of young adults as a whole.

Stronger answers are likely to include a definition of what social media is (i.e. electronic media which allow individuals to interact and contribute their own ideas). Stronger answers are also likely to mention a range of different types of social media, e.g. online forums/discussions, communities, blogs, social bookmarking sites, social networks, as well as 'brands'. Weaker answers may identify only 'brands' of social media, e.g. Facebook, Twitter, Linked-In, Flickr, YouTube, Digg, Del.icio.us.

Stronger answers are also likely to offer a definition or description of what is meant by social media research and to give examples of different approaches, e.g. social media monitoring, netnography, co-creational techniques, online communities etc.

Credit should be given for answers which identify what particular type/s of research might contribute to the research aims.

Definition of social media:
e.g. websites and applications that enable users to create and share content and/or to take part in social networking; sites that allow user participation and user-generated content – the construction of words, pictures, video and audio,.

Types of social media:
online forum/discussions, communities, blogs, social networks

Social media platforms:
e.g. Facebook, Twitter, Linked-In, Flickr, Instagram, YouTube, social bookmarking sites eg Del.icio.us, Digg, blogs

Social media data:
information generated by users, user-generated content

Definition of social media research:
Research involving social media

Types of social media research:
Quantitative and qualitative
- *Monitoring or crawling social media platforms (from automated to ad hoc research)*
- *Ethnographic research (from observing to participating), e-ethnography, netnography*
- *Co-creational techniques*
- *Online communities*

Strengths
Access:
- *to people from a range of backgrounds (a diverse group)*
- *to people that are otherwise hard to reach*
- *to a lot of people*
- *to particular groups, e.g. those with extreme views*
- *to unfiltered conversations – i.e. not driven by a researcher*
- *to the language and mode of expression of the group*

Insight:
- *that may not be available by other research means*
- *into ways of thinking, development of attitudes*

Tracking:
- *conversations, development of ideas/attitudes etc over time*

Offers flexibility/research design options
- *Can use polls, questions, start discussions*
- *Online group discussions, recruiting for offline groups*
- *Can look at individual and group and community level attitudes and behaviour in combination with qualitative research*
- *Good for getting hard to reach groups – can use direct surveys, recruit survey participants*

Logistics:
- *Easy to set up*
- *Relatively cheap for the reach that can be achieved*
- *Fast turnaround*
- *Can share information etc quickly*
- *Individual, one to one communication and communication with a group*
- *Direct interaction*
- *Opportunity for collaboration*
- *Can use for further networking, beyond original contacts*

All the strengths of 'at a distance' research

What it can be used for:
- *To find out what people are saying*
- *To spot issues, trends*
- *To identify groups, subcultures*
- *To find influencers*
- *To identify/understand use of language/identity etc*
- *To run real time analysis of reaction to events, announcements, speeches etc*
- *To help refine messages etc for ad/campaign development*

- *To help determine audiences for targeting campaigns*
- *To evaluate campaigns/messages*
- *To help interpret etc findings of other research*

Limitations

Sample/population/generalising findings:

- *The users of social media are not representative of the population as a whole so the findings from any research using social media cannot be generalised to the population*

Ethical issues:

- *how to respect the rights of those being researched*
- *privacy, confidentiality, copyright and terms of use - permission/consent from the user to use the material they have on their social media*

Verification issues:

- *is the respondent/blogger/participant etc who they say they are, how can you verify this, what self-image are they presenting*

Doing the research:

- *Time intensive*
- *Mass of information/data – how to handle it, potential for overload of information/data, what/how to analyse*

Getting participation:

- *Easy to ignore/not take part*
- *Low engagement levels*
- *Limited control on part of researcher*

Getting data:

- *Technical aspects, degree of technical sophistication involved*
- *Knowledge of how big data sets work*
- *Limits set by Terms of Use/Terms of Service of the social media site*

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)

At pass level, candidates should be able to identify that research using social media is subject to the same ethical requirements as all other forms of research, and the steps they outline should reflect this awareness. Answers are expected make specific reference to the MRS Code of Conduct or the principles in the MRS Code, and stronger answers might also reference guidelines on the use of social networking. Weaker answers might fail to identify research using social media is covered by the principles of the MRS Code, or may simply list steps without providing a sufficient rationale for their inclusion.

Steps might include some or all of the following:

- *Key principles of Code, including informed consent, anonymity and confidentiality, apply. In particular, informed consent is required if personal data is extracted from social media sites.*
- *This is research into a specific group of young adults. Respondents will have to be screened and verified to ensure that they are within the target population.*
- *Data gathered and held in accordance with Data Protection Act*
- *Analysis of data to meet requirements of MRS Code, giving sufficient detail to provide assurance of validity of any findings*
- *If undertaking research in 'walled garden' social media sites, chatrooms, etc need to identify as a researcher if engaging participants in conversations, etc.*
- *Restrictions on undertaking online ethnographic observations*
- *Limitations on the use of user generated content "scrapped" from social media sites, etc.*