Advanced Certificate in Market & Social Research Practice

EXAMINATION ANSWER GUIDE

28th June 2017
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.

With members in more than 50 countries, MRS is the world's leading authority on research and business intelligence.

MRS Advanced Certificate Examination Answer Guide
28th June 2017

MRS
The Old Trading House
15 Northburgh Street
London EC1V 0JR

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

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.

Every year, all 15 year-old school students across the country complete a 2-week Work Experience Programme towards the end of the school year. Each student spends two weeks working for an employer who has volunteered to offer a placement. The programme is intended to help the students make career and study choices and to prepare them for the world of work. However, the government is concerned that the programme is not achieving its aims. Recent news stories have highlighted complaints from the students and their parents about the range and quality of placements, and from employers about the support provided for them and for the students.

The government has commissioned your research agency to find out how the Work Experience Programme could be made more effective in achieving the above objectives. This research will involve gathering information from the students and employers along with parents and school staff.

Before commencing with a national programme of research, the agency intends to conduct an initial study at six schools in different regions of the country, using both qualitative and quantitative research. It hopes that information gathered during this initial study will help inform the national study. The schools involved have agreed to participate in the research.

Question A

Identify and explain benefits that might be gained from conducting this initial study prior to roll-out of the full national study. Illustrate your answer with examples.

(Weighting: one third of total)

In order to pass, candidates are expected to identify and explain a minimum of two benefits that might be gained from conducting this limited study. Stronger answers might identify a wider range of benefits and/or provide clear and useful illustration that demonstrates depth of understanding.

Potential benefits include:

- *the opportunity to identify issues/ areas which can be included in the wider study*
- *the chance to pilot the data collection instruments (e.g. questionnaire)*
- *opportunity to pilot the sampling method and recruitment processes*
- *opportunity to plan for the full project from a timing perspective*
- *the opportunity to generate hypotheses which can be tested at the next stage*
- *the chance to identify possible problems and how to overcome them – e.g. unforeseen issues which prevent groups from participating; bad times to conduct the research etc.*
- *establish vocabulary appropriate for the target populations*
- *opportunity to develop a more closed-ended questionnaire for the wider study, resulting in greater cost-efficiency for the quant stage*

Question B

The agency has decided to conduct the qualitative phase of the research first. It intends to hold qualitative group discussions with groups of students and groups of staff at each school, and to conduct telephone depth interviews with a number of parents and employers in each of the selected areas.

Design an outline sampling plan for this stage of the research. Your plan should include:

- the sampling criteria for the selection of participants from each group
- the sample sources or sampling frames you intend to use

Give reasons for your suggestions.

(Weighting: one-third of total)

This question requires candidates to demonstrate that they understand the principles of sampling for exploratory research.

At pass level, the candidate should identify at least one criterion for sample selection for each of the groups within the target population and how that sample might be identified. Stronger answers may provide a wider range of criteria, argue that previous participants' responses should be given greater weighting than potential participants' responses, and may provide greater depth of rationale. Weaker answers may provide simply a list of suggestions with no analysis.

Group / criteria	***Source / Frame***
Students: ○ *Past participants* ○ *Students about to participate* ○ *Satisfied students* ○ *Dissatisfied students*	○ *School register for recent and planned participants* ○ *No frame available for former students, so other approaches to recruitment required – e.g. social media 'friends' of the school*
School staff: ○ *Teachers of year groups involved in programme* ○ *Staff involved in organising placements* ○ *Senior staff involved in running of the programme*	○ *School staff list*
Parents: ○ *Those with satisfied children who have participated* ○ *Those with dissatisfied children who have participated* ○ *Those with children about to participate*	○ *School register provides the information*
Employers: ○ *Those who have offered placements* ○ *Those who have volunteered to offer placements* ○ *Major employers who have not (yet) participated* ○ *SMEs who have not (yet) participated*	○ *School will have a list of those employers participating* ○ *Local directories for contacts of non-participating employers* ○ *Chamber of Commerce for contacts of local employer*

Question C

Identify the ethical issues you need to consider when recruiting each of the groups in the sample. Describe how you will ensure ethically-robust recruitment of each group in the sample, giving reasons for your suggestions.

(Weighting: one third of total)

This question requires candidates to demonstrate their understanding of ethical considerations in sampling and how these affect recruitment. At pass level, candidates must identify the following two key issues and provide appropriate ideas for addressing these issues:

- *The requirements for conducting research with under 16s, in particular the need for informed consent from parents as well as students*
- *The data protection issues relating to the use of school databases for access to personal information*

Stronger answers may identify a wider range of considerations, provide well-justified approaches to recruitment, and provide more detailed discussion of what informed consent means (e.g. explain clearly the purpose of research, how findings will be used, issues about recording/filming, etc). Weaker answers may fail to identify the two key issues and may fail to demonstrate an understanding of how they can affect recruitment and how they might be addressed.

Some issues and recruitment ideas might include the following:

Issue	***Possible approach to recruitment***

Students
○ *Current group are under 16 therefore parent/responsible adult permission is needed for research*
○ *Research agency cannot have direct access to school database*
○ *Access to students who have left school difficult*
	○ *For 15 year olds / all current pupils – ask School to send letter to parents asking for permission and response*
	○ *For former pupils:*
	    ○ *Call via social media (e.g. school facebook page)*
	    ○ *Snowball sampling – asking participants to encourage others to contact*

Staff ○ *Current staff school email addresses can be used – but not personal ones*	○ *Email to relevant staff using staff email* ○ *Notice in staff room?*
Parents ○ *As with students, school database cannot be used directly by agency*	○ *Invitation letter from school?* ○ *Social media invitation to parents following school?*
Employers ○ *School database cannot be used directly* ○ *Identifying non-participants may be difficult – how can an appropriate selection be made?*	○ Invitation directly from school asking for permission to contact?

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

Your organisation has carried out a primary research project for a new client and you are preparing to write the final report.

a) Outline the steps you would take when planning the report to ensure its usefulness to the client. Explain why each step is important.

(Weighting: one-half of total)

Candidates are expected to provide at least 3 steps as evidence that they understand not only how to produce the 'finished product' (i.e. write a report) but also how to ensure that it is of maximum benefit to the client. Weaker candidates are likely to provide a list of steps for report writing, without considering the usefulness of each step to the client. Stronger candidates are likely to look for ways to add value (particularly as this is a new client).

Some candidates may write a structure for a report rather than steps taken to maximise the usefulness of the report. This obviously doesn't directly answer the question but some of the points made can be relevant to the answer required and should receive credit.

Possible steps could include:

- *go back to original brief and proposal to find out what was originally asked, and what was promised in terms of deliverables*
- *make sure that you are fully aware of the business objectives and the decisions which need to be made as a result of the research*
- *make sure you understand who the audience is for the report, and consider how this will affect the structure of the report*
- *if you are not the principal contact with the client, talk with the person who is, to find out if needs/requirements have changed during the life of the project*
- *check that you understand the relevance of each part of the research project to the problem and research objectives, and that you have identified any limitations*
- *talk through the findings that are emerging with the client to see if they can provide further insight that you could explore in the data*
- *if relevant, check if any external events could have influenced the data that would be worth examining and commenting on (e.g. if your client received some bad publicity while the interviewing was in progress that may have influenced the views of those participants who were interviewed after the bad news became known)*
- *do you know the limits of the research – i.e. what you can say for sure based on this data, and what the information doesn't tell you?*
- *do a 'common-sense' check – are the recommendations you suggest practicable?*

b) Outline the checks you would make to ensure that the finished report adheres to the MRS Code of Conduct and ethical practice. Explain why each check is important.

(Weighting: one-half of total)

Candidates need to demonstrate that they understand how participants' rights and researchers' responsibilities should be reflected in the research report. Candidates should identify a minimum of two justified checks in order to meet pass level for this section.

Checks they could make include:

- *Check how participants were briefed before presenting findings to ensure any assurances made to participants are honoured*
    - *Research data including recorded data can only be used for the purpose for which it was collected*
    - *Can't use direct, attributable verbatim quotes unless participants have agreed that these can be used*
    - *Can't provide personal details of participants unless prior agreement has been obtained*
    - *Participants have to have given permission to be re-contacted for any follow-up research that the client may wish to conduct as a result of this research*
- *Check that all conclusions presented are supported by the findings, and that facts are clearly differentiated from interpretation*
    - *Check that the report makes clear which data is being used to support interpretation*
    - *Check that verbatims are reflective of the research as a whole*
    - *Check that graphs of participant responses include the sample size, and that statistically significant differences are made clear*
- *Check that data tables include sufficient technical information to enable reasonable interpretation of the validity of the results*
- *In the case of a qualitative report, ensure that it accurately reflects the findings of the research in addition to the practitioners' interpretations and conclusions*
- *Check that information regarding sample source(s) and possible bias is provided*
- *Check that you have not incorporated data from other clients' surveys (unless agreed with those clients)*
- *Check that the client is aware that, were they to publish any incorrect or misleading reporting, the agency would be obliged to 'correct', in an appropriate forum, the relevant technical details of the project that were inaccurately reported (item 57 in the Code of Conduct)*

Question 2

CfBS is a charity which campaigns for improved public services across the country. The Board of the charity has commissioned your agency to carry out research into the improvements citizens want to see in services. The results will be used to help ***CfBS*** target their campaigning activities. You are the client's key contact and they have requested information about how the data will be analysed.

a) The Board members have heard of the following terms but want to understand them more fully. Describe what is meant by each term and outline its importance in the analysis of quantitative data. Illustrate your answer with examples.

i) sampling error
ii) confidence interval
iii) significance testing

(Weighting: two-thirds of total)

This section of the question requires candidates to show that they

- *know what each term means*
- *can demonstrate their understanding of the relevance of each term to the analysis of quantitative data.*

In order to pass, candidates should provide a convincing description or definition of at least two of the three terms as well as a demonstration of their understanding of their importance (use) in the context of data analysis.

Weaker answers may simply provide a definition, with little reflection on the relevance of the concept to the analysis process. Stronger answers are likely to provide a clear description or definition plus clear examples from the charity sector (i.e. relating to CfBS) to illustrate the links between the term and the analysis process.

Sampling Error

- *Key points in a description include:*
  - *Sampling error is error that arises during the process of sampling, at any stage from the definition of the population of interest to the choice of sampling approach and the administration of the sample*
  - *Sampling errors might arise because the sample is not appropriately representative of the population of interest or if the sampling frame is problematic (e.g. it provides inadequate coverage of the population of interest, out of date etc)*
  - *Answers should demonstrate that the candidate understands that sampling error affects the ability to make inferences about the population of interest from the sample*

Confidence Interval

- *Key points in a description include:*
  - *The confidence interval refers to the range of values around the sample value or statistic within which we expect the population value to lie*
  - *The confidence interval is a measure of how well the sample statistic estimates the population parameter. The two extremes of the confidence interval are known as the confidence limits*

- *Answers should demonstrate that the candidate recognizes the use and value of the confidence interval in understanding how well the sample statistic estimates the population parameter*

Significance testing

- *Key points in a description include:*
    - *Significance testing is statistical testing that is done to determine the extent to which a sample statistic can be said to be significantly different from the population parameter*
    - *It is the process of carrying out statistical tests that allow the researcher to generalise (make inferences) from the sample data to the population from which the sample was drawn with a known amount of confidence that the difference is not one that could have arisen by chance*
- *Answers should demonstrate that the candidate understands that significance testing enables the researcher to make inferences from the sample data to the population as a whole*

b) The Board members stress that ***CfBS*** needs to have confidence in the results of the survey as major decisions may rest on the results. The charity needs to be sure that the results can be robustly defended if challenged. You inform the Board members that steps will be taken to minimise sampling error in the survey. Outline the steps you will take, giving reasons for each step you suggest.

(Weighting: one-third of total)

This section requires candidates to demonstrate their understanding of the links between the various stages of the sampling process and the final results.

At pass level, the candidates should identify a minimum of two steps that can be taken, along with convincing rationale. Weaker answers may identify steps but provide a description of – rather than rationale for – those steps. Stronger answers are likely to demonstrate greater depth of understanding of the impact of decisions taken in sampling on the resultant information, especially with the context of the charity sector (i.e. CfBS).

Some examples of the types of steps which might be suggested include:

- *establishing clearly the population of interest*
- *deciding on an appropriate approach to sampling – probability sampling is possible in this case (e.g. stratified sample, taking into account differences between segments of the populations) would allow sampling error to be calculated*
- *if a quota approach is to be used, need to ensure that:*
  - *the info on which the quota controls are based is up to date*
  - *limit any selection bias as far as possible*
  - *ensure that the final sample is appropriately weighted so that all quota groups are weighted appropriately*
- *ensuring that all steps in the sampling process are carried out to a high standard*
- *planning in a series of checks during the survey period to see if sample is being achieved and to take steps to rectify if not*
- *taking steps to ensure that the response rate is maximised*
- *once the survey is completed, consider steps such as weighting of results if samples are not fully achieved*

Question 3

You are a senior research executive in a small, full-service research agency. Until now, the agency has offered clients the option of having face-to-face survey interviews administered using paper and pen or computer-assisted technology. However, it has now decided to administer all face-to-face interviews using online surveys loaded onto tablet computers.

a) Outline the benefits and limitations of the research agency's decision to conduct all interviews using online surveys administered on tablet computers. Illustrate your answer with examples.

(Weighting: one-half of total)

This question requires candidates to evaluate the pros and cons of technology-based interviewing and/or technology-based (i.e. online) data collection, particularly in comparison to traditional pen and paper-based interviews.

At Pass level, candidates are expected to identify at least two benefits and one limitation of data collection using online methods (e.g. face-to-face tablets, online survey), and provide examples that illustrate their answer. Stronger answers may identify a wider range of benefits and several limitations linked to the agency's business decision (i.e. the use of face-to-face interviews using a tablet computer). Weaker answers may identify generic benefits of online surveys, without considering the context of the question. They may also fail to identify limitations in any depth.

Examples of possible benefits and limitations are listed below. These are not comprehensive lists and credit should be given to any convincing benefits presented.

Benefits

- *May be quicker for field force to administer if they don't have to write*
- *May reduce error (e.g. if handwriting isn't needed; if interviewer can't move on if a question is missed)*
- *Much quicker to process*
- *Can provide client with immediate reports on progress of the interviewing – e.g. can see if sample/quota is being achieved*
- *May match expectations of survey participants (i.e. people may see paper and pen as old fashioned / too laborious)*

Limitations

- *There may be clients who want/need a paper and pen option (e.g. data protection policies may restrict the type of survey software which they can allow to be used)*
- *Depending on location chosen for interview, there may be restrictions on using online surveys (e.g. lack of broadband cover; firewalls in institutions)*
- *Depending on the survey software chosen there may be restrictions on the types of questions permitted – this would mean question formats being dictated by the software as opposed to the research*
- *Still needs questionnaire design skills and data checking skills – this doesn't reduce the workload in these areas*
- *Less flexibility to adapt questionnaire responses using on-line software than with paper and pen*

b) You are working on a project for a mobile phone retailer, looking at the phone usage habits of young people aged 17 to 24. The interviews for this project will be conducted face-to-face in the town centre by interviewers using the agency's tablet computers. You are about to brief a new group of field interviewers before they start the data collection phase.

Outline the steps that the interviewers must take to ensure that the data is collected in a professional and ethically-robust manner, explaining why each step is important.

(Weighting: one-half of total)

This section of the question requires candidates to identify the responsibilities of interviewers in ensuring the professional and ethically-robust collection of data.

At Pass level, candidates should identify at least three steps that interviewers must take if data collection is to be robust and professional. In order to pass, candidates must identify that the interviewers need to gain the participant's informed consent to participate in the interview. Stronger answers are likely to identify a longer list of steps, and may link these to the appropriate stage in the interview process. Weaker answers may simply list tasks that interviewers carry out, with no reference to ethical requirements. They may also fail to provide convincing evidence of understanding why each task is important for professional and ethically robust data collection.

Examples of steps include:

Before the interviews

- *Ensuring they are fully familiar with the questionnaire, the instructions and how to work the technology*
- *Ensuring that they have the necessary connection (i.e. linked to Wi-Fi or 4G) before interviewing starts*
- *Ensuring they have supplies of information about the research and who they are which they can give to participants*

During interviews

- *Intercepting people politely and not being aggressive/pushy at any point*
- *Introducing themselves and showing their MRS ID to establish their bona fide role*
- *Conducting screening questions to ensure that the potential respondent should be included (particularly important to screen out under-17s)*
- *Ensuring that participants give their informed consent before the interview begins and that they know they can stop at any time*
- *Conducting the interview consistently, not straying from script so that all interviews are carried out to the same standard*
- *Ensuring that participant understands if there will be any follow up /checking and why this is necessary*

Following interviews

- *Ensure all questionnaires are complete and submitted*
- *Store tablet and any associated information in accordance with agency's procedures, as well as those mandated by the Data Protection Act*

Question 4

A major healthcare company has designed three new 'lifestyle programmes' designed to help people reduce their risk of developing diabetes and heart disease. The company is planning a phased launch of the programmes, and the Chief Executive needs to decide which programme to launch first. The company's research manager has suggested that a programme of qualitative research, using focus groups, will help the company gather the information it needs.

The Chief Executive is more familiar with quantitative research. After discussion, the research manager has convinced the Chief Executive that qualitative research is an appropriate method given the circumstances. However, the Chief Executive now wants to know what steps can be taken during the qualitative research to ensure robust and valid results.

a) Describe the steps the research manager could adopt during the qualitative research to help convince the Chief Executive that the planned qualitative research will provide valid and useful information to inform the company's decisions. Give reasons for the steps you suggest.

(Weighting: one-half of total)

This question requires candidates to provide examples of actions that researchers can adopt to ensure the robustness of qualitative research. Implicit within the provision of these actions is that they will provide reassurance to the Chief Executive.

At pass level, candidate should identify a minimum of two steps supported by detailed rationale, or more steps with more limited but convincing rationale. Stronger answers may identify a sequence of steps and provide clear justification for the sequence. Weaker answers may provide generic statements about the benefits of research without consideration of the context.

Steps could include:

- *Review the research objectives to ensure that there is a shared understanding of the aims and the type of information required – shared between the CEO and the research team*
- *Review the discussion guide to ensure it meets the research objectives*
- *Ensure all moderators/interviewers agree on the aim and interpretation of questions and agree that all topic areas can be covered in the time available*
- *Ensure agreement on what data will be recorded and how it will be recorded*
- *Ensure appropriate training of all research staff using tablets (i.e. to ensure interviews look professional, and that no data is lost from tablets during transfer to analysis centre)*
- *Review the make-up of groups – e.g. geographical spread; age; income levels etc. What similarities and differences are there? Are there potential impacts on the data collection?*
- *Consider how to get an appropriate spread to address possible impacts identified above – e.g. are online groups possible to address geographic differences'*
- *Agree on the purpose and structure of tasks, including how and when projective or other techniques might be used*
- *Discuss analysis plan with CEO so he understands the approach being taken*
- *Could suggest that findings from qual phase could be tested further in a quant phase to provide the statistical reliability if required*
- *Invite CEO to attend groups to see how the data is being uncovered, collected and probed*

b) Describe at least three projective techniques that moderators could use in the focus groups to gather the information that the Chief Executive needs. Give reasons for the suggestions you make.

(Weighting: one-half of total)

In order to pass this section, candidates must identify three techniques and provide an appropriate description and rationale for at least one of these. Stronger answers may make clear links between the context and the use of the techniques. Weaker answers are likely to provide more generic descriptions of the techniques.

Some possible techniques include:

- *Word association*
- *Picture association*
- *Sentence completion*
- *Collage*
- *Projective questioning*
- *Personalisation of the brand*
- *Choice ordering*
- *Visualisation*
- *Analogies*

Question 5

A group of your friends have had an idea for a new business. They would like to launch The Coffee Bus: an old bus remodelled as a mobile café. The Coffee Bus would provide the comfort of a traditional café with flexibility, allowing them to move their café around the town. Your friends would like to bid for business start-up funding and need to provide evidence of the viability of their idea. They have limited financial resources so you have suggested a programme of secondary research to help support their bid for funding.

a) What are the potential benefits and limitations of a programme of secondary research in this context? Illustrate your answer with examples.

(Weighting: one-third of total)

At pass level, candidates are expected to identify a minimum of two advantages and two limitations. Candidates are expected to provide clear examples for the points they make.

Advantages	***Limitations***
• *Cost effective – there may be existing research on different types of start ups and street food vending* • *Accessible – wide range of sources available so a range of material can be gathered* • *Not necessary to employ an agency – sources can be searched by non-researchers* • *Info gathered might indicate a range of possibilities not considered previously*	• *Needs some expertise to ensure that appropriate sources are consulted* • *Need to be aware of possible bias (e.g. who commissioned the research?)* • *Need to be aware of scope of research – how representative, reliable and valid is the information?* • *Some sources may be time consuming or difficult to track down* • *May be difficult to make an accurate synthesis of all the data* • *Will not give the depth, breadth and insight that primary research would.* • *Need to ensure ethical practice when using social media or other online data sources* • *Need some skill to accurately interpret and use the secondary source effectively*

b) Your friends are aware of the importance of having robust information to support their bid. They have asked you to set up a programme of secondary research which they will carry out under your supervision. Devise a plan for this research, outlining how you will set up the programme and how you will ensure that data is gathered in an ethically-robust way. Give clear rationale for the suggestions you make.

(Weighting: two-thirds of total)

Candidates are expected to provide a brief plan, with clear steps outlined. The plan should be convincing in that it should provide:

- *Logical progression*
- *Clear rationale for each step included*

At pass level, candidates are expected to provide a plan with at least three stages listed below and some rationale. Stronger answers may provide more than four stages, greater depth of rationale for suggestions and relate this convincingly to the context of a small business. They may also highlight how, if social media sources are used, data is gathered with due regard to ethics. Weaker answers may focus on data gathering without giving due consideration to the other stages, such as preparing to carry out the research or deciding how to analyse it. There may be no reflection on how to draw data from social media in an ethical manner.

Steps may include some or all of the following:

- *Identify the market accurately – in order to select type of info required*
- *Identify key competitors – in order to identify possible sources (e.g. competitors' websites)*
- *Draw up list of sources and the type of info sought on each*
- *Identify internet and non internet sources e.g.*
  - *finding out which magazines and websites operate in this area (food magazines; trade journals)*
  - *visits to appropriate social media sites to gauge the types of discussions carried out*
  - *existing reports/data sets available for purchase or via subscription*
- *Allocate the research activity – will one person be responsible for data gathering or will this be split between different people?*
- *Ensure that all are aware of the need to adhere to ethical practice if visiting social media sites, e.g.:*
  - *No collection of personal data without the individual's consent*
  - *Avoid collecting personal data when monitoring or analysing social media content*
  - *No 'lurking': if they interact in any way they need to ensure that other participants know they are there for research purposes*
- *Decide how to record the information – categories of information; recording opinions/attitudes expressed in the information etc*
- *Plan on how to collate the data gathered – identify how to prioritise the different types of data gathered*
- *How will it be analysed/presented/communicated*
- *Action planning – what will be done as a result of the info? How does this relate to the research objectives?*

Question 6

Look at the following scenarios:

i) Your client is a major high-street bank which has always taken pride in how well it knows its customers. Following the economic downturn, the bank is keen to find out how it might best develop its services to retain its existing personal banking (that is, non-business) customers. To gauge opinion on a range of initiatives it would like to conduct a quantitative survey among these existing customers.

ii) Your client is the local government in a major city. In order to reduce environmental pollution it plans to introduce charges for motorists to drive into and through the city centre. To gauge opinion of the proposed charges it would like to conduct a quantitative survey among those who commute into and through the city centre by car and by public transport.

Choose **one** of the scenarios above and answer the following questions.

a) Identify and describe the sampling approach that you think is most appropriate for the scenario you have chosen. Give a rationale for your choice.

(Weighting: one-half of total)

Credit should be given for an appropriate selection of a sampling approach and for the rationale given for this choice. It is important that the rationale provided for the approach suggested demonstrates that the candidate has considered the needs of the context and evaluated their selection.

At Pass level answers should provide a convincing description of the approach selected, how it works in practice for the scenario chosen and a rationale for their choice. The approach chosen should be practicable for the scenario.

Stronger answers are likely to show clear links to the scenario, be able to identify the population of interest for that scenario, choose an appropriate design and demonstrate a depth of understanding of the sampling process. The strongest answers may also identify limitations of the selected option and the problems that might be encountered in executing it. Stronger answers may also note the relationship between the sample design or sampling approach and the overall research design including the choice of method of data collection. Weaker answers are likely to choose an unsuitable approach and/or give a more limited and/or more generic description of how it works and a weaker justification for the choice made, failing to identify the population of interest and/or not recognising any of the limitations of the chosen approach or the issues it raises.

Scenario (i): Arguments might be made for either random or quota sampling in this scenario. Given that the bank has their customer list as a sample frame and they want to assess communication across their customer base, random or stratified random sampling (i.e. across different customer groups) might be appropriate. However, arguments might also be made for quota sampling, drawn across customer groups, distinguished by types of account. In either case, clear description is required of the chosen approach along with justification for its use. .

Scenario (ii): A quota or convenience sample is likely to be suggested here. For those who have chosen a quota sample design, there should be references to how quotas might be established. Candidates might suggest a random sample with the rationale that this is a controversial topic and in the public interest. Again, credit should be given for any practicable alternative approach suggested.

b) In the research brief your client has suggested a maximum sample size of 300 for the project. You are now writing the proposal. Identify the advantage and the limitations of a sample size of 300 in the context of the scenario you chose in part a). Outline how you would overcome the limitations you have identified.

(Weighting: one-half of total)

At Pass level, candidates are required to demonstrate that they have a clear understanding of the implications of sample size for the scenario they have chosen.

At Pass level, candidates should identify a minimum of one advantage and two disadvantages with some reference to the context of the chosen scenario.

Stronger answers are likely to make explicit the links back to the client's business problem - what it is s/he is trying to address - and so the information needs/research objectives and to the sampling approach they have chosen. Weaker answers may fail to link this part of the answer with their chosen approach, instead providing a generic answer on sample size. The strongest answers may identify a range of advantages and disadvantages of this sample size and provide an outline of ways in which the limitations might be overcome.

***Advantages** of a sample size of 300 might include some or all of the following:*

- *Its suitability for:*
  - *the required precision of the study*
  - *the scope of the objectives*
  - *the end use of the data*
- *The time, budget and resources likely to be available*
  - *could be achieved in a shorter time than a larger sample*
  - *could be less expensive than a larger sample, depending on other choices e.g. method of data collection*
  - *easier to manage than a larger sample and so possibly some potential to reduce non sampling error)*

***Limitations** (these are inter-linked)*

- *Limitations on the end use of the data*
- *May not be able to address all of the client's research and/or business objectives depending on the information needed about sub-groups*
- *Limited scope to look at findings among key sub groups within the population of interest*
- *Limited ability to make claims with a certain degree of confidence*
- *Credibility issues/lack of confidence in the findings of the research*
- *Limited scope to use data for multivariate analysis/other detailed analysis*