



Awarding body monitoring report for: The Market Research Society (MRS)

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Introduction

Regulating external qualifications

Responsibility for regulating external qualifications lies jointly with three qualifications regulators:

- the Office of the Qualifications and Examinations Regulator (Ofqual)
- the Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills (DCELLS), the body for Wales
- and the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA), the authority for Northern Ireland.

Following the accreditation of a qualification, the regulators systematically monitor awarding bodies against the requirements set out in the statutory regulations. The aim of this activity is to promote continuing improvement and public confidence in the quality of external qualifications.

Where an awarding body is found not to comply with relevant criteria, the regulators set conditions of accreditation. Even if an awarding body is compliant, the monitoring team may make observations on ways that the awarding body could change its systems and procedures to improve clarity or reduce bureaucracy.

Accreditation conditions and observations arising from this monitoring activity are specified at the end of each section of this report. Awarding bodies are required to produce an action plan to show how they will deal with accreditation conditions imposed as a result of a monitoring activity. The regulators will agree the action plan and monitor its implementation.

The regulators will use the outcomes of monitoring and any subsequent action taken by awarding bodies to inform decisions on the re-accreditation of qualifications, or, if necessary, the withdrawal of accreditation.

Banked documents

As part of their awarding body recognition processes the regulators require awarding bodies to submit certain documents to Ofqual for the purposes of 'banking' centrally. Information from banked documents will be used to inform monitoring activities and may also affect the awarding body's risk rating.

A suite of documents has been identified as suitable for banking and are those that are considered to be most crucial in supporting an awarding body's ability to operate effectively. To maintain the currency of the banked documents awarding bodies are responsible for updating

them as and when changes occur. They are also reminded to review them at least annually at the time of completion of the self-assessment return.

About this report

This is the second monitoring activity on The Market Research Society (MRS) and was carried out in April and May 2008.

The monitoring focused on the regulatory criteria relating to the following key areas:

- corporate governance
- resources and expertise
- application of assessment methods
 - quality assurance and control of internal assessment
- application of assessment methods
 - quality assurance and control of independent assessment
- determination and reporting of results
- registration and certification
- monitoring and self-assessment.

The monitoring activities included desk research of information already held by the regulators, attendance at an Awards meeting and scrutiny of MRS's website. The regulators' monitoring team visited MRS's head office to conduct interviews with staff and review documentation.

This report draws together the regulators' findings from these monitoring activities.

About MRS

MRS is a professional membership society that has recently expanded its role to incorporate the activities of a trade association, formerly known as the British Market Research Association. It offers three accredited qualifications at levels two, five and seven in the national qualifications framework. For more information on MRS, visit its website at www.mrs.org.uk.

Corporate governance

This is subject to *The statutory regulation of external qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (2004)*, paragraphs 5, 6 and 7.

Findings

1. MRS is a company limited by guarantee. The MRS Council is its governing body. Reporting to the MRS Council are several boards and it is the Professional Development Advisory Board (PDAB) that supervises the awarding body. The PDAB's terms of reference indicate that its powers are limited to making recommendations to the Council.
2. The regulators' monitoring team noted slight differences in the content of the terms of reference for the PDAB from the other boards. For example, in contrast to the management board, there was no mention of what constituted a quorum for its meetings and nothing specific on the lines of reporting. It only meets twice a year whereas the management board meets six times. The references to specific job titles in the terms of reference section on PDAB membership are out of date as re-organisation has occurred since they were written.
3. The regulators' monitoring team examined the minutes of the two PDAB meetings in 2007 and found these to be completely relevant to awarding body matters. An awarding body review group's recommendations had been accepted and membership of the PDAB had been changed to include more of those directly involved in the operational aspects of MRS qualifications. Both meetings in 2007 had received a comprehensive pre-meeting report that covered the awarding body's activities in depth.
4. The MRS Council delegates day-to-day responsibilities to the Director General and his executive staff. The Director General is the single named point of accountability for maintaining the quality and standards of the awarding body's accredited qualifications.
5. The administration of the awarding body is carried out by a small team of four staff, one of whom is the Deputy Director General. There is also a team of consultants, examiners and subject specialists who are drawn upon as required. An organisation chart for head office staff was provided that showed clear lines of management. Despite a reduction in numbers of staff since the last monitoring activity, the recommendations contained in the last monitoring report had all been addressed.
6. MRS has a training arm but its activities do not include training for any of its accredited qualifications.
7. The regulators' monitoring team was satisfied with MRS's awarding body's corporate governance arrangements and did not find any conflicts of interest.

8. The regulators' monitoring team questioned whether MRS was offering qualifications in partnership with other awarding bodies. There is reference, for example, in the national database of accredited qualifications, to MRS as a partner in another awarding body's qualification. This is a qualification that is now entirely run by the other awarding body, but which was originally created by MRS and for which there is a commercial arrangement.
9. There is a shared unit for MRS's level 7 qualification with another awarding body. MRS sits on the joint committee that draws up the examination paper. MRS assesses this solely by examination whereas the other awarding body provides its candidates with alternative routes. All examined assessment is carried out by MRS, including for the other awarding body's candidates. This ensures a standard approach. Technically this should have been included on the last awarding body recognition update (ABRU) submission to the regulators. This was inadvertent and the arrangement had been advised to the regulators by a different route.
10. MRS provided the regulators' monitoring team with a full list of its fees and there were no issues that required further investigation.

Accreditation conditions

There are no accreditation conditions for this section.

Observations

1. MRS should ensure that it keeps under review the possibility of any potential conflict of interest for its Council and how this would be managed should it occur, given the limited powers of the PDAB.
2. The PDAB's terms of reference should be kept up to date.
3. MRS should ensure that it keeps up to date the written statement of responsibilities where it awards qualifications in partnership or consortium with other awarding bodies, as required by paragraph 5c of the regulatory criteria. It should also take note of criterion 6aii should any changes occur.

Resources and expertise

This is subject to *The statutory regulation of external qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (2004)*, paragraphs 8 and 10.

Findings

1. MRS provided full access to its records and staff. The organisation chart showed the lines of reporting and the principal players in awarding body activity. The core awarding team is small with four key staff involved. There are approximately eight chief examiners, and 20 other examiners and external assessors used for the three qualifications.
2. Full appointment procedures exist, including training and monitoring of new examiners. Records of attendance at training events are held.
3. Recruitment is dependent to a degree on personal recommendation. However, competence requirements for examiners are couched in terms that lack precision such as 'appropriate academic qualifications' and 'substantial experience'. Nevertheless, the sample CVs requested for examiners all showed high degrees of subject competence and experience.
4. When qualifications or examinations need to be created MRS recognises that its head office staff resource is too small for this activity. It typically sets up a task force, including academics and employers as appropriate, to carry out the work. Reporting is to the PDAB.
5. The regulators' monitoring team was satisfied that MRS possesses, or has access to, the expertise required to carry out the functions of an awarding body.

Accreditation conditions

There are no accreditation conditions for this section.

Observations

4. MRS should ensure that person specifications for examiners' posts have greater detail.

Application of assessment methods: quality assurance and control of internal assessment

This is subject to *The statutory regulation of external qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (2004)*, paragraphs 13, 36, 38–42, 56–57 and 59–62.

Findings

1. There are three MRS qualifications within the national qualifications framework and two of them have internal assessment as part, or the whole, of their assessment method. For level 2, assessment consists entirely of internal assessment by means of observation recorded in a portfolio that is then externally moderated. For level 5, half of the assessment is by means of an assignment that is internally assessed and then externally moderated.
2. All level 2 portfolios are currently examined by the external moderator, as numbers of candidates are small. All level 5 assignments are submitted to MRS for moderation and from this the Qualifications Manager selects a sample following MRS's guidance on sampling.
3. There is no internal moderation at centres but there are references in MRS's documentation telling centres to double mark 'where possible' or double mark 'a selection'. The lack of detail and compulsion does not allow for consistency and the instructions should be made more specific.
4. All level 2 portfolios are retained by the centres for a year and are then destroyed in accordance with MRS's guidance. Level 5 assignments are kept for three years. It is not clear how MRS uses assessment records and examples of candidates' work to monitor provision over time, but it has set up a working group on the subject, covering both internal and independent assessment.
5. English is the language of assessment but MRS will provide assessment in Welsh or Irish if there is sufficient demand. MRS has several statements on this subject spread throughout its documents, but even within a document the wording is not always consistent. One incorrectly states that only English is available. MRS must ensure that its stated policy is reflected in the wording of all its documents.
6. Training for internal assessors is provided annually, but once enough people in a centre have been trained, MRS allows cascaded training within the centre to take place.
7. The methodology for level 2 follows a national vocational qualification (NVQ) model but without internal verification at the centre. The assessor and the external moderator need training to ensure a unified approach to assessment and moderation. MRS needs to ensure

that its guidance and training are thorough. Depending on cascaded training carries inherent risks.

8. Candidates must either follow a centre-devised research problem on which to base their assignment or create their own research problem. The document *Integrated Assignment – Guidelines for Centres* provides very specific detail to centres on how the research problem should be devised. Centres can devise their own guidelines for candidates covering format, length and layout and research context or they can use MRS's document *How to Complete and Submit the Integrated Assignment*. Exemplar material is available to centres for training and standardisation purposes.
9. For the level 2 qualification, centres have no guidance on the data they must keep to track candidates' progress. There is no confirmation of authenticity provided with candidates' level 2 evidence. For the level 5 evidence, the awarding body expects a declaration of authenticity but the regulators' monitoring team could not see any check for this. The regulators' monitoring team found one of the two examples it looked at did not have the authenticity confirmed. (Similar comments on authenticity appear later in the section on independent assessment.)
10. Because each candidate may be involved in a unique project, the marking scheme for the portfolio and for the assignments is generic. The assessment guidance attempts, therefore, to state what a fail, pass, merit or distinction will look like rather than, as in some mark schemes, allocating specific marks for particular answers. Exemplar assignment material and examiner reports are provided to assist tutors and future candidates.
11. Clear guidance is given on how much assistance tutors can give candidates in evidence production but there is nothing on the extent to which candidates can be allowed to redraft material before it is assessed.
12. There was an example of good practice in that MRS provided special guidance on completing assignments for those candidates entering directly and not via a centre.
13. MRS uses only two moderators per assessment round, even for its largest qualification, so there is little problem of standardisation of moderators' work. The sampling guidance they follow is sound. Any problems that moderators identify are reported to the awards committee meeting if serious enough.
14. The awarding body keeps a record of its examiners' and moderators' conflicts of interest and this is updated every year. No report is produced on the work of the moderators. With only two moderators currently, this is understandable.

15. Feedback is given to centres on their internal assessment by external moderators' reports for level 2 and by exception reports when problems have been identified for level 5.

Accreditation conditions

1. For its level 2 qualification, MRS must explain its system for retaining evidence of candidates' work or internal/independent assessment decisions to monitor provision over time (*The statutory regulation of external qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (2004), paragraph 13).

2. MRS must inform internal assessors about:

- the extent to which candidates can be allowed to redraft work before it is assessed
- double marking, so that requirements can be interpreted consistently
- the minimum data that centres should keep to track candidates' progress
- how confirmation is to be provided to MRS that the candidate's work is authentic (and address the same problem for independent assessment)

(*The statutory regulation of external qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (2004), paragraphs 60c, 60e, 60f, 60g and 57a).

3. MRS must ensure that it reports on the work of each moderator (*The statutory regulation of external qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (2004), paragraphs 61dii and 61f).

Observations

5. MRS should check its documentation to ensure that a consistent message is given regarding its willingness to provide assessment through the medium of Welsh or Irish (Gaelige).
6. MRS should check the efficacy of relying upon cascaded training for internal assessors.

Application of assessment methods: quality assurance and control of independent assessment

This is subject to *The statutory regulation of external qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (2004)*, paragraphs 13, 36, 38–42 and 56–58.

Findings

1. There is independent assessment for the examination that makes up half of the assessment for level 5 and for all of the assessment for units that make up the level 7 qualification. The level 7 is assessed by a mixture of examinations and assignments.
2. MRS insists on photographic identification for all its examination candidates. Confirmation of assignments' authenticity when submitted for independent assessment suffers the same weaknesses as were identified in the preceding section of this report on internal assessment.
3. The handbooks and other documentation provide clear links to the syllabus and outcomes required. MRS produces examiners' reports, including exemplar material, commenting on candidates' weaknesses and problems to assist training providers and future candidates.
4. The mark schemes are generic for the assignments, indicating what a fail, pass, merit or distinction will look like. Raw marks are only awarded for the level 7 examination. MRS has procedures for monitoring the work of its examiners. Statistics on results are used as a way of measuring comparability of examinations and of assignments over time.
5. The regulators' monitoring team tracked on-screen information held by the awarding body on the process of examination production. This confirmed that, for example, items were being evaluated by people not involved in their development. The regulators' monitoring team was satisfied with the security arrangements for distribution of the examination papers.
6. MRS combines with another awarding body to produce unit 1 of its level 7 qualification. There is a joint awarding body committee and examination papers and mark schemes are signed off by this committee. Assessment of the examination is carried out for both awarding bodies' candidates by MRS's examiners. Guidelines for invigilators cover conventional written examinations. In unit 5 of the level 7 qualification, candidates are allowed to prepare notes on a case study for one and a half hours ahead of a conventional written examination based on it.
7. Examiners' marks are standardised at each examination or assignment sitting by means of examiners each submitting a small selection of marked scripts. The chief examiner provides

feedback and ensures uniformity in accordance with MRS's comprehensive procedures entitled *Assessment and Awarding Procedures*.

8. At present, examiners receive, on average, 25 scripts to mark. MRS stated that the standing of its markers made it difficult to expect such people to mark large quantities of scripts. The regulators' monitoring team considered that this was barely within the parameter for using the minimum number of examiners and asked the awarding body to ensure that numbers were monitored closely.
9. Potential conflicts of interest by examiners are recorded and flagged up, if they occur, as described in the preceding section of this report on internal assessment.

Accreditation conditions

There are no accreditation conditions for this section.

Observations

7. MRS should ensure that no more examiners are used to mark scripts than is absolutely necessary in order to assist standardisation.

Determination and reporting of results

This is subject to *The statutory regulation of external qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (2004)*, paragraphs 63–67.

Findings

1. MRS's level 2 qualification is awarded against the assessment of a portfolio in three sections: knowledge, skills and behaviours. Each section is graded fail, pass or distinction. The candidate must pass all three sections. If the candidate exceeds the pass grade in two or more sections then the overall qualification is graded as a distinction.
2. The regulators' monitoring team looked at two portfolios provided by the awarding body. These portfolios are stored by the centres after moderation has occurred. The portfolios lacked adequate audit trails. For example, assessors' reports were typed with no signature and evidence consisted of unauthenticated pages in a loose-leaf portfolio. MRS is not applying for the level 2 qualification to be re-accredited.
3. Level 5 is awarded on successfully completing an assignment and an examination. Although both are graded (fail/pass/merit/distinction), the qualification is not. Within the examination, each question is graded but if candidates fail one of them, they may still be awarded a pass overall if they achieve a merit or above in one of the other two questions. Even if they do not, their paper will be re-assessed to see if they may qualify for a pass grade. The assignment and examination grades are shown on the certificate.
4. The regulators' monitoring team looked at examples of level 5 assignments and saw that the internal assessor did not sign off the assessment but merely recorded their comments and classification, sometimes on a typed sheet with their name but no signature. The moderators did sign off their comments. The candidate's script was entirely unmarked and therefore did not confirm that every page had been examined. It would be good practice to ensure that this is done to give confidence that all of the candidate's evidence has been viewed.
5. For the level 7 qualification, candidates must pass the three compulsory units (units 1, 2 and 5) and one of the two optional units (units 3 and 4). All of the units are graded but the qualification is not graded overall.
6. Although the information to centres on overall performance at level 7 was provided, as required by the regulatory criteria, the regulators' monitoring team found its presentation complex and difficult to understand. The regulators' monitoring team had to ask for clarification since the narrative in the *Diploma in Market and Social Research Practice*

Handbook, 2007 onwards was insufficiently detailed. MRS indicated that they would incorporate a clearer explanation of marks and grades in this publication.

7. The regulators' monitoring team could not find any information available to users that would enable them to understand the meanings of grades.
8. Reviewing the decisions of the examiners and looking at difficult cases is carried out by the awarding committee which meets approximately nine weeks after the examination sitting. This consists of the chief examiner and moderators together with the awarding body's qualifications manager and the professional development coordinator. Procedures are contained in the *Assessment and Awarding Procedures*. A member of the regulators' monitoring team attended a meeting of this committee and was satisfied with the paperwork and conduct of the meeting.

Accreditation conditions

4. MRS must ensure that, for the level 2 qualification:
 - comprehensive records of the decisions taken and of the standards achieved are maintained
 - the bases on which decisions are made are open to monitoring by the regulators

(The statutory regulation of external qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (2004), paragraph 63a).

5. MRS must provide information to enable users to differentiate between the meaning of grades (*The statutory regulation of external qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (2004), paragraph 67*).

Observations

8. MRS should consider asking assessors and moderators to indicate that they have examined each sheet of the candidate's answer.
9. MRS should provide clearer information on how the overall award is derived from candidate performance at level 7.

Registration and certification

This is subject to *The statutory regulation of external qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (2004)*, paragraphs 11–12 and 21–22.

Findings

1. Candidates may register directly or via a centre. Centres are responsible for their candidates' eligibility since the awarding body has admission requirements of an academic or experience nature for two of its qualifications.
2. Centres are registered and there is an approval visit by the awarding body. Conditions are tracked by means of a spreadsheet. The visit report form examines a centre's complaints procedure but not their appeals procedure. It does not specifically cover the issue of buildings used for assessment being accessible. MRS considers the single named point of accountability for the quality assurance and management of the qualifications as the person signing the contract on behalf of the centre.
3. A letter of accreditation is issued but this makes no mention of the centre's obligation to allow the regulators access to premises, people and records and to cooperate with the awarding bodies' monitoring activities.
4. MRS keeps data on its centres, candidates and qualifications, and provides this information to the regulators as required.
5. Certificates are issued to candidates within six weeks of the results being announced. Unit certificates and replacement certificates are available and properly controlled. Aegrotats may be awarded in strictly controlled circumstances. Replacement certificates were currently described as duplicates which would only be true for the first replacement. The word 'replacement' is safer and should be in a position where its removal (typically by cutting off) would be easily seen by someone unfamiliar with the dimensions of an MRS certificate. MRS was aware of the need to establish the identity of anyone claiming a replacement.
6. MRS could not provide evidence that it informs its clients that the regulators' logos on its certificates indicate that the qualifications are accredited for England, Wales and Northern Ireland.
7. The specimen certificates provided to the regulators' monitoring team required some amendments to meet the regulatory requirements despite MRS having asked for and received Qualifications and Curriculum Authority approval of the certificates.

Accreditation conditions

6. MRS must ensure that:

- there is a clear indication of the centre's single named point of accountability for the quality assurance and management of its qualifications
- it examines centres' appeals procedures
- information is obtained on whether buildings used for assessment are accessible
- its centres agree to provide the awarding body and the regulators with access to premises, people and records and to cooperate with MRS's monitoring activities

(The statutory regulation of external qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (2004), paragraphs 11a, 11b, 11c and 11f).

7. MRS must inform its clients that the regulators' logos on the certificate indicate that the qualification is accredited for England, Wales and Northern Ireland (*The statutory regulation of external qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (2004)*, paragraph 21b).

8. MRS must ensure that:

- the design of certificates meets the regulators' requirements
- replacement certificates are clearly labelled as such and the wording 'replacement' is not easily removed

(The statutory regulation of external qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (2004), paragraphs 22a and 22d).

Observations

There are no observations for this section.

Monitoring and self assessment

This is subject to *The statutory regulation of external qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (2004)*, paragraphs 33a, 34–35 and 37.

Findings

1. MRS had submitted its annual self-assessment report and was involved in discussions with the regulators over its content. The regulators' monitoring team noted that use had been made of the template that the regulators use to assist them to assess the level of compliance with the individual regulatory criteria.
2. MRS's awarding body operates on a small resource in terms of people but they have the ability to step back from their operational duties in order to carry out objective self-assessment. The regulators' monitoring team read all the 2007 minutes and attached awarding body reports of the PDAB and found them to be both detailed and appropriate.
3. The regulators monitoring team was satisfied that MRS completed reviews and monitoring activities to assist in the completion of a self-assessment process.

Accreditation conditions

There are no accreditation conditions for this section.

Observations

There are no observations for this section.