



Association of Irish Market Research Organisations

---

**QUALITY STANDARDS  
FOR QUALITATIVE RESEARCHER  
RESPONSIBLE FOR PROJECTS**

**APRIL 2009**

**1. INTRODUCTION**

a. OBJECTIVES

- i. The purpose of this document is to set out some guiding principles on the importance of the independence and objectivity of qualitative marketing research.

**2. SECTION A – A SUMMARY OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH**

a. COMPONENTS OF A QUALITATIVE RESEARCH PROJECT

- i. Typically a qualitative research project will include the following stages
  1. Consultation with the client to establish research needs and objectives
  2. Design of the research project
  3. Recruitment of the respondents to take part in the research
  4. Moderation of focus groups and/or interviewing of respondents
  5. Analysis and interpretation of findings
  6. Presentation and reporting of findings
- ii. Each stage requires considerable skill and the only element of the process which does not directly involve the research executive is the recruitment of respondents.

Register in Ireland:  
No. 199377

Directors: T. Harper, L. McClure, I. McShane, N. Murray, T. Healy.  
Representatives: R. Jupp, D. Loscher C. Fanagan, G. O'Neill, M. Burke

b. THE SKILLS OF A QUALITATIVE RESEARCHER

i. Good qualitative researchers typically display the following characteristics

1. An interest in the client's business that will allow the researcher to design better research and ask more telling questions
2. An ability to help respondents relax and articulate their views
3. The capacity to distinguish between 'convenient' responses and true insights. Convenient responses are those where the respondent wishes to represent themselves in a certain light, for any number of reasons. So, for example, people may overstate their commitment to organic foods or to controlling their children's TV watching. A true insight will provide the client with a perspective on the subject that had not been recognised or articulated up to that point.
4. The ability to sift through the findings and sort the merely anecdotal from the truly important points and to place them within their proper context vis-à-vis the market and the client's business aspirations.
5. A skill in presenting findings that allows the client gain a richer understanding of the findings than mere words on a page might ever allow.

c. QUALITATIVE QUESTIONING

i. Distinguishing qualitative and quantitative questioning

1. The key distinction between qualitative and quantitative research is that qualitative research uses unstructured questioning which means that while the list of subjects (discussion guide) to be covered is agreed in advance, the moderator (research executive) does not have to follow a set order of questions and can depart from the discussion guide to explore points of particular importance to the respondents.

d. **MODES OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH**

- i. There are two main types of qualitative ‘research units’
  1. Group discussions (focus groups)
    - a. Group discussions are probably the most regularly-used format for qualitative research. As their name suggests, they are discussions convened with anywhere between 4 and 10 people, usually lasting about 90 minutes.
  2. Depth interviews
    - a. Depth interviews are conducted on a one-to-one basis, either face-to-face or by telephone, and can last from 30 to 90 minutes.

**2. SECTION B – BUYING QUALITATIVE RESEARCH**

a. **OVERVIEW**

- ii. Given the complexity of the qualitative process, AIMRO has set down a series of guiding principles, designed to facilitate the commissioning of qualitative research projects.

b. **EXPERIENCE**

- iii. Years of experience
  1. The executive directing the project will have a minimum of (3) years’ experience of conducting qualitative research – group discussions or interviews.
- iv. Number of groups and interviews conducted
  1. They will have conducted at least (200) groups or depth interviews in their career, or at least (75) in the last (12) months.
- v. Proportion of experience in ROI or NI market
  1. The company undertaking the research will conduct a substantial proportion of their total business in the Republic of Ireland or Northern Ireland. The senior executive on the project will have conducted a substantial proportion of their work of the last twelve months in the Republic of Ireland or Northern Ireland.

vi. Training

1. The senior executive will have had formalised training in qualitative research techniques over the course of a number of years.

c. RESPONSIBILITY AND INVOLVEMENT

vii. Working with an assistant

1. Where the executive directly responsible for the project is working with a junior colleague, the senior executive will conduct at least half of the group discussions or interviews themselves.

d. MEMBERSHIP OF PROFESSIONAL BODIES

viii. The research executive or their employer will be a member of at least one of the following organisations

1. Market Research Society
2. Association of Qualitative Research
3. European Society for Opinion and Market Research
4. Association of Irish Market Research Organisations

e. STANDARD OF GROUP RECRUITMENT

- i. Those recruiting group discussions or depth interviews will operate to industry standards – as set out by the bodies above and Interviewing Quality Control Standards
- ii. The companies and individuals involved in the recruitment of the group discussions will be PAYE and PRSI compliant.

f. IMPARTIALITY IN RESEARCH

- i. The company conducting the research will only sell marketing research services to the client. They and their direct employers will not be involved in the sale of any other consultancy or marketing services.