



STAGE 4

PROJECT

GUIDELINES

The Stage 4 project is integrative in nature. It seeks to bring together the knowledge, both theoretical and applied, which the student has learned during the graduateship programme. In the project the student is required to describe and evaluate the overall marketing strategy of a firm or organisation and is requested also to focus in greater detail on an aspect of this strategy, e.g. marketing communications or pricing. The examiner expects to see evidence of a senior cycle student, attempting to come to grips with contemporary marketing issues, in a mature, analytical, structured and professional manner.

Stage 4 is the final capstone year of the graduateship and the student should have the ability to bring together the various strands and subfields of their learning about marketing; they should be able to see the 'big picture' from the perspective of the marketing manager or director. It is this holistic and integrative dimension that distinguishes the Stage 4 project from those of previous years.

Describing and evaluating the marketing strategy of a firm or organisation involves considering the overall strategy and mission of the firm, its products and services, its served markets and competitive positioning, its customers and competitive environment. It involves the study of product development and product choice, marketing communication, price, distribution and logistics and other variables that impact on marketing strategy and its successful management. Students can use as their template the structure and frameworks to be found in the texts assigned within the many modules they have undertaken while studying with the Marketing Institute of Ireland.

The complementary and more focused part of the project requires the student to address a particular aspect or dimension of the marketing strategy. It could be to examine sales management, product development, or the role of design in the organisation in more depth. It could be to explore the role of internationalising or cooperative marketing in the firm and how this underpins its marketing strategy. It could also represent a paradigmatic shift in marketing theory and practice by asking the student to consider a development like internal marketing, relationship marketing or category management. In some cases this request could necessitate the student doing some extra reading/study on the particular topic; but it will also deepen the student's knowledge of some module of the final stages. The expectation is always that the student will use his/her initiative and produce a piece of work which reflects the current level of knowledge in the field of marketing.

In writing-up the project, a student may first present and evaluate the overall marketing strategy and then go on to deal with the complementary, more focused part in more depth. While it may be stating the obvious, students should be aware that they are applying their knowledge of marketing theory to the circumstances of a particular firm. Regurgitating theory alone is not enough. Its application to the case firm is key. It is also well to remember that as well as research on the company, the whole exercise requires considerable thought by the student. The best projects reveal deep knowledge of marketing theory, mature reflection on the case study data, as well as balanced evaluation and recommendation. Waffle on the part of the student can be easily detected. The examiner shows the projects to nobody. However, they should be of a standard that the examiner would be delighted (in theory!) to show to the senior management of the firms involved as offering examples of first rate, clearly written, consultancy-type insight into the firms.

Students display great resourcefulness and imagination in choosing their case firms or organisation. These can operate in any sector of the economy, be for-profit or not-for-profit, or be big or small. Many students choose the firm with which they work and will often have access to relevant data and reports. However, students are required to acknowledge whether or not they work in the firm under study, and the examiner keeps this in mind when assessing the student's work. Privileged access does not necessarily mean a better project, and as many first rate projects come from students who do not work full-time in the case companies as from those who do.