



## MRS QUALIFICATIONS

### Who we are and what we do

#### 1. Introduction

Since 2000, MRS has been involved in redeveloping its suite of qualifications in line with developing government requirements related to the training of workplace skills. The aim of this document is to provide a short guide to the work of the MRS Awarding Body: how it is structured and what it does.

#### 2. What is an Awarding Body?

MRS is recognised by the UK's Office of the Qualifications & Examinations Regulator (Ofqual) as an awarding body for vocational qualifications in market and social research.

The MRS Awarding Body is responsible for the development, delivery and monitoring of all aspects of assessment for the MRS suite of qualifications. These qualifications currently include:

- *MRS Advanced Certificate in Market & Social Research Practice*
- *MRS Diploma in Market & Social Research Practice*
- *MRS Certificate in Interviewer Skills for Market & Social Research*

MRS has also been responsible for the development of the *MRS/City & Guilds Certificate in Market & Social Research*. The delivery and monitoring of assessment for this qualification is carried out by our partner in this project, City & Guilds.

#### 3. MRS & Ofqual

The Office of the Qualifications & Examinations Regulator (Ofqual) is the regulatory body which accredits qualifications which are offered in England, and, with partner organisations, in Wales and Northern Ireland (Scotland is regulated by a separate body – the SQA – which has links with Ofqual). The role of Ofqual is to regulate qualifications to ensure that they are fit for purpose and that they are quality assured. The practical implications of this for awarding bodies, including MRS, are as follows:

- All qualifications need to go through a rigorous development and accreditation phase, to demonstrate that they are assessing candidates appropriately.
- All vocational qualifications need to have the support of the industry or business sector which they are designed to serve. This means they need to show that they are helping candidates to develop the required work skills.
- Everything related to accredited qualifications is monitored by Ofqual. The MRS is audited to ensure that the qualifications are delivered in line with government regulations and guidelines.
- The awarding body cannot provide direct training for candidates who are taking their qualifications. This means that MRS cannot train candidates to take MRS qualifications. This has to be done through other organisations (e.g. employers, colleges, universities & other training providers).

Certificates for MRS qualifications accredited within the National Qualifications Framework carry the logos of three regulatory bodies: Ofqual, ACCAC and CEA. These logos signify that the qualifications are accredited for England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

#### **4. Accessing MRS Qualifications**

MRS does not provide training programmes for its own qualifications. Instead, the MRS Awarding Body accredits a wide range of organisations (known as 'centres') to deliver its qualifications. All centres undergo a rigorous accreditation process in order to become an MRS Accredited Centre. A full list of all MRS Accredited Centres for each qualification can be found in the Qualifications section of the MRS website.

#### **5. How is the MRS Awarding Body structured?**

The Professional Development section of MRS comprises two distinct departments: MRS Qualifications (the Awarding Body); and MRS Training, which provides short courses in core and key skills for researchers. As shown in Section 4, these courses are not linked to MRS qualifications.

Within the Awarding Body, there are two key roles:

**Qualifications Manager (Samantha Driscoll)** is responsible for the ensuring the effective delivery and appropriate monitoring of all aspects of the assessment process.

**Professional Development Co-ordinator (Hayley Dack)** is responsible for ensuring the accurate registration of candidates, for ensuring that accurate and up-to-date information is sent to candidates and centres, and for liaising with centres and venues to ensure the appropriate conduct of examinations.

The Qualifications Manager and Professional Development Co-ordinator are accountable to the **Director, Policy & Communication (Debrah Harding)**. The Director, Policy & Communication is also responsible for ensuring clear and distinct lines of management and accountability for each of the two departments in the Professional Development section.

#### **6. The MRS Awarding Body & accountability to the profession**

The role of the MRS Awarding Body is to provide qualifications which suit the needs of those involved in the research industry. In order to ensure that the qualifications which are developed meet – and continue to meet - the needs of individuals and employers, the Awarding Body reports to the MRS Professional Development Advisory Board (PDAB).

##### **Who are the PDAB?**

The PDAB comprises experts drawn from both the employer and academic sectors of the research industry. Their role is both to advise on and to monitor the development of MRS strategy and policies in the area of professional development, and to ensure their ongoing relevance to the industry as a whole.

##### **What does PDAB do?**

The PDAB normally meets twice per year, in order to:

- review developments in the research industry to ensure that both MRS qualifications and MRS training programmes develop to meet emerging industry needs
- oversee the design and development of qualifications
- advise on the appointment of Task Forces, drawn from employer organisations and academic institutions, to oversee the development of new qualifications if required
- monitor the performance of the MRS Awarding Body via reports on all statistics relating to registration and achievement

MRS is required to conduct an internal annual self assessment of their processes and performance. The self assessment is carried out by the Director, Policy & Communication and the Qualifications Manager. MRS reports back to PDAB and submits an Annual Return to Ofqual.

## 7. How are qualifications assessed?

The MRS Awarding Body is responsible for developing and monitoring all aspects of the assessment of MRS qualifications to ensure that:

- each assessment method used is fit for purpose
- the method of assessment differentiates between candidates only on the grounds of their ability, and is free from any form of discrimination
- the standard required to complete the qualification successfully remains consistent over time
- centres and candidates understand what is required by each assessment method
- those involved in assessing candidates' work are appropriately qualified, experienced and briefed to ensure consistency and accuracy of assessment.

### **Types of assessment**

MRS uses three different forms of assessment within its suite of qualifications:

- *External examinations* are set and marked by MRS.
- *Coursework assignments* are set and marked by the individual centres. All coursework assignments are then submitted to MRS for moderation.
- *Personal development portfolios*, which chart the individual's work-based learning, are assessed by the centre, then submitted to MRS for moderation.

The following grid shows how each of the three MRS qualifications is assessed:

<b>Qualification</b>	<b>Type of assessment</b>
<i>MRS Advanced Certificate</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coursework assignment and examination</li> </ul>
<i>MRS Diploma</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Units 1 &amp; 5 assessed by examination</li> <li>• All other units assessed by assignment</li> </ul>
<i>MRS Certificate in Interviewer Skills</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Professional development portfolio</li> </ul>

### **Ensuring consistency**

- All examinations are compiled against clear criteria. Each examination paper includes questions which represent an appropriate balance of topics across the syllabus for the qualification or the unit. All papers are compiled by the Chief Examiners for the qualification or unit, and are then reviewed by a panel of expert moderators.
- All assignments are supported by a set of specifications and assessment criteria, highlighting the areas which should be covered in the assignment and the knowledge and skills which the candidates need to demonstrate in order to pass.
- Everyone who is involved in assessing candidates' work is also directly involved in the market research industry, either as a research practitioner or as a lecturer/teacher within an academic centre. All MRS examiners, moderators and assessors have to undergo specialist training to ensure that they can assess candidates' work consistently and fairly.

## 8. How are centres and candidates supported?

The MRS Awarding Body provides a wide range of information and material to support both centres and candidates in relation to assessment.

### **Supporting centres**

All accredited centres receive comprehensive information about the requirements of the qualifications they offer. This information takes the form of:

- administration handbooks, giving guidance on all aspects of assessment systems

- briefing and standardization meetings for those involved in the internal assessment of assignments
- regular newsletters, providing updates on any developments to assessment systems
- a dedicated area of the MRS website for accredited centres, to provide regular updates and access to forms and past exam papers
- an examination report following each assessment round, including statistics and guidance on how each question was answered by candidates.

In addition, centre representatives are encouraged to contact the MRS Awarding Body directly if they require specific information or assistance.

### ***Supporting candidates***

In addition to providing supporting information for centres, the MRS Awarding Body provides a range of information for individual candidates:

- the Qualifications section of the MRS website provides guidance to potential candidates on the structure and requirements of each qualification, along with links to centres which offer the qualification
- candidates can also access more detailed information about assessment, including practice exam questions, via the website
- following their registration for assessment, all candidates receive confirmation of their registration and information about assessment systems
- information about how to enquire about or appeal against final grades is included with each candidate's results confirmation.

## **9. How is the MRS Awarding Body's work monitored?**

All aspects of the work of the MRS Awarding Body are monitored to ensure that MRS qualifications continue to meet the needs of candidates and of the industry, and the regulatory requirements of the Ofqual. In order to meet all of these requirements, several monitoring systems exist:

- All operational aspects of assessment are subject to a series of internal checks within the awarding body. This monitoring is overseen by the Qualifications Manager.
- Consistency of assessment is monitored via statistical analysis of results. Following each assessment round, results are reviewed in relation to those of previous rounds in order to identify if any anomalies exist. This work is carried out by the Chief Examiners and industry moderators.
- Feedback on the work of the MRS Awarding Body is gathered during the annual Centre Network meeting (for all centres) and the biannual Professional Development Scheme meetings (for companies accredited to deliver qualifications as part of their in-house training). Centres are also encouraged to contact MRS on an individual basis with comments and feedback. Customer satisfaction surveys will also be carried out to allow for a more systematic approach to evaluating the awarding body's work with centres.
- Candidates are encouraged to give feedback on their views of the qualifications to their centre. Systems are currently under review in order to identify ways in which candidates' views may be gathered more systematically.
- The MRS Awarding Body currently reports twice annually on its work to the PDAB. The awarding body's work will be reviewed annually by a Self Assessment reported to the PDAB and by an Annual Return to the Ofqual.
- All aspects of the work of the MRS Awarding Body are regulated and liable for audit by Ofqual.