



Advanced Certificate in Market & Social Research Practice

Updated Syllabus & Assessment Guidelines

**Effective from the June 2027
Assessment Round**

The Market Research Society (MRS) is the UK professional body for research, insight and analytics. We recognise 4,500 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 supports the sector with specialist training and qualifications, professional membership, company accreditation, cutting-edge conferences, glittering awards and advice on best practice.

MRS Advanced Certificate Syllabus & Assessment Guidelines Revised
June 2026
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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.

This Syllabus update does not alter learning outcomes or assessment requirements. The update focuses on the indicative content, where it modernises terminology, rebalances references to traditional methods, and includes examples of new tools, techniques, and digital research approaches.

These changes ensure that the Advanced Certificate both reflects and supports the skills candidates need for a future-focused research profession, while maintaining a strong grounding in the core principles of real-world research practice and their application to research problems.

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, insights and analytics sector, working in the areas of commercial market and/or social research.

The qualification aims to develop a strong, practical understanding of the principles that underpin every stage of the research process, alongside the skills required to design, deliver and evaluate key research activities.

Reflecting the increasing role of data, analytics and technology within the research sector, the qualification equips candidates with the capability to interpret insights from both traditional and new data sources, including digitally generated and analytics-led outputs. Candidates build an understanding of how AI-enabled tools, automation and advanced analytical techniques can support research design, data collection, analysis and insight generation, while also developing the critical thinking required to assess their appropriate and ethical use.

As a result, candidates can select and apply research approaches, methodologies and technologies that are fit for purpose, grounded in a clear understanding of the research problem, stakeholder needs and the objectives of any associated programme of research.

a) Entry requirements

Candidates for the Advanced Certificate would normally have one or more of the following:

- One year or more of relevant experience in the research, insights and analytics sector
- MRS Certificate in Market Research
- Satisfactory nomination by employer
- Satisfactory nomination by course tutor, in cases where the Advanced Certificate is being taken alongside an undergraduate degree
- 2 A Levels (or equivalent)
- Market Research Executive Apprenticeship

Additionally, MRS recommends:

- Mathematics and English GCSE, at Grade 4/5 (C) or above (or equivalent)

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.

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.

- To be considered for the award, Referred candidates must retake the component in which they were not successful.
- 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 individuals 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:

INSMAR001	Design and plan marketing research
INSMAR002	Collect and analyse marketing research data
INSMAR003	Interpret and present marketing research findings
INSMAR004	Develop, implement and evaluate a customer insight strategy
INSMAR006	Plan, obtain and evaluate stakeholder feedback
INSMAR008	Ensure marketing activities comply with legal, regulatory and ethical requirements, and organisational values

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 two elements, each divided into several 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.

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. 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 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 suitable approaches for the analysis and interpretation of data
19. Create a suitable analysis strategy 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, always, 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, technology and practical skills which will enable them to become more effective practitioners.

The table commencing on Page 11 provides guidance for 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 relevant practical research skills reflective of current and evolving research practice 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 a range of approaches to addressing research problems in context
- **select** the most appropriate research approach for the 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 the knowledge that candidates need to achieve the outcomes.

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; and
- **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 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	Learning outcomes <i>For a given research context, the candidate will be able</i>	Indicative Content – to guide training programmes
<i>Topic 1</i> Understanding the research context and planning the research project	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	The wider research context • Definitions of market and social research • Definitions of research, data and insight • The nature of the research sector, e.g. size, structure, type of organisations, adoption and use of technologies etc • The purpose of research, e.g. to understand the needs of stakeholders, including consumers, businesses, governments/public sector, non-government organisations. • The value of research to the end user organisations etc • The scope of research, e.g. different types of research; different methodologies and techniques; different methods; use and application of technology including AI driven research, use of AI tools and other related technologies • Areas of focus for market and social research, e.g. to understand markets, consumers, competitors, society etc • How research is used/applied to inform decision making in a range of contexts including business and society • Limitations of research and the application of research The research process • The steps or stages or tasks in the research process including manual, automated etc • The roles of different types of research supplier and the research and insight end user in the research process (e.g. internal and external suppliers, research agency and client roles) including the use of AI and related technologies etc • The skills of the research executive and other members of the research delivery team, e.g. project manager, fieldwork manager, data analyst, data scientist etc The early stages of the research process • Examples of client business problems and related research problems • Use of research including use of AI tools and related technologies to clarify the problem, the information needs etc • The link between the client's business issue or problem and the problem to be researched • Identifying, defining and refining the research problem and writing the research objectives, including the use of AI to do this

		• Types of research objectives • The role of the brief or briefing document in the research process • What is an effective brief for a given research project, what does it contain • How to develop an effective brief • How to evaluate the quality of a brief, how to think critically about a brief, how to examine the strengths and weaknesses of a brief • The role of the proposal in the research process • The relationship between the research proposal and the research brief • The contents of the research proposal • The tasks involved in setting up a research project • The roles involved in setting up and running a research project (e.g. researcher; data processing team; interviewer; moderator) as appropriate, including the use of AI tools/automation and other relevant technology • Resources for setting up and running a project: Who and what will be needed to do the research and deliver the findings, e.g. people, technology (including AI tools and related technologies), time, money/budget • How to evaluate the quality of a research proposal, how to think critically about a proposal, how to examine the strengths and weaknesses of what has been proposed • Ethical, legal and MRS Code of Conduct issues as appropriate, as they apply to understanding the research context and the planning and set up of a research project
<i>Topic 2</i> Guiding Principles	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	• Definition of good quality research • The principles of validity and reliability, and their qualitative equivalents (e.g. truth value, consistency and neutrality) • Ethical and legislative principles underpinning good research practice, through the course of a research project • Key principles of professional codes, including the MRS Code of Conduct • Key principles of data protection and freedom of information, as they relate to the practice of research • Elements of quality assurance across the research process • How to do an ethical/Code of Conduct review for a project

Element 2: The Research Project	Learning outcomes <i>For a given research context, the candidate will be able</i>	Indicative Content – to guide training programmes
<i>Topic 3</i> Selecting the Research Design and Planning the Approach	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	Research designs • Definition of research design • Types of research design • Uses and applications of different research designs • The link between the research design and the research objectives and the client’s business problem • The process of research design • Evaluating/thinking critically about research design • Ethical/Code of Conduct issues in research design Types and sources of data • Size, format, nature, sources of data, e.g. big and small data, structured, semi-structured and unstructured data, primary data and secondary data, passive data, synthetic data, qualitative data, quantitative data etc • Methods of data collection, e.g. mobile, online, in person, automated etc • Planning and managing fieldwork in a range of contexts/types of projects Types of research/research techniques • Secondary Research ◦ Key principles, features, uses and strengths and limitations of sources of secondary data ◦ Ways of approaching secondary research including the use of AI and other technology ◦ Data mining and data analytics including algorithms, machine learning, natural language processing, AI etc • Primary Research ◦ Qualitative research methods ◦ Quantitative research methods • Key principles, features, uses and strengths and limitations of a range of methods for qualitative and quantitative primary research including mobile, online, in person, use of AI tools such as AI interviewers/bots, automated and AI organised data gathering • Quality assurance including validity and reliability, and their qualitative equivalents, in relation to the specific type of research being undertaken

		Design of data collection tools • Elements in effective questionnaire design • Elements in effective interview/topic guide design • Identifying and exploring the concepts to be researched in a given project • Translating research objectives and information needs into effective questions and prompts • Drafting, refining and testing/piloting a data collection tool • Assessing/evaluating the quality of a data collection tool, how to think critically about the quality, key principles of validity and reliability, and their qualitative equivalents, in design of a data collection tool Data collection • The tasks, roles and resources (i.e. time, money/budget, people, technology including AI tools) required to carry out proposed data collection • Planning the data collection process (e.g. deciding on an approach, e.g. researcher led or automated, choosing the relevant tools or technology, selecting and briefing the fieldwork team or interviewers/moderators) • Managing and monitoring the data collection including the use of AI tools • Ethical, legal and MRS Code of Conduct issues including responsibilities regarding the collection, recording and storage of data and the use of automation and/or AI tools or other technologies
<i>Topic 4</i> Selecting an Appropriate Sample	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	Sampling theory and techniques • Principles of sampling in quantitative research including random or probability sampling, non-random or non-probability sampling, quota sampling, semi random sampling • Use of AI in sampling • Awareness of the use of sampling 'products' – proprietary samples (e.g. panels, databases, aggregated samples) • How the samples in research panels are created, maintained and used • The advantages and limitations of using a sample from a panel • Principles of sampling in qualitative research, e.g. purposive sampling, theoretical sampling, judgement sampling, convenience sampling, snowball sampling • The key elements of sampling including definition of the population of interest, choice of inclusion and exclusion criteria, choice of method or strategy, choice of sampling frame or sample source and sample size, selection or recruitment approach and response rates

		• Sources and/or sampling frames for a given population • Techniques for recruitment/finding sample members/research participants including the use of AI tools and other relevant technologies • The implications of time and budget constraints on the choice of sampling plan • Quality issues in sampling • Sampling and non-sampling error • Thinking critically about a sample, its advantages and limitations, the implications of the choice of sampling approach, the sample source, and other elements of the sampling plan on data/research quality and robustness • Managing fieldwork and monitoring response rates including the use of AI tools and other relevant technologies to do this, ensuring appropriate participation as required • Ethical, legal and MRS Code of Conduct issues as appropriate e.g. informed consent, transparency, privacy, bias, use of language, accountability, reporting requirements
<i>Topic 5</i> Analysing and Interpreting Data and Reporting Findings	18. Identify and evaluate suitable approaches for the analysis and interpretation of data 19. Create a suitable analysis strategy 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	The analysis process • The link between the client's problem, the research objectives and the analysis, interpretation and reporting of the data and insight generated by the research project • The steps or stages in the analysis, interpretation and reporting process • Creating an analysis strategy • Managing the analysis implementation process • The roles, the tasks, the people and the resources needed in the analysis implementation process Preparing data for analysis • Key principles, processes and techniques (including automation and use of AI tools and techniques) in preparing and processing data for analysis e.g. including: ◦ Data discovery ◦ Data cleaning ◦ Data editing ◦ Data reduction ◦ Data transformation/(re)structuring ◦ Coding ◦ Transcribing ◦ Translating

Analysing data

- Key principles, processes and techniques in analysing data from a range of sources, including:
 - Techniques for summarising, sorting, structuring and coding qualitative data including use of AI tools and other relevant technologies
 - Techniques for analysing qualitative data (e.g. the uses of content analysis, narrative analysis, discourse analysis, sentiment analysis, use of AI tools and other relevant and/or related technologies)
 - Techniques for analysing quantitative data (e.g. coding, structuring, grouping, sorting and summarising data; validating and verifying data; the principles and application of basic statistical tests in univariate, bivariate and multivariate analysis, techniques for looking for/uncovering patterns and relationships in data, use of data mining and data analytics, AI tools and related technologies)
- Ethical, legal, and MRS Code of Conduct issues including how data can be used, however it is generated, including security, privacy, transparency

The reporting stage

- Interpreting the data, identifying key findings that address the client's needs, turning the data into actionable insights and recommendations for the client, looking at research findings from the research user/client perspective
- Written and verbal communication skills
- The reporting requirements, creating a reporting plan
- Designing the outputs, how to provide usable 'deliverables' at the end of a project, including e.g.:
 - Principles of communication, storytelling and narrative structure
 - Formats for findings including charts, reports, presentations, workshops
 - Creating a report or presentation plan
 - Design features of effective presentations and reports etc
 - Use of technology including AI tools for visualisation, image generation, video etc
- Assessing/reviewing/evaluating the quality of the findings/thinking critically about the findings
- Ethical, legal and MRS Code of Conduct requirements, including how participants' data can be used in reporting research findings etc

6. Recommended Support Materials

a) Core Text

The Practice of Market Research – From Data to Insight

5th Edition, Pearson Education

Yvonne McGivern

November 21, Paperback

ISBN13: 978-1292331362

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 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

5th Edition, Bloomsbury Publishing

Alan Wilson

2026, Paperback

ISBN: 978-1-35-044278-8

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, Navin Willams and Sue York

2014 Hardback

ISBN: 978-1-118-93562-0

Social Research Methods

6th Edition, Oxford

Tom Clark, Liam Foster, Luke Sloan and Alan Bryman

2021 Paperback

ISBN: 978-0-19-879605-3

New Methods of Market Research and Analysis

1st Edition, Edward Elgar Publishing Ltd

G Scott Erickson

2019 Paperback

ISBN-13: 978-1-78990-105-4

Individual MRS Members can access **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

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

[Code of Conduct](#)

[Guidance Docs](#)

[Data Protection](#)

[Policy](#)

[Guidance on using AI and Related Technologies](#)

[MRS Best Practice Guide on conducting data collection activities in the metaverse](#)

[Webinar - Data Quality, Ethics & AI](#)

[AI Hub](#)

esomar

[Code of Conduct](#)

[Responsible AI Development](#)

efamro

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

Social Research Association

[Research Ethics Guidance](#)

Research Buyer's Guide

<https://www.mrs.org.uk/researchbuyersguide>

Research Live

Understand the critical research trends, hear from the influential players and listen to 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 3,500 – 4,000-word limit. This component is externally moderated.
- an externally assessed written examination - 2^{1/2} 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 and 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 qualification's 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.
- The use of AI tools as part of the proposed solution to the research process is permitted. Candidates who use AI tools 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 methods. Candidates should demonstrate critical thinking and awareness of AI limitations, risks, and potential biases. 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
- Anonymisation: Candidates do not need to anonymise the tools/programmes used for analysing data/handling a sample. E.g. candidates may name programmes such as Excel. However, to prevent the breaking of professional confidence and/or prevent use of a real brand as the focus of the assignment, compulsory anonymisation is required for all other clients/companies/products. Any naming of real-life companies or organisations would cause the IA to be non-compliant. The IA is for assessment purposes and not real-world purposes. Anonymisation can be done simply by assigning a letter, e.g. Company K or government department responsible for food safety issues.

c) AI Guidance – Integrated Assignment

Candidates are expected to demonstrate their own knowledge, skills and understanding as required for the MRS Advanced Certificate in Market & Social Research Practice (Advanced Certificate) and set out in the qualification specification.

While AI and emerging technologies are becoming established in the sector, for the purposes of demonstrating knowledge, understanding and skills for the Advanced Certificate, it’s important for candidates’ progression that they do not rely solely on tools such as AI.

Candidates should develop the knowledge, skills and understanding of the subjects they are studying. They must be able to demonstrate that the IA submission is the product of their own independent work and independent thinking.

As has always been the case candidates must submit an Integrated Assignment (IA) which is their own work. This means both ensuring that any final IAs are in candidates’ own words and not copied or paraphrased from another source such as an AI tool, and that the content reflects their own independent work.

AI misuse is where a candidate has used one or more AI tools and has submitted work for assessment when it is not their own. Examples of AI misuse include, but are not limited to, the

following:

- Copying or paraphrasing sections of AI-generated content so that the work submitted for assessment is no longer the candidate's own
- Copying or paraphrasing whole responses of AI-generated content
- Using AI to complete parts of the assessment so that the work does not reflect the candidate's own work, analysis, evaluation or recommendations
- Failing to acknowledge use of AI tools when they have been used as a source of information/reference
- Submitting work with intentionally incomplete or misleading references or bibliographies.

AI misuse constitutes malpractice as defined in the *MRS Qualifications - Policy Handbook*.

Please refer to the *MRS Qualifications - Policy Handbook* for further information, including Potential indicators of AI misuse, AI – The Responsibilities of Centres, AI – Centre Information, AI Checklist, Identifying Malpractice and Dealing with Malpractice.

d) 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
The assignment should include: - a brief, outlining the business problem and the research problem - a proposal for a programme of research to meet the needs of the brief - identification of any relevant ethical and legal requirements linked to the proposed research, and a description of how these will be addressed - a clear rationale for the choices made at each stage in the proposal	4, 5, 8
The Brief should:	
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	1, 2, 4
The Proposal should:	
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 for the stated objectives and the chosen sample	7, 8, 11, 12, 13
e) describe the data collection tool(s) most appropriate to the stated data 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.

e) 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.

f) 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
Structure & Language	The assignment: - structure is appropriate to the task format - organisation of information is appropriate to the task format - language is appropriate to a task written for a professional context - language puts little or no strain on the reader - respects the word limit			The assignment: - structure and organisation of information put strain on the reader - is written in language which is inaccurate or inappropriate to the topic - language puts inappropriate strain on the reader
Content	The assignment: - meets the information requirements of the specification - demonstrates an adequate overall awareness of the links between the various research processes described - identifies all international and national key legal, ethical and regulatory issues and outlines how these can be addressed - provides an appropriate rationale for most of the choices made	The assignment: - meets or exceeds the information requirements of the specification - demonstrates a clear awareness of the links between various research processes described - demonstrates a clear awareness of all relevant international and national legal, ethical and regulatory issues relating to the research project and identifies how these can be addressed - provides clear and appropriate justification for the choices made	The assignment: - meets or exceeds the information requirements of the specification - demonstrates a high level of awareness of the links between the various research processes described - demonstrates a high level of awareness of all relevant international and national legal, ethical and regulatory issues relating to the research project and plans how to best to manage these issues - provides clear and appropriate justification for the choices made and, where appropriate, with evaluation of those choices	The assignment: - fails to meet a number of the information requirements of the specification - fails to demonstrate an awareness of the links between the research processes described - fails to identify relevant international and national legal, ethical and regulatory issues - is in conflict with current legislation, regulation and/or ethics advice for research and data practice - fails to explain why the selected research methods have been chosen

9. Examination Specifications and Guidelines

The examination is held online with live invigilation via the TestReach platform.

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 hour (150 minute) 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 with three tasks, based on a scenario)
- 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 scenario with three associated tasks, all of which the candidate must answer. The aim of this 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 tasks normally follow the following format:

- A short scenario, usually containing the following information:
 - Background information and secondary data,
 - Specification of the client's needs or problem,
 - Definition of the task for a researcher.
- There are three tasks associated with the scenario. Candidates must answer all three. The normal format for the tasks is as follows:
 - One task requiring candidates to demonstrate their understanding of research methodology, make informed methodological choices and justify those choices.
 - One task requiring candidates to demonstrate their understanding of sampling issues, make informed sampling choices and justify those choices.
 - One task 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 1-3 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 three 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 two or three 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**.

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 to pass overall. A candidate who achieves one distinction and two 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
Structure & language	The answer: - is written in language that is generally accurate, easy to read and appropriate to the topic. - is generally clearly structured. - Language puts little or no strain on the reader.			The answer: - is written in language which is inaccurate or inappropriate to the topic. - language puts inappropriate strain on the reader.
Task achievement	The answer: - recognises and addresses the key issues raised by the question - demonstrates a satisfactory level of awareness and understanding of the key issues	The answer: - recognises and addresses the key issues raised by the question - demonstrates a good level of awareness and understanding of the key issues	The answer: - recognises and addresses the key issues raised by the question - demonstrates an excellent level of awareness and understanding of the key issues	The answer: - fails to recognise and/or address the key issues raised by the question - demonstrates a significant lack of awareness or understanding of key issues
Content	The answer: - meets the minimum requirements specified in the answer guide, and: - provides adequate rationale, where appropriate, for the points made - provides some appropriate examples to illustrate points made - identifies all or most key international and national legal, ethical and regulatory issues, and outlines how these can be addressed	The answer: - covers more than the minimum information requirements specified in the answer guide, and: - provides convincing rationale, where appropriate, for the points made - provides a range of appropriate examples, where appropriate, 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 relevant international and national legal, ethical and regulatory issues, and identifies how these can be addressed	The answer: - covers more than the minimum information requirements identified in the answer guide, and: - provides fully convincing rationale, where appropriate, for the points made - where appropriate, 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 relevant international and national legal, ethical and regulatory issues, and plans how best to manage these issues.	The answer: - fails to meet the minimum information requirements specified in the answer guide - fails to provide adequate rationale, where appropriate, for the points made - fails to identify relevant international and national legal, ethical and regulatory issues - is in conflict with current legislation, regulation and/or ethics advice for research and data practice



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