



EXAMINER'S REPORT

MAY 2005

SELLING SKILLS Certificate in Marketing Skills

General Comments

In this first year of examination in the subject there was a 96% pass rate. Three students (6% of candidates) received an A grade. The average mark achieved was a very respectable 54%.

SECTION A

Question 1 (a)

The case study revolved around a bribery request and how a salesperson should respond. Unfortunately several students failed to recognise the bribery issue for what it was and instead regarded it as an opening negotiating platform. The range of issues that should have been identified included: Ethical issues in personal selling, Responsibility to one's employer, What if every salesperson was to do it? Will you now have to make the same offer to all customers? What will you have to offer this customer next time? Will you be prepared to tell your manager how you reached your target? Are there legal implications? Is it appropriate to attempt to meet sales targets by any means? In addition the student should have considered that it is a very good product, superior to all alternatives, having several USPs, and has already been 'accepted' by the lecturers. Therefore, even without the bribe, will the lecturers be prepared to recommend an inferior alternative product to their students? It should also be noted that the Head of Department is not a customer - independent retailers are your customers - and he doesn't recommend a textbook to students - lecturers do that.

Question 1 (b)

This part of the question asked the student to differentiate between a gift and a bribe. The phrasing of the question should have been a clear signal to all students that bribery was the central point of the question.

Question 1 (c)

This part asked the student to explain the approach that s/he would employ to secure the sale without adopting the Head of Department's proposal. It was expected that students would concentrate on the product's features, advantages, and benefits, the product's USPs, the fact that the lecturers had already 'accepted' the book, and so on. It also offered an opportunity to introduce a number of appropriate closing techniques. Disappointingly, many students opted to pay the bribe to ensure that they would reach their target.

SECTION B

Question 2

Part A asked the student to differentiate between the two mainstays of the marketing communications mix - personal selling and advertising. This merely required knowledge of Table 1.2 in the manual. Part B asked students to identify the personal qualities required for success in selling. The manual lists product knowledge, personal selling, customer understanding, appreciation of buyer's time, personality, and follow-up as the essential qualities of personal sellers as identified by Irish industrial buyers. This however is not regarded as the definitive list and students who identified characteristics from textbooks or from their own experience also got marks as long as the identified characteristics were based on logic.

Question 3

Marks were awarded equally for outlining each of the five stages of the consumer decision process - problem recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, product choice, and post-purchase evaluation. Part B required the student to explain how and why the industrial buying process differs from the consumer process. It did not require an examination of how the respective buyer behaviours differ in general.

Question 4

This question was made up of six individual parts requiring mathematical calculations and the application of logic. Unfortunately a typographical error altered the intended meaning of the question. Where it says *the retailer has a 100% margin on all items* it was intended to read *the retailer has a 100% mark-up on all items*. As presented, the sixth part to the question could not be answered. A 100% margin implies that the product was received at no cost to the retailer so therefore there could be no percentage mark-up. All other questions could be answered, though the academic value of some calculations is uncertain. Many students assumed that mark-up was intended, or regarded the terms as interchangeable, and were marked accordingly. Others who interpreted the wording literally were marked generously where their initial calculations of the selling price excluding VAT and of the amount of VAT itself were correct.

Question 5

This was the most popular question on the paper and was generally well answered. In the first part greater emphasis should be placed on the expression of an objection being an indication of interest in the product. In Part B most students found an appropriate response to the prospect comments presented. Many however seemed overly enthusiastic to offer a discount. It should be noted that 10% is not a 'nominal discount' as many suggested. Bear in mind that 10% refers to the selling price and represents a considerably greater proportion of the profit margin. Students should have been able to overcome the objection without resorting to discounting. You should be able to justify your price, you only have to justify the price difference - don't be afraid of your price!