



Advanced Certificate in Market & Social Research Practice

NEW - A Guide to the Examination –

A comprehensive guide to the Examination element of
assessment for both centres and candidates

Effective from January 2014 Assessment

With members in more than 60 countries, MRS is the world's leading authority on research and business intelligence.

NEW - A Guide to the Examination
November 2013
© The Market Research Society 2013



The Market Research Society
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

Company Limited by guarantee. Registered in England No 518686. Registered office as above.

INTRODUCTION	4
1. Overview of the MRS Advanced Certificate in Market and Social Research Practice	4
STRUCTURE AND PROCESSES	5
2. Aim of the Examination.....	5
3. Format of the Examination.....	5
Section 1: Compulsory Question (Recommended time: 50 minutes).....	5
Section 2: Option Questions (Recommended time: 100 minutes).....	6
Assessment weighting	6
Pass Requirements	6
4. Assessment and results processes.....	7
When are results released?	7
What happens if a candidate does not pass the exam?	7
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS: TIPS FOR CANDIDATES	8
5. Preparing for the exam.....	8
6. What is the examiner looking for in exam answers?.....	8
7. What are the most common problems in the exam?	9
Take time to read the paper.....	9
Work to time.....	9
APPENDIX 1	10
Examination: Level Descriptors	10

INTRODUCTION

1. 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 is a single-unit qualification, comprising 3 elements which follow the research process from problem definition to reporting on research results. The structure is 'horizontal', allowing for an integrated approach and for themes such as ethics and critical appraisal, fundamental to every aspect of research, to run through all three elements.

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 coursework element (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 three elements of the syllabus will be assessed through the range of questions.

This document provides:

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

Please refer to the document '[A Guide to the Integrated Assignment](#)' for further information on the IA.

STRUCTURE AND PROCESSES

2. 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 candidates to demonstrate their ability to meet learning outcomes at different stages in the research process.

3. Format of the Examination

The 2^{1/2} 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 candidates answer more than two questions in Section 2, only the first two answers are marked, candidates who answer fewer questions than the requirement may 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 the candidate must answer. The aim of this type of question is to assess the candidate's ability to apply their 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. Candidates must answer all three. The normal format for the questions is as follows:
 - One question requiring candidates to demonstrate their understanding of research methodology, make informed methodological choices and justify those choices.
 - One question requiring candidates to analyse an aspect of the market research process.
 - One question requiring candidates to apply their knowledge to an aspect of the market research process to produce an MR 'item'.

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

This section contains 6 questions. Candidates must answer **two** out of six.

Section 2 questions 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 candidates to demonstrate:

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

Assessment weighting

Candidates 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.

Exam questions are allocated one of the following grades:

- Distinction
- Merit
- Pass
- Fail

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.

Pass Requirements

Candidates 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.

Points are allocated to each question grade, as follows:

Distinction	3 points
Merit	2 points
Pass	1 point
Fail	0 points

In order to achieve an overall Pass grade candidates 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 pass overall. A candidate who achieves 1 distinction and 2 fails will not pass.

Grades based on point allocation:

- **FAIL** = 0 – 2 points
- **PASS** = 3 – 4 points
- **MERIT** = 5 – 6 points
- **DISTINCTION** = 7 - 9 points

When deciding grades, the examiners, moderators and Chief Examiner use the Examination Level Descriptors for guidance – Appendix 1

4. Assessment and results processes

All examiners who mark MRS Advanced Certificate papers are very experienced market and/or social researchers who are, or have been involved in, training researchers. Before they begin to work as examiners, they undergo thorough training in assessing examination work.

When marking papers, the examiner has an *Exam Answer Guide* to support them. Examples of these answer guides are on the MRS website to help candidates assess their own answers to the sample questions. These answer guides are not 'model answers', nor definitive lists of all the points which could be made in relation to the question. They are summaries of key points which might be made in answer to the question. However, if candidates do not cover all of the points in the answer guide or if they make different points, the examiner who reads their paper is an expert who will give credit for all relevant and convincing points which they make.

In addition to this first round of marking, a range of exam scripts are double marked by a Senior Examiner. These include:

- all exam scripts which fail to meet the pass standard
- all exam scripts which fall on a borderline
- a sample of exam scripts across all examiners.

After second marking a further selection of scripts are then subject to moderation by an industry expert and by the Joint Chief Examiner. Only then is a decision made on a candidate result.

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.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS: TIPS FOR CANDIDATES

5. Preparing for the exam

When you are studying think ahead to the exam. You can begin to gather ideas to inform your exam practice by trying the techniques below:

- **Review the *learning aims* 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. You will have already done this when preparing the Integrated Assignment. 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.** The MRS Website contains sample questions. You should allow yourself 50 minutes to write an answer, then compare your ideas with the relevant Answer Guide.

6. 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 understanding.

7. 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.

APPENDIX 1

Examination: Level Descriptors

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

	Fail	Pass	Merit	Distinction
Task achievement	<p>The answer:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> fails to recognise and/or address the key issues raised by the question demonstrates a significant lack of awareness or understanding of key issues 	<p>The answer:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> recognises and addresses the key issues raised by the question demonstrates a satisfactory level of awareness and understanding of the key issues 	<p>The answer:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> recognises and addresses the key issues raised by the question demonstrates a good level of awareness and understanding of the key issues 	<p>The answer:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> recognises and addresses the key issues raised by the question demonstrates an excellent level of awareness and understanding of the key issues
Content	<p>The answer:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> fails to covers many of the core information points identified in the answer guide fails to provide adequate rationale, where appropriate, for the points made fails to identify all key ethical and/or legal issues. 	<p>The answer:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> covers many of the core information points identified in the answer guide provides adequate rationale, where appropriate, for the points made provides some appropriate examples to illustrate points made identifies all key ethical and/or legal issues and outlines how these can be addressed 	<p>The answer:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> covers most of the core information points identified in the answer guide provides convincing rationale, where appropriate, for the points made provides a range of appropriate examples to illustrate points made demonstrates a good level of knowledge and/or understanding in either the range or depth of the points made demonstrates a clear awareness of all potential ethical and/or legal issues and identifies how these can be addressed 	<p>The answer:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> covers the core information points identified in the answer guide and may exceed these points provides fully convincing rationale, where appropriate, for the points made makes good use of examples to illustrate points made demonstrates a high level of knowledge and/or understanding in the range and depth of the points made demonstrates a high level of awareness of all potential ethical and/or legal issues and plans how to best to manage these issues.
Structure & language	<p>The answer:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> is written in language which is inaccurate or inappropriate to the topic. puts considerable strain on the reader. 	<p>At PASS level and above, the answer:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> is written in language that is generally accurate, easy to read and appropriate to the topic. is generally clearly structured. puts little or no strain on the reader. 		

This Page is Blank



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

Company limited by guarantee. Registered in England No 518686. Registered office as above.