



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

## **Syllabus & Assessment Guidelines**

September 2019

*First assessment against syllabus:  
June 2020*

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.

MRS Advanced Certificate Syllabus & Assessment Guidelines Revised  
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## 1. Introduction

This document contains full details of the syllabus and assessment specifications for the MRS Advanced Certificate in Market & Social Research Practice (MRS Advanced Certificate). In addition to this document, The Market Research Society (MRS) publishes an *MRS Advanced Certificate Admin Handbook*, which is intended to provide support for centres and tutors which provide training towards the qualification.

## 2. The Structure & Aims of the MRS Advanced Certificate

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 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.

### a) Entry requirements

The MRS Advanced Certificate is designed for those taking on the role of Research Executive. In line with the general sector requirements in the UK, candidates entering for the MRS Advanced Certificate are normally expected to be studying for or to hold a first degree (or equivalent). Candidates who do not meet standard qualifications requirements may enter for the MRS Advanced Certificate, providing that they can demonstrate an appropriate level of general education and/or professional experience. Full details of entry requirements are contained in the ***MRS Advanced Certificate Admin Handbook***.

### b) English Language Requirements

The language used in all assessed components of the MRS Advanced Certificate is English. The language of their assessments should be appropriate to both the task and the professional nature of the qualification.

It is the responsibility of the centre to ensure that all candidates have an appropriate level of language competence in English to allow them to undertake and complete the assessed components of the qualification.

To complete the assessed components of the MRS Advanced Certificate, candidates are expected to have English language skills (reading and writing) equivalent, as a minimum, to Level C1 in the Common European Framework for Languages / 6.5 in IELTS.

### c) Pass requirements

#### Examination

Candidates receive 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.

In order to achieve a **Pass** grade overall candidates will normally need to achieve a minimum of a Pass grade in all three questions.

When deciding grades, the Examiners, Moderators and Chief Examiner use the Answer Guide and Examination Grade Descriptors for guidance.

#### Integrated Assignment (IA)

Candidates receive a grade (Distinction, Merit, Pass or Fail) for the IA.

#### Overall Result

No overall grade is awarded for the MRS Advanced Certificate. The Results Notification and Certificate (if applicable) give the grade in each component.

#### Fail/Referred Candidates

A candidate who has failed to meet the pass criteria for both components of assessment is described as Fail.

Candidates who fail to achieve the **Pass** criteria in one component only will have their grade for that component **Referred**. They will retain the grade achieved for the remaining component. In these circumstances, candidates need only re-sit/re-submit the component in which they were referred.

- In order to be considered for the award, Referred candidates must retake the component in which they were not successful.
- In order to be considered for the award, Fail candidates must retake both components of assessment.
- Candidates may take each of the two components of assessment (Examination and Integrated Assignment) three times within a three-year registration period. Candidates who are unsuccessful on the third attempt must wait until the end of their initial three-year registration period before re-registering for assessment.
- Candidates who have been successful in one component but who have been unsuccessful three times in the second component are required to retake both components of assessment in any subsequent registration period.

### d) Research skills being developed

The qualification seeks to enable candidates to develop a wide range of research skills. These include the abilities to:

- understand, define and evaluate research objectives for given research problems
- design appropriate research solutions to identified problems, based on a clear understanding of a range of research approaches and techniques
- select appropriate approaches and techniques for the collection and analysis of the data necessary to inform effective decision-making and justify their selection
- plan a research project based on their understanding of the research need and the resource parameters for the research
- present the findings of research, reflecting a clear understanding of the analysis and interpretation of the data collected

- provide recommendations to support the decision-making process, based on a clear understanding of the information gathered during the research process
- ensure that all research activities comply with relevant national & international legal, ethical and regulatory requirements
- analyse and evaluate choices made at each stage in the process

#### e) Links to National Occupational Standards

The MRS Advanced Certificate is specifically designed to develop the skills needed to enable people to commission, design and/or implement market and/or commercial social research projects. The learning outcomes of the qualification link closely with a range of the UK's National Occupational Standards (NOS) for Marketing. The NOS to which the MRS Advanced Certificate link most directly include:

- CFAMAR01 Design and plan marketing research
- CFAMAR02 Collect marketing research data
- CFAMAR03 Analyse marketing research data
- CFAMAR04 Interpret and present marketing research findings
- CFAMAR05 Develop a customer insight strategy
- CFAMAR06 Implement and evaluate a customer insight strategy
- CFAMAR10 Ensure marketing activities comply with legal, regulatory and ethical requirements

#### f) Overview of the structure of the qualification

The MRS 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 pass the IA component of assessment, 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.

### 3. Learning Outcomes

The focus of the MRS Advanced Certificate is on the development of understanding of key principles and 'real world' research practice, and on the application of this understanding to research problems. Underpinning the qualification is the understanding that the stages of the research process are interdependent and that, although each topic area of the syllabus identifies a distinct area or stage within that process, 'real world' tasks will invariably require candidates to combine understanding drawn from two or more of these topic areas.

The MRS Advanced Certificate learning outcomes describe what a candidate needs to know and be able to do in order to achieve the qualification.

#### Element 1 - The Research Context

*For a given research setting, successful candidates will be able to:*

1. Evaluate the usefulness of research to a given setting
2. Identify and define the problem to be researched and the associated research objectives within a given setting
3. Identify the information needed to address defined research objectives
4. Plan and/or evaluate a research brief for a given research problem
5. Plan a research proposal for a given research brief
6. Develop plans for the appropriate use of resources (people, time & money) during the delivery of the research project
7. Apply the concepts of validity and reliability, and/or their qualitative equivalents, as appropriate throughout the research process
8. Identify relevant ethical principles and apply them appropriately throughout the research process

#### Element 2 - The Research Project

*For a given research problem successful candidates will be able to:*

9. Identify and evaluate possible research designs
10. Select the most appropriate research design and justify that selection
11. Evaluate sources of data and select the most appropriate
12. Identify and evaluate a range of data collection methods
13. Select the most appropriate data collection method(s), and justify that selection
14. Plan all aspects of the data collection, including fieldwork and the design of data collection tools
15. Identify and evaluate possible sample sources
16. Identify and evaluate possible sampling approaches and techniques
17. Create a suitable sampling plan and plan its implementation
18. Identify and evaluate possible suitable approaches for the analysis and interpretation of data
19. Create a suitable analysis plan and plan how to implement it
20. Identify and evaluate the usability of research findings
21. Identify and evaluate the suitability of different approaches for the reporting of findings
22. Select the most suitable approach for the reporting of findings and justify that selection

#### **4. Developing and delivering learning programmes**

Some of the learning outcomes contained within the MRS Advanced Certificate are achievable as discrete elements. However, for the most part, they depend on the candidate being able to analyse research problems from a variety of perspectives and to make links between different elements within the syllabus. As a result, tutors who deliver this syllabus are expected to recognise and to impart the integrated nature of the research process and, by extension, these learning outcomes.

To achieve this integrated approach, tutors are encouraged to include in their programme of tuition the analysis of research problems and the development of possible approaches to addressing those problems. Candidates should, at all times, be encouraged to provide clear rationale for their suggestions and to evaluate the strengths and limitations of the approaches they choose. This type of task is essential in helping participants to develop the analytical and practical skills which will enable them to become more effective practitioners.

The table on Pages 10-13 provides guidance for suggested content for courses and programmes leading to the completion of the MRS Advanced Certificate. This is not an exhaustive list of the items to be included in any programme of learning but indicates items which can be considered as core topics.

## 5. Syllabus & Indicative Content

### a) Aims & structure

The MRS Advanced Certificate syllabus enables candidates to develop practical research skills based on a firm understanding of research principles.

Successful completion of the qualification demonstrates that the candidate can:

- **identify** key issues affecting a research context and the issues related to them
- **evaluate** the strengths and weaknesses of range of approaches to addressing research problems in context
- **select** the most appropriate research approach for the particular context
- **design** a research project that addresses a client's business challenge
- **plan** elements of the delivery of a research project, including the allocation of resources
- **justify** decisions, based on a clear understanding of the context, the problem and the approach.

The syllabus has two key components:

- **Learning outcomes** define what candidates should be able to do by the end of the learning programme. They form the framework for assessment of candidates' progress and achievement.
- **Indicative content** supports the development of learning programmes. It suggests some of the knowledge that candidates need in order to achieve the outcomes. NOTE: This list is not definitive; it *indicates* some of the key knowledge areas that candidates need.

The learning outcomes and indicative content are divided into two Elements:

- **The Research Context:** Refers to the setting in which research takes place and the ethical principles that underpin the research process. The learning outcomes in this section inform and guide each stage of the development of a research project.
- **The Research Project:** The learning outcomes in this section reflect the specific skills and understanding required to develop each stage of a research project.

### b) Using the MRS Advanced Certificate syllabus

**Learning outcomes** are the benchmarks for the assessment of candidate achievement. During learning programmes, they should be used by:

- **candidates**, to support their reflection on their progress and development needs;
- **trainers, mentors and tutors** to support formative assessment and identify priorities for development.

**Indicative content** is **not** a definitive checklist of knowledge points that candidates need. It provides guidance for some key areas of knowledge and understanding which candidates may need in order to achieve the learning outcomes. In learning programmes, the indicative content should be used by:

- **learning providers and trainers**, as a guideline for developing learning programmes and training sessions;
- **candidates**, as support for self-assessment and identifying their own learning needs; and
- **tutors, trainers and assessors**, as a guide for identifying areas of knowledge that candidates need to develop.

## Element 1: The Research Context

<b>The Research Context</b>	<b>Learning outcomes For a given research context, the candidate will be able to:</b>	<b>Indicative content – to guide training programmes</b>
<p><i>Topic 1</i></p> <p>Understanding the research context and planning the research project</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Evaluate the usefulness of research to a given setting</li> <li>2. Identify and define the problem to be researched and the associated research objectives within a given setting</li> <li>3. Identify the information needed to address defined research objectives</li> <li>4. Plan and/or evaluate a research brief for a given research problem</li> <li>5. Plan a research proposal for a given research brief</li> <li>6. Develop plans for the appropriate use of resources (people, time &amp; money) during the delivery of the research project</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Definitions of market and social research, and insight– similarities and differences</li> <li>• How research is used to inform decision making in a range of contexts</li> <li>• The roles of the research supplier and the research and insight user (e.g. agency and client roles in the research process)</li> <li>• The link between the client or business issue and the problem to be researched: identifying, defining and refining the research problem and information needs</li> <li>• The role of the brief in the research process and how to develop an effective brief</li> <li>• The role of the proposal in the research process</li> <li>• The relationship between the research proposal and the research brief</li> <li>• The contents of the research proposal</li> <li>• The stages involved in setting up and running a research project</li> <li>• The range of roles involved in setting up and running a research project (e.g. researcher; data processing team; interviewer; moderator) as appropriate</li> <li>• How to evaluate the quality of a research proposal</li> <li>• Ethical, legal and MRS Code of Conduct issues as appropriate</li> </ul>
<p><i>Topic 2</i></p> <p>Guiding Principles</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>7. Apply the concepts of validity and reliability, and/or their qualitative equivalents, as appropriate throughout the research process</li> <li>8. Identify relevant ethical principles and apply them appropriately throughout the research process.</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The principles of validity and reliability, and their qualitative equivalents (e.g. truth value, consistency and neutrality)</li> <li>• Ethical and legislative principles underpinning good research practice through the course of a research project</li> <li>• Key principles of professional codes, including the MRS Code of Conduct</li> <li>• Key principles of data protection and freedom of information, as they relate to the practice of research</li> </ul>

## Element 2: The Research Project

The Research Project	Learning outcomes <i>For a given research project, the candidate will be able to:</i>	Indicative content– to guide training programmes
<p><i>Topic 3</i></p> <p>Selecting the Research Design and Planning the Approach</p>	<p>9. Identify and evaluate possible research designs</p> <p>10. Select the most appropriate research design and justify that selection</p> <p>11. Evaluate sources of data and select the most appropriate</p> <p>12. Identify and evaluate a range of data collection methods</p> <p>13. Select the most appropriate data collection method(s), and justify that selection</p> <p>14. Plan all aspects of the data collection, including fieldwork and the design of data collection tools</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Secondary Research               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Key principles, features, uses and strengths and limitations of sources of secondary data</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Primary Research               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ the key principles and uses of qualitative research</li> <li>○ the key principles and use of quantitative research</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Principle types of research design and their uses</li> <li>• Key principles, features, uses and strengths and limitations of a range of methods for primary data collection</li> <li>• Validity and reliability, and their qualitative equivalents, in relation to type of research</li> <li>• How to collect data</li> <li>• Designing effective data collection tools</li> <li>• Identifying and exploring the concepts to be researched in a given project</li> <li>• Translating research objectives and information needs into effective data collection tools</li> <li>• Validity and reliability in question and questionnaire design</li> <li>• Elements in effective questionnaire design</li> <li>• Elements in effective interview/topic guide design</li> <li>• Resources (i.e. time, money, people) required to carry out proposed data collection</li> <li>• Planning the data collection process (e.g. selecting and briefing the fieldwork team or interviewers/moderators)</li> <li>• Ethical, legal and MRS Code of Conduct issues including responsibilities regarding the collection, recording and storage of data</li> </ul>

<b>The Research Project</b>	<b>Learning outcomes</b> <i>For a given research project, the candidate will be able to:</i>	<b>Indicative content– to guide training programmes</b>
<p><i>Topic 4</i></p> <p>Selecting an Appropriate Sample</p>	<p>15. Identify and evaluate possible sample sources</p> <p>16. Identify and evaluate possible sampling approaches and techniques</p> <p>17. Create a suitable sampling plan and plan its implementation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The principles of sampling</li> <li>• The key elements of sampling including definition of the population, choice of method, choice of sampling frame or sample source and sample size</li> <li>• The implications of time and budget constraints on the choice of sampling plan</li> <li>• The implications of the choice of sampling plan on data/research quality and robustness</li> <li>• Identifying suitable sample sources and/or sampling frames for a given population</li> <li>• Ensuring appropriate participation as required</li> <li>• Key principles, features, uses and strengths and limitations of a range of sampling methods</li> <li>• Sampling and non-sampling error</li> <li>• Ethical, legal and MRS Code of Conduct issues including sample sources</li> </ul>

<b>The Research Project</b>	<b>Learning outcomes</b> <i>For a given research project, the candidate will be able to:</i>	<b>Indicative content– to guide training programmes</b>
<p><i>Topic 5</i></p> <p>Analysing and Interpreting Data and Reporting Findings</p>	<p>18. Identify and evaluate possible suitable approaches for the analysis and interpretation of data</p> <p>19. Create a suitable analysis plan and plan how to implement it</p> <p>20. Identify and evaluate the usability of research findings</p> <p>21. Identify and evaluate the suitability of different approaches for the reporting of findings</p> <p>22. Select the most suitable approach for the reporting of findings and justify that selection</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The links between research objectives, data gathering and analysis for primary and secondary research</li> <li>• Identifying, evaluating and selecting relevant datasets or data sources for analysis</li> <li>• Key principles, processes and techniques in preparing data for analysis:</li> <li>• Key principles, processes and techniques in analysing data, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Techniques for analysing qualitative data (e.g. the uses of content analysis, narrative analysis, discourse analysis; techniques for coding qualitative data and identifying themes and patterns)</li> <li>○ Techniques for analysing quantitative data (e.g. grouping and summarising data; the principles and application of basic statistical tests in univariate and bivariate analysis)</li> <li>○ Techniques for analysing secondary data (e.g. social media, big data, data collected for another purpose and passive data)</li> </ul> </li> <li>• The roles of technology in the data analysis process for both quantitative and qualitative data</li> <li>• Ethical, legal, and MRS Code of Conduct issues including how participants data can be used</li> <li>• Looking at research findings from the research user/client’s perspective, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ the links between the research problem, the research objectives and the research findings</li> <li>○ identifying key findings that address the client's needs</li> <li>○ identifying actionable recommendations</li> </ul> </li> <li>• How to provide usable ‘deliverables’ at the end of a project, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ designing and delivering a presentation of key findings which adds value for the end user/client</li> <li>○ planning and writing a research report which adds value for the end user/client</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Ethical, legal issues and MRS Code of Conduct requirements, including how participants' data can be used, in reporting research findings</li> </ul>

## 6. Recommended Support Materials

### a) Core Text

#### **The Practice of Market Research - An Introduction**

4th Edition, Pearson Education  
Yvonne Mcgovern  
May 2013, Paperback  
ISBN13: 978-0-273-77311-5

The new edition is due out in late 2020/early 2021. In the meantime, MRS has devised a brief guide on where to find textbook material for the new syllabus elements, topics and learning outcomes in the 4<sup>th</sup> edition.

It should also be noted that the 4th edition is out of date in terms of coverage of topics including ethics and GDPR, definition/scope of research, the roles of researcher, use of digital research, passive data and analytics, data visualisation and the terminology around all those topics as well as examples of them in practice. Content in relation to these topics can be found in Other texts, Codes, Guidelines and Legislation.

### b) Other Texts

In addition to the recommended text, we advise candidates to read as widely as possible to become better informed about the research industry and its practices.

These various textbooks and resources are intended to give an indication of the great range of research information which is available, both via the Internet and in published form. Dipping into this reading list will help candidates gain the depth of insight which will support the development of their research skills.

The following provide useful additions to the recommended textbook:

#### **Marketing Research - Delivering Customer Insight**

4th Edition, Red Globe Press  
Alan Wilson  
2019, Paperback  
ISBN: 978-1-352-00111

#### **Marketing Research - Tools and Techniques**

3rd Edition, Oxford University Press  
Nigel Bradley  
March 2013, Paperback  
ISBN: 978-0-19-965509-0

#### **The Handbook of Mobile Market Research - Tools and Techniques for Market Researchers**

ESOMAR & Wiley  
Ray Pointer and Navin Williams  
2014 Hardback  
ISBN: 978-1-118-93562-0

#### **Social Research Methods**

5<sup>th</sup> Edition, Oxford  
Alan Bryman  
2016 Paperback  
ISBN: 978-0-19-968945 -3

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## **New Methods of Market Research and Analysis**

1<sup>st</sup> Edition, Edward Elgar Publishing Ltd

G Scott Erickson

2019 Paperback

ISBN-13: 978-178990105

**Individual MRS Members** can access **Knowledge Centre** – 40 e-books, plus videos and articles, **SAGE Research Methods** – tools and content to help you research, and Members only content in the Members area of the MRS Website.

### **c) Codes, guidelines & legislation**

In order to support the focus on ethics and professionalism in this qualification, candidates should familiarise themselves with codes, guidelines and legislation which affect research carried out internationally, as well as those which affect research practices in the candidate's own country.

The following websites provide useful information about guidelines and regulations governing research.

#### **MRS**

<https://www.mrs.org.uk/standards/code-of-conduct>

<https://www.mrs.org.uk/standards/guidance>

<https://www.mrs.org.uk/standards/legislation/tab/data-protection>

<https://www.mrs.org.uk/standards/mrs-policy>

#### **ESOMAR**

<https://www.esomar.org/what-we-do/code-guidelines>

#### **efamro**

<https://www.efamro.eu/>

#### **Social Research Association**

<http://the-sra.org.uk/research-ethics/ethics-guidelines/>

**Research Buyer's Guide** <https://www.mrs.org.uk/researchbuyersguide>

#### **Impact Magazine** (MRS)

Quarterly Magazine – Impact - Gain from insight and strategy studies to global trends, and with sections on technology, science and the law

#### **Research Live**

<https://www.research-live.com/>

Understand the critical research trends, hear from the influential players and listen to the fiercest debates with access to Research-Live.com

## 7. Methods of Assessment

Candidates are required to complete 2 assessed components. These are:

- an internally assessed integrated assignment. This component is externally moderated.
- an externally-marked written examination - 2<sup>1/2</sup> hours (150 minutes).

## 8. Integrated Assignment Specifications and Guidelines

Please refer to ***A Guide to the Integrated Assignment*** for comprehensive information.

The aim of the Integrated Assignment (IA) is to allow candidates to demonstrate the extent to which they have developed a range of market and/or social research skills. To this end, they must complete an assignment which integrates learning objectives from the three elements of the Advanced Certificate syllabus, from problem definition to reporting, providing clear justification for their choices.

The Advanced Certificate syllabus focuses on all stages of the research process, from problem identification to reporting research results. The IA requires candidates to demonstrate their ability to meet learning outcomes at all stages in the research process.

There are two IA submission rounds per year: **January & June**.

### a) Format of Integrated Assignment

The Integrated Assignment must be in the form of a Brief and Proposal.

Centres can either provide a selection of research problems/scenarios from which their candidates can choose or candidates can select their own research problem on which to base their brief & proposal (be it fictional or based on 'real life').

Candidates who select a 'real life' scenario on which to base their IA will be required, as will the centre, to confirm (via a signed form) that - although based on a real life problem - the Brief & Proposal they have submitted is an original piece of work by them, that it is not a re-drafted or re-written version of an existing client brief and/or a proposal prepared\* for a client.

\*MRS reserves the right to go back to a Centre and/or an individual for clarification if there is concern that this has not been adhered to.

### b) Assignment length, layout & language

- The assignment should be between min 3,500 and max 4,000 words (excluding appendices).
- All words within the main body of the text, including those within tables are included within the word count. Text within the title page, contents page or header and footer is not included in the word count.
- IAs that exceed the 4,000 word limit will be as classified as 'non-compliant' as they do not comply with the assessment criteria and cannot be assessed within the qualifications framework.
- IAs that are below the 3,500 word limit are unlikely to contain sufficient information to adequately meet the pass criteria.

- Candidates must include a combined word count for both the Brief & Proposal at the end of the assignment. MRS reserves the right to request an electronic version of the assignment to verify a stated word count.
- A maximum of 2 single-sided pages of appendices is permitted. Appendices are not for further substantiating text and should only be used for a Glossary and/or Bibliography for example. Appendices should not be used to extend the word limit.
- MRS Qualifications requires candidates to produce the IA as a Word document.
- Sections within the assignment should be clearly indicated with headings.
- The use of Proprietary Methods – that is, a company’s own branded research product - is not forbidden within the IA. However, the aim of the IA is for candidates to demonstrate their knowledge of the syllabus and therefore the use of a propriety method or solution must be handled with care. Candidates who use their own company’s Proprietary Methods as part of their solution to the research problem need to ensure that the underlying methodology associated with it is clearly explained and that a suitable rationale or justification is given as to why this method has been chosen over other non-proprietary methods. Failure to explain the method involved and failure to justify adequately its use in the given context could result in the assignment failing to reach the pass criteria.

### c) Content Specifications & Assessment Criteria

The following grid outlines the expected content of an integrated assignment, and how the specified content maps against the learning outcomes of the qualification.

Content Specifications	Learning Outcomes
<p>The assignment should include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a brief, outlining the business problem and the research problem</li> <li>• a proposal for a programme of research to meet the needs of the brief</li> <li>• identification of any relevant ethical and legal requirements linked to the proposed research, and a description of how these will be addressed.</li> <li>• a clear rationale for the choices made at each stage in the proposal</li> </ul>	4, 5, 8
<b><i>The Brief should:</i></b>	
<p>a) describe the context for the research            b) outline the business problem to be addressed            c) identify any parameters for the research, such as timescale, resources available, or reporting requirements</p>	1, 2, 4
<b><i>The Proposal should:</i></b>	
a) discuss and define the problem to be researched, and define appropriate research objectives	2, 3, 5, 7, 8
b) identify an appropriate research design to address the research objectives	7, 8, 9, 10, 11
c) outline a plan for sampling which is appropriate to the research objectives and research design	7, 8, 15, 16, 17
d) describe the data collection methods chosen to address the stated objectives and chosen sample	7, 8, 11, 12, 13
e) describe the data collection tool(s) most appropriate to their stated collection methods	7, 8, 13, 14
f) outline a plan for analysing the data in a way that is appropriate to the data collected, the sample and the research objectives	7, 8, 18, 19
g) describe how findings will be reported and/or presented, taking into account client needs, the data collected and the research objectives,	7, 8, 20, 21, 22
h) describe how resources (people, time and money) will be allocated across the project	6, 7, 8

Guidance on the general assessment criteria for each grade can be found in the following Integrated Assignment Grade Descriptors.

#### **d) Pass requirements**

Candidates are given a band grade (Distinction, Merit, Pass or Fail) for the IA.

Integrated Assignments which fail to meet pass criteria may be re-submitted for assessment when appropriate improvements have been made a maximum of one time. If the IA fails to meet the pass criteria on second submission, the third submission must be a new IA topic.

## e) Integrated Assignment: Grade Descriptors

The following descriptors define the assessment criteria that an assignment needs to meet to achieve a Pass grade. They also define how higher grades (Merit; Distinction) are achieved. The descriptors also highlight the key features of a Fail grade.

	Pass	Merit	Distinction	Fail
<b>Structure &amp; Language</b>	<b>The assignment:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• structure is appropriate to the task format</li> <li>• organisation of information is appropriate to the task format</li> <li>• language is appropriate to a task written for a professional context</li> <li>• language puts little or no strain on the reader</li> <li>• respects the word limit</li> </ul>			<b>The assignment:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• structure and organisation of information put strain on the reader</li> <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>Content</b>	<b>The assignment:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• meets the information requirements of the specification</li> <li>• demonstrates an adequate overall awareness of the links between the various research processes described.</li> <li>• identifies all international and national key legal, ethical and regulatory issues and outlines how these can be addressed</li> <li>• provides an appropriate rationale for most of the choices made.</li> </ul>	<b>The assignment:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• meets or exceeds the information requirements of the specification</li> <li>• demonstrates a clear awareness of the links between various research processes described.</li> <li>• demonstrates a clear awareness of all relevant potential international and national legal, ethical and regulatory issues relating to the research project and identifies how these can be addressed</li> <li>• provides clear and appropriate justification for the choices made.</li> </ul>	<b>The assignment:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• meets or exceeds the information requirements of the specification</li> <li>• demonstrates a high level of awareness of the links between the various research processes described.</li> <li>• demonstrates a high level of awareness of all potentially relevant international and national legal, ethical and regulatory issues relating to the research project and plans how to best to manage these issues.</li> <li>• provides clear and appropriate justification for the choices made and, where appropriate, with evaluation of those choices.</li> </ul>	<b>The assignment:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• fails to meet a number of the information requirements of the specification.</li> <li>• fails to demonstrate an awareness of the links between the research processes described.</li> <li>• fails to identify relevant key international and national legal, ethical and regulatory issues.</li> <li>• is in conflict with current legislation, regulation and/or ethics advice for research and data practice</li> <li>• fails to explain why the selected research methods have been chosen</li> </ul>

## 9. Examination Specifications and Guidelines

Please refer to **A Guide to the Examination** for comprehensive information.

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 focuses on 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.

### a) Mode of assessment

Candidates are required to complete the examination which is set and marked externally.

### b) Format of the examination

The 2 ½ hours (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.

Each examination paper 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)

If candidates answer more than two questions in Section 2, only the first two answers will be marked. Candidates who answer fewer questions than the requirement will be marked as non-compliant.

### c) Section 1: Compulsory Question

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 and social 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 a 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 demonstrate their understanding of sampling issues, make informed sampling choices and justify those choices.
  - One question requiring candidates to apply their knowledge to a different aspect of a research problem and to suggest and justify an appropriate response to the problem.

#### d) Section 2: Option Questions

Section 2 contains six questions. Candidates 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 candidates to demonstrate:

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

#### e) 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.

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.

#### f) Pass requirements

When deciding grades, the Examiners, Moderators and Chief Examiner use the Answer Guide and Examination Grade Descriptors for guidance.

Candidates are awarded an overall grade (Distinction, Merit, Pass or Fail). The overall grade is an aggregate of grades allocated across 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 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 to pass overall. A candidate who achieves 1 distinction and 2 fails will not pass.

#### Overall Grade based on point allocation:

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

## g) Examination: Grade Descriptors

The document should be read alongside the **Exam 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: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <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 international and national legal, ethical and regulatory issues. and outlines how these can be addressed</li> </ul> </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: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <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 international and national legal, ethical and regulatory issues. and identifies how these can be addressed</li> </ul> </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: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <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 international and national legal, ethical and regulatory issues.</li> <li>and plans how to best to manage these issues.</li> </ul> </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 international and national legal, ethical and regulatory 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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