



## **Advanced Certificate in Market & Social Research Practice**

### **Guide to the Examination - Candidates**

*A comprehensive guide to the Examination element of assessment for candidates*

Effective from June 2020 Assessment

The Market Research Society (MRS) is the UK professional body for research, insight and analytics. We recognise 5,000 individual members and over 500 accredited Company Partners in over 50 countries who are committed to delivering outstanding insight. As the regulator, we promote the highest professional standards throughout the sector via the MRS Code of Conduct.

NEW - A Guide to the Examination - Candidates  
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## **INTRODUCTION**

### **Overview of the MRS Advanced Certificate in Market and Social Research Practice**

The role of market and social research is vital in informing and driving effective decision making within both the business and public sectors.

The MRS Advanced Certificate in Market & Social Research Practice (Advanced Certificate) is designed for those who have just entered or are seeking to enter the research profession, working in the areas of commercial market and/or social research. The overall aim of the qualification is to enable candidates to develop a clear practical understanding of the principles underpinning all stages in the research process, and to develop the skills required to enable them to design and carry out key research tasks. As such, it enables candidates to select appropriate approaches and tools based on a clear understanding of the research problem and the objectives of any associated programme of research.

The Advanced Certificate is a single-unit qualification which follows the research process from problem definition through to interpreting and reporting on results. The qualification comprises 2 elements, each divided into a number of topic areas:

Element 1 (The Research Context) contains two topic areas, focusing on the setting in which research takes place and the preparation needed to underpin the research process. The learning outcomes in this section inform and guide each stage of the development of a research project.

Element 2 (The Research Project) contains three topic areas, focusing on the stages involved in planning and carrying out the research project based on the understanding of the context. Understanding of the research setting, and the ethical principles underpinning research, are woven into each of the topic areas in Element 2.

In order to reflect the inter-dependence of the various stages in the research process, the assessment of the qualification follows an integrated approach. All candidates must successfully complete 2 components of assessment:

A project component (the Integrated Assignment, or IA): This requires candidates to prepare a brief & proposal for a research project. To successfully pass the IA candidates are required to integrate knowledge from across the syllabus, from problem definition to reporting.

A written examination: All questions in the examination require candidates to demonstrate how they might apply their learning in practical situations. In order to be successful, candidates must demonstrate that they can integrate and apply knowledge from different areas of the syllabus in order to address the given problems. In each examination round, all elements of the syllabus will be assessed through the range of questions.

This document provides:

- guidance for candidates on the structure of the examination and the marking process;
- tips for candidates on how to prepare for the MRS Advanced Certificate examination.

## AIM & FORMAT

### Aim of the Examination

The examination requires candidates to demonstrate the extent to which they can apply the knowledge and skills developed while studying for the qualification to a range of market and/or social research scenarios and tasks.

The Advanced Certificate syllabus covers all stages of the research process, from problem identification to reporting research results. The examination requires you to demonstrate your ability to meet learning outcomes at different stages in the research process.

### Format of the Examination

The 2<sup>1/2</sup> hour (150 minutes) examination is held twice per year in **January & June**. The dates of examinations are published on the MRS website, usually one year in advance.

The examination comprises two sections:

- Section 1: Compulsory Section (one question in three parts based on a case study)
- Section 2: Option Section (candidates must complete two out of six questions)

The requirement is for candidates to complete all of the questions in Section 1 and two questions from six in Section 2. If you answer more than two questions in Section 2, only the first two answers are marked, if you answer fewer questions than the requirement you will be marked as non-compliant.

#### Section 1: Compulsory Question (Recommended time: 50 minutes)

This section contains a short case study with 3 associated questions, all of which you must answer. The aim of this type of question is to assess your ability to apply your knowledge of market research to a concrete situation and to offer clear and convincing solutions.

Section 1 questions normally follow the following format:

- A short case study, usually containing the following types of information:
  - Background information & secondary data;
  - Specification of the client's needs or problem;
  - Definition of the task for the researcher.
- There are three questions associated with the case study. You must answer all three. The normal format for the questions is as follows:
  - One question requiring you to demonstrate your understanding of research methodology, make informed methodological choices and justify those choices.
  - One question requiring you to demonstrate your understanding of sampling issues, make informed sampling choices and justify those choices.
  - One question requiring you to apply your knowledge to a different aspect of a research problem and to suggest and justify an appropriate response to the problem.

## Section 2: Option Questions (Recommended time: 100 minutes)

Section 2 contains six questions. You must answer **two** questions from this Section.

The questions in Section 2 are drawn from across the syllabus.

The questions usually provide a short description of a research context or problem and between 1 and 3 associated tasks. These tasks normally ask you to demonstrate:

- your knowledge of a given topic (e.g. through a descriptive element in the question);
- your understanding of a given topic (e.g. through analysis or evaluation);
- your ability to relate your knowledge and understanding to the practical application of market and social research principles.

## Assessment weighting

You must answer 3 questions: the compulsory question in Section 1, and two questions from Section 2. All three questions are equally weighted in their contribution towards the final result.

Where questions are subdivided into 2 or 3 tasks, the weighting for each task within the question will be clearly indicated. The weighting of the task and the grades awarded for each task determines the grade awarded to the exam question.

Exam questions are allocated one of the following grades:

- Distinction
- Merit
- Pass
- Fail

## ASSESSMENT

### Preparing for the exam

- **Review the *learning outcomes of the qualification*.** Look again at the MRS Advanced Certificate syllabus to remind yourself of the scope of the type of questions which might come up. A copy of the Syllabus is available from the MRS Website.
- **Apply your knowledge to a problem.** When revising, it is useful to consider how you might apply what you are reading about to a practical situation. Try to think of practical situations which are relevant to the area you are looking at.
- **Analyse some research.** The business or social affairs sections of newspapers are good places to start. Try to keep an eye open for reports of recent research surveys and evaluate the processes which are described. Which areas would you like more information about? You may be able to find a copy of the research report on the internet.
- **Read.** Broaden your knowledge by reading the core text along with recommended supplementary reading – Recommended text and Codes & Guidelines.
- **Get to know the exam.** Read past papers on the MRS Website.
- **Practise writing to time.** Practice questions within past papers. You should allow yourself 50 minutes to write an answer, then compare your ideas with the relevant Answer Guide.

### What is the examiner looking for in exam answers?

As with many subjects, there are few 'black and white' solutions in market research practice. The examiners are seeking evidence that you:

- have a range of ideas which are relevant to the question being asked
- can justify the suggestions you make, thereby demonstrating an *understanding* of the research process
- can identify the limitations of the suggestions you make – i.e. can you identify any potential problems which may not be solved by your suggestions.

In short, the examiner is looking for a *range* of suggestions which demonstrate the *depth* of your understanding.

## What are the most common problems in the exam?

Completing an exam can be stressful. You can overcome the most common exam problems by following these guidelines:

### Take time to read the paper

When the exam begins, you should take a few minutes to plan how you are going to tackle the paper. For example, you may want to do one of the Section 2 questions first if you feel you can answer the question effectively and quickly. That is fine – you should not feel constrained to answer the sections in the order in which they appear in the paper.

### Work to time

Avoid spending too much time on one question. Instead, try to follow the suggested timings.

- Reading and choosing questions: 5 minutes
- 45 minutes per question
- 10 minutes checking your work

### Focus on the question:

- Remember that you need to identify exactly what the question requires. Writing all you know about a subject will mean that only a few of the points you make may be relevant. Focus should be on the key elements of the question.

### Plan your answers:

- When writing in continuous prose, it is easy to go off at a tangent. You need to stay focused on the question and to plan your answers, making sure that you can link each point you make with the question being asked. This can be done via rough work in the answer booklet – with a line put through any notes which you don't want the examiner to take into consideration.

### Use the question to support the answer:

- The question usually gives you a lot of context on which to base an answer. This is certainly true of the Mini Case Study section, where you are given a research 'problem' and asked to provide suggestions and/or solutions. You should remember to link your answers to the context given.

### Demonstrate the depth of your understanding:

- The examination is a time for you to show exactly how wide and deep your knowledge and understanding of key issues are. When writing an answer there needs to be a rationale for the points made. The examiner does not know you personally and therefore can't assume *why* you have made a particular suggestion. You should not be afraid to 'state the obvious' – it demonstrates that you know what you are talking about!

**Remember, as with most exams, exam technique is important. The sample questions and the relevant answer guides on the MRS Website are a useful learning/revision resource.**

## Pass Requirements

You are given an overall grade (Distinction, Merit, Pass or Fail). The overall grade is an aggregate of grades allocated over the three questions attempted in the exam.

When awarding the overall grade for the exam script, a points system is used. Points are allocated to each question grade: **Distinction = 3 Merit = 2 Pass = 1 Fail = 0.**

In order to achieve an overall Pass grade, you are expected to achieve a minimum of a Pass grade in each of the three questions. Candidates who pass only 2 questions, are expected to achieve a grade of merit or distinction in one of the pass questions in order to pass overall. A candidate who achieves 1 distinction and 2 fails will not pass.

Answers to (parts of) questions will automatically be graded as a Fail if they:

- fail to identify the key ethical and/or legal issues relevant to the context
- Include information or suggestions which conflict with current legislation, regulation and/or ethics advice for research and data practice.

If there is a connection with other part questions, then this will be taken into account in the marking of the other part(s).

## Results process

### When are results released?

The results are released approximately 12 weeks following the date of the exam, after exam scripts and integrated assignments have been marked and moderated.

### What happens if a candidate does not pass the exam?

Candidates can retake the examination twice after the initial sitting, as long as the retakes are taken within the candidates' 3-year registration period.

## Examination: Grade Descriptors

The following should be read alongside the **Examiner Answer Guide** for each examination question. The answer guide provides guidance on the minimum information required by each question.

	Pass	Merit	Distinction	Fail
<b>Structure &amp; language</b>	<b>The answer:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>is written in language that is generally accurate, easy to read and appropriate to the topic.</li> <li>is generally clearly structured.</li> <li>Language puts little or no strain on the reader.</li> </ul>			<b>The answer:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>is written in language which is inaccurate or inappropriate to the topic.</li> <li>language puts inappropriate strain on the reader.</li> </ul>
<b>Task achievement</b>	<b>The answer:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>recognises and addresses the key issues raised by the question</li> <li>demonstrates a satisfactory level of awareness and understanding of the key issues</li> </ul>	<b>The answer:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>recognises and addresses the key issues raised by the question</li> <li>demonstrates a good level of awareness and understanding of the key issues</li> </ul>	<b>The answer:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>recognises and addresses the key issues raised by the question</li> <li>demonstrates an excellent level of awareness and understanding of the key issues</li> </ul>	<b>The answer:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>fails to recognise and/or address the key issues raised by the question</li> <li>demonstrates a significant lack of awareness or understanding of key issues</li> </ul>
<b>Content</b>	<b>The answer:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>meets the minimum requirements specified in the answer guide, and:</li> <li>provides adequate rationale, where appropriate, for the points made</li> <li>provides some appropriate examples to illustrate points made</li> <li>identifies all or most key ethical and/or legal issues and outlines how these can be addressed</li> </ul>	<b>The answer:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>covers more than the minimum information requirements specified in the answer guide and:</li> <li>provides convincing rationale, where appropriate, for the points made</li> <li>provides a range of appropriate examples, where appropriate, to illustrate points made</li> <li>demonstrates a good level of knowledge and/or understanding in either the range or depth of the points made</li> <li>demonstrates a clear awareness of relevant potential ethical and/or legal issues and identifies how these can be addressed</li> </ul>	<b>The answer:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>covers more than the minimum information requirements identified in the answer guide and:</li> <li>provides fully convincing rationale, where appropriate, for the points made</li> <li>where appropriate, makes good use of examples to illustrate points made</li> <li>demonstrates a high level of knowledge and/or understanding in the range and depth of the points made</li> <li>demonstrates a high level of awareness of all potentially relevant ethical and/or legal issues and plans how to best to manage these issues.</li> </ul>	<b>The answer:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>fails to meet the minimum information requirements specified in the answer guide</li> <li>fails to provide adequate rationale, where appropriate, for the points made</li> <li>fails to identify relevant key ethical and/or legal issues</li> <li>is in conflict with current legislation, regulation and/or ethics advice for research and data practice</li> </ul>

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