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## **INTRODUCTION**

This report has been compiled with the primary aim of assisting those who are preparing to sit Diploma Examination Papers in the future. It will also be of benefit to lecturers, course co-ordinators, tutors and mentors. It aims to give brief comments on candidates' answers to each question, as well as highlighting common pitfalls and successes. It is designed to provoke constructive thought as much as to give all the answers. Comments on individual questions are preceded by some statistics and general comments. In some instances, guidance notes are supplemented by extracts from candidates' responses. Where appropriate, advice is given on where additional marks could have been gained. Whilst examples are not provided for every question set, there are examples of sections from each of the specific styles of question – coursework assignments, tasting questions and theory questions from closed book papers. In each instance, the scripts have been selected to illustrate good coverage of either the topic as a whole, or a specific section of it.

It should be borne in mind that these are not the definitive answer to any of the questions. Some may omit a number of facts, or in the case of the coursework assignments, may express a degree of personal opinion rather than fact. Nevertheless, they are reproduced here because they are a good representation of the standard required to pass or excel in the Diploma examination. In some instances, we have also included less than perfect answers. These illustrate the difference between a very good script and one that requires more work to reach the standard to justify a pass, or in some instances to illustrate what is not acceptable in an examination of this level.

Candidates' responses published in this report were actual submissions in the 2006-07 examination cycle and as such are anonymous and are reproduced as submitted to the examiner.

It is suggested that candidates revising and preparing for a particular type of question - tasting, paragraph, essay etc - read all comments on similar questions, as these often contain general advice, which is applicable across the board.

Janet Bangs  
Director, WSET Awards  
December 2007

## DIPLOMA EXAMINATIONS 2006/07 STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

Paper	2007		2006		2005		2004	Paper	2003	2002
Unit 1	(1)							NO DIRECT EQUIVALENT PAPER		
Unit 2	81%		84%		79%		79%	Section I (A)	48%	62%
								Section I (B)	43%	44%
Unit 3 tasting 1 & 2	JUNE 63%	JAN 55%	JUNE 49%	JAN 55%	JUNE 62%	JAN 48%	JUNE 59%	Section IIA Tasting	60%	65%
								Section IIB Tasting	51%	74%
Unit 3 theory	JUNE 59%	JAN 42%	JUNE 54%	JAN 42%	JUNE 41%	JAN 24%	JUNE 27%	Section IIA Theory	50%	52%
								Section IIB Theory	59%	57%
Unit 4	69%		61%		69%		76%	NO DIRECT EQUIVALENT PAPER		
Unit 5	61%		61%		58%		70%	NO DIRECT EQUIVALENT PAPER		
Unit 6	70%		67%		45%		65%	NO DIRECT EQUIVALENT PAPER		
NO DIRECT EQUIVALENT PAPER								Section III (A)	83%	64%
NO DIRECT EQUIVALENT PAPER								Section III (B)	78%	68%

**NOTES:**

- (1) Direct pass rates for Unit 1 are not given as this Unit is awarded on completion of all four coursework titles. Individual pass rates for each title are given within the body of this report.

## **GENERAL COMMENTS ON RESULTS FOR THE 2006/07 EXAMINATION CYCLE**

Most of those reading this report will be studying for one of the six Units of the Diploma syllabus, either as a first or second year candidate or one of those re-sitting following an unsuccessful previous attempt.

### **Unit 1 - the Global Business of Alcoholic Beverages**

Coursework assignments that form the assessment methodology for Unit 1 continue to generate the highest pass rates of all units of the Diploma qualification. This has been a topic of discussion with the Diploma Examination Panel since the introduction of coursework as part of the assessment programme in 2003. We have also been aware of the considerable workload that these create for candidates and the effect this has on their ability to revise sufficiently in time for examinations in other units. It is evident from the content of assignments submitted that candidates enjoy this part of the Diploma assessment as they often explore, through research, aspects of the wine and spirit trade that they might not otherwise experience. However, many are frustrated by the restriction that the 1500 – 2000 word count imposes. We have therefore been monitoring the use of assignments as a means of assessment over the last couple of years and have also taken advice from the Government Regulator as there continue to be instances where the authenticity of work has come into question or where candidates have been guilty of plagiarism (in some cases unintentionally) which raises questions regarding the reliability of coursework as a means of assessment. Unfortunately there have been instances where the Examination Panel has had no option but to impose a fail grade for work where proof of cheating is irrefutable. Fortunately these have been few and far between, but any form of malpractice creates problems for an Awarding Body when it comes to maintaining the validity of candidate results particularly where it is feasible for a dishonest candidate to gain a whole unit of the Diploma qualification if they are not detected.

I explained in this report last year that the WSET were conducting a review to determine how we should revise the criteria for assessment of Unit 1 in a way that would enable us to retain coursework as a means of assessment within the Diploma qualification but reduce the workload for candidates and strengthen the validity of the assessment for Unit 1 by reducing the potential for malpractice. I announced that any changes would be implemented in August 2008. I can now confirm that the following changes will be put into practice with effect from 1 August 2008 and will be mandatory for all candidates enrolling onto programmes of study commencing in August 2008.

The current format of four coursework assignments of 1500 – 2000 words, handed in on a choice of two submission dates (November and April) will be replaced with one coursework assignment of 2500 – 3000 words (submitted in either November or April) and a closed book examination of one hour's duration which will be scheduled three times a year (November, March and June). The closed book assessment will be in the format of a written "case study" and will be similar to a coursework assignment written in a closed book

environment. This is a system that many awarding bodies are adopting as a means of verifying that the work presented for assessment has been produced by the candidate submitting it.

Candidates registering to sit the closed book assessment will need to download the case study assignment brief from the WSET website. The brief will advise candidates of the scope of the topic they should research, but will not give details of the specific questions that will be asked of them in the examination itself. The brief will be posted after registrations for the examination have closed, and 20 working days before the date of the examination itself. This will allow candidates one month in which to conduct their research and make study notes. The examination paper itself will contain the information previously posted in the case study brief, together with any additional relevant information or statistics that could be useful to the candidate in generating their response. The paper will also contain the examination question itself. This will take the form of a multi-part question, very similar in content to the current Assignment Brief, i.e. three or four numbered sub-sections with specific criteria regarding content and focus. Candidate responses should be submitted in essay format, (full introduction and conclusion) and should address each of the mandatory subsections of the question. Responses are to be of around 1500 – 2000 words in length and should be completed without reference to study notes in a “closed book” environment.

Titles for the “open book” coursework assignments will also be posted on the WSET website. There will be one compulsory assignment title for each of the two submission dates. This means that the title for the November 2008 submission date will be posted in May 2008 and the second title for the April 2009 submission date will be posted in late November 2008.

The open book coursework assignment will carry a weighting of 25% of the unit total, and the closed book case study will carry the remaining 75% of the unit total.

Special arrangements will remain in place to accommodate those candidates who registered for the WSET Diploma course prior to the 2008/09 academic year. These “transitional” candidates will have until **31 July 2010** in which to complete all four coursework assignments under the current system.

Candidates who have failed to complete Unit 1 by this date will have any passes held transferred to the new format on the following basis:

<b>CANDIDATE HOLDS</b>	<b>EQUIVALENT TO</b>	<b>NEEDS TO COMPLETE</b>
One coursework assignment (25% weighting)	Open book coursework assignment (25% weighting)	Closed book case study (75% weighting)
Two coursework assignments (50% weighting)	No direct equivalent	Candidate may complete EITHER component which will carry a “one off” weighting of 50%
Three coursework assignments (75% weighting)	Closed book case study (75% weighting)	Open book coursework assignment (25% weighting)

Candidates who have not yet achieved a pass for any of the four coursework assignments of Unit 1 at the start of the 2008/09 academic year, or who hold a pass grade for one assignment only, will be given the option of transferring immediately to the new system in August 2008 if they so wish. All other candidates will complete under the transition arrangements outlined above.

The new assessment arrangements will be piloted during the 2007/08 academic year and examination papers from this pilot will be published following the closed book assessments in March 2008 and June 2008 and may be used to help candidates prepare for the new assessment format.

## **Unit 2 - the Production of Wine**

Results for the multiple choice examination format for Unit 2 continue to be very good compared to examinations prior to 2004 (see statistical analysis on page 2). This high pass rate is almost certainly attributable to the format of the assessment. A multiple choice paper clearly allows some candidates to demonstrate factual knowledge without the restriction of having to express this in an essay format – something which many foreign language candidates find challenging. In addition, as this is the first assessment that Diploma candidates undertake, we feel it is reassuring for them to be assessed via a format they are already familiar with from previous WSET qualifications. Whilst the pass rate is high, this is certainly by no means an easy paper.

## **Unit 3 – Wines of the World**

Unit 3 has generated mixed results with pass rates for the June exam consistently higher than those for January. This seems to be down to a higher percentage of first year and resit candidates taking their examinations in January. Nevertheless, it is very gratifying to see the steady rise in pass rates for the Unit 3 theory paper. This seems to indicate that the majority of candidates now appreciate the amount of work that is required to succeed in this paper. However, there is still evidence that some vastly underestimate the level of this qualification and the amount of revision work required to succeed in the closed book examinations. In some instances, the level of knowledge is little better than that required to pass the Advanced Certificate. This is a real shame, as these candidates undermine the achievement of those who do well by dragging down the global pass rate and making it appear that the quality of candidates sitting examinations has deteriorated. This is not necessarily the case. We continue to see many excellent candidates, many of whom are awarded scholarships in recognition of their efforts.

## **Units 4, 5 and 6 – Spirits, Sparkling and Fortified wines**

Candidates need to remember that these units are a test of all-round knowledge and that tasting and theory elements carry equal weighting in the examination. This means that candidates cannot count on passing this paper purely on the strength of tasting skills alone. I make this point as the theory question continues to be the downfall of many candidates who have not prepared sufficiently or have underestimated the level of knowledge required. However, the pass rate for these three units is higher than that for Unit 3 and is a reflection of the current trend towards small “bite sized” chunks when it comes to examinations. However, the WSET Diploma is a Level 4

qualification, placing it alongside foundation degrees. It is therefore important to retain an element of assessment commensurate with a qualification of this standing, and this is currently achieved through the Unit 3 examination.

Now for some general comments on the issues and problems that come up year after year.

### **Supplementary reading**

Candidates are reminded that the Study Guides issued by the WSET contain an overview of each section of the syllabus only and make frequent reference to additional sources of information. Candidates should be warned that the examination panel specifically refers to material listed as “required reading” when setting examination questions. Candidates who limit their study to the Diploma Study Guides in isolation run the risk of coming unstuck in the closed book examinations as a result. These additional sources of information should be just as much part of a study plan as the Study Guides themselves. In addition, there is clear evidence that candidates are not reading the Candidate Assessment Guide. This has been written specifically to help them prepare for assessment, and gives very clear guidance on the approach to assignment writing and the candidates’ obligations in this respect. Candidates who do not read this document, may run the risk of gaining a fail grade for their work.

### **Commercial awareness**

Unit 1, The Global Business of wines and other beverages specifically examines candidates’ commercial awareness through the means of coursework assignments. There is some evidence that candidates are ignoring the fundamental fact that wine and spirit production and trading are business enterprises, and therefore fail to bring a commercial approach to their answers where appropriate. All coursework assignments have a clear commercial focus and a pass cannot be achieved simply by reiterating facts relating to production methods. Titles for the 2007/08 coursework assignments are currently on the WSET website under [www.wset.co.uk](http://www.wset.co.uk). Titles for the 2008/09 academic year will be published at the end of May 2008.

### **The regulars**

Taking note of these can make a big difference to your examination result.

- Answering the question as set.
- Writing legibly and presenting answers clearly.
- Avoiding careless errors such as mis-spelling a word contained in the question.
- Applying the Systematic Approach when answering tasting papers

In addition, we have noticed that candidates who take advantage of “examination preparation schemes” perform considerably better on the day than those who do not. Many of the Diploma Programme Providers offer such schemes to their candidates. Where these are not available, candidates can apply to join the Wine & Spirit Education Trust’s Diploma Assessment

Preparation scheme (DAPs) and should speak to the administrator at their Approved Programme Provider in the first instance.

Finally, I would like to convey my gratitude to all those who contribute their time, and expertise to help the Awards team put the Diploma examination together and who contribute to the success of this qualification both in the UK and overseas.

To the internal and external members of the Examination Panel, the Moderating Panel, the examiners, the administration team in the WSET School and other examination centres, the examination invigilators and tasting teams who work so hard behind the scenes on the big day, the Results Panel and the Appeals Panel – my thanks to all of you!

**Janet Bangs**  
**Director WSET Awards**



## COMMENTS ON INDIVIDUAL QUESTIONS

### Unit I, The Global Business of Wines and other Beverages

Before commenting on each specific assignment title, here are some general comments about the grading of coursework assignments:

All assignments are graded out of 100. Of this, 20 marks are available for the candidate's handling of the assignment. This includes the diversity of the bibliography, the presentation of the work in terms of spelling, grammar and legibility and the structure and style of the assignment. The latter incorporates issues of coherence, flair, fluency, use of illustrative examples and the candidate's method of approach to the assignment.

The allocation of the balance of 80 marks varies according to the individual assignment and will be detailed as appropriate under each Assignment Brief.

In terms of presentation, marks will be lost where work is presented with spelling and/or grammatical errors. With spell checkers on all PCs these days, there is really no excuse for sloppy work of this kind. Structure is also important, particularly if candidates do not follow the format dictated by the various sections of the Assignment Brief, as an automatic fail grade is awarded where any section is not addressed. The bibliography is an essential part of the assignment and those submitted without one are penalised as a result. Many candidates appear confused over the difference between a bibliography and "Reference Notes". The Candidate Assessment Guide explains this. The bibliography needs to draw on a variety of sources – books, magazines, internet, interviews – and certainly needs to have strong commercial evidence of the kind that can be obtained from trade journals such as *Harpers*, *Drinks Business*, or *Just Drinks*. These are vital for identifying trends and problems. The internet features strongly in many candidates' bibliographies. This is fine, so long as there are other sources as well such as text books, personal contact with subject experts and trade press. There is however a worrying dependence on "unreliable" sources such as Wikipedia. The bibliography should be correctly referenced throughout the body of the assignment – something far too few candidates actually do. Guidance on this is given in the Candidate Assessment Guide. Failure to follow this will result in lower marks in this section of the Assignment Brief.

A number of examiners have commented on misuse of footnotes and appendices. Some assignments are submitted with footnotes which account for up to half of each page of the assignment. This is simply abusing the restriction on the maximum permitted word count and in such instances, their content is not included in the marking process. On a similar vein, some candidates submit excessive quantities of appendices. In many instances, these are not even referenced within the body of the assignment and their purpose is therefore questionable. There is a general feeling that these are often included to show how much work had been done since they were often actually surplus to requirements.

Next, a few words on the use of the SWOT analysis in coursework. Whilst these do have their uses, some candidates include them indiscriminately without really making any conclusion regarding their findings. At worst they can be repetitive, of limited relevance, and eat into the word-count with little to show for it. At best they can highlight key points, generate imaginative thought and clear the mind. **They should be used with caution** and should never form the bulk of the work.

Finally a general comment that applies to all assignment writing. Some pieces of work submitted show signs of collaboration or "leading" by the Approved Programme Provider, or in the worst cases, plagiarism or simply copying another candidate's work. There have been some appalling instances of candidates simply lifting huge sections of work from papers

published on the internet. Where this has been detected, a fail grade has been awarded. Candidates must remember that assignments are to be the work of one individual only and they should be in no doubt that it is always very obvious to the examiner where this is not the case. The penalties in such instances can be very severe indeed, and in repeated instances, will lead to the candidate being barred from completing this qualification.

## Assignment Title 1

### ***Meltdown, or the implications of climate change for the wine industry.***

#### **Required content and suggested approach**

There is a growing body of research indicating that climate change is taking place. Carbon emissions are usually blamed for this phenomenon. Projections have been made about what will happen to the global climate if emissions continue to grow. Candidates should outline what the climate change research shows and what the projections suggest will happen. Candidates should then consider the impact of climate change on the wine industry. Finally, candidates should indicate how the global wine industry, from the level of an individual grower to that of a multinational company, should respond and what measures should be taken. Thought should be given to the effects of climate change on the wine industry over and above the obvious implications for viticulture.

*Answers: 420*

*Passes: 398 (95%)*

This was a very topical subject and one for which there was an abundance of research material. This was reflected in the high pass rate, which I suspect was also an indication of the fact that candidates appeared to enjoy researching and writing this assignment.

The following is a summarisation of the key points that should have been covered in each of the required sections of the assignment brief.

#### **Introduction**

The candidate was required to discuss the emergence of climate change as an issue for the world in general and the wine industry in particular. Good candidates made the point that from a political point of view, climate change is contentious and mentioned issues such as the growing importance of the Green Parties in Europe, the Republican Oil Lobby in the US and the effects of developing economies in Asia and India.

#### **Climate change research and projections:**

The section should have focussed on the principal findings of the research done on global climate change, including latest projections of future climate change, based on likely emissions levels.

Issues to consider should have included the following at the very least, but there is plenty of research readily available that will highlight other options as well:

- Melting of the Ice Cap
- Rise in ocean water levels
- Changes in climate patterns, which will not be uniform – some places will get warmer/cooler/drier/wetter
- Re-routing of the Gulf Stream

In some instances, candidates took a very simplistic approach here, concluding that it will get hotter. This is only one possible scenario. A significant number of candidates completely failed to mention the possible impact of climate change on the Gulf Stream – something of enormous significance for any European vineyard.

**Impact on the wine industry:**

This section required the candidate to consider how climate change might change the world's existing wine regions. Examples should have been drawn from climatically and geographically diverse regions. This was to ensure that candidates demonstrated their understanding that the effects of climate change would vary considerably from location to location, with some benefiting from change whilst others would in all probability face extinction. Candidates were also advised that they needed to consider the effects on ALL aspects of the wine industry, not just viticulture, although many failed to consider the wider picture in their response. Some of the issues that were raised were:

- Loss of some coastal vineyard areas because of rising sea levels e.g. Salins du Midi, Médoc, Marlborough.
- Certain grape varieties becoming incompatible with their current viticultural homes because of changes in temperature e.g. Sauvignon Blanc in the Loire, Pinot Noir in Burgundy.
- Some areas becoming too dry for viticulture, and the wider implication that in some classic steep vineyards (eg Germany) topography would make irrigation impossible (even were it allowed).
- Regions such as the Central Valley in California and the Murray River Basin in Australia becoming too hot for viticulture.
- Interruption of the Gulf Stream resulting in severe winters in Western Europe resulting in vine death.
- Increased heat in some areas continuing the trend towards high alcohol/low acid wines and the battle for phenolic ripeness and elegance.
- Revisions to legal regulations (AC, DOC etc) in terms of who grows what where.
- Winery implications – a need for more refrigeration with resulting higher energy bills (and increased emissions), more frequent incidents of acidification to ensure wines are balanced, possible absence of chaptalisation in traditional “cool” regions, blocking of MLF to maintain balance and acidity, etc.
- Transport implications – disruption to port and harbour facilities due to rising water levels, embargoes on heavily polluting means of transport, such as air freight.
- Marketing implications – will consumers want to drink wine, (and heavy, alcoholic reds in particular) in warmer climates?
- On the other hand, completely new markets could be opened up, such as sparkling wine from Scandinavia.
- The impact of pressure from the “anti-globalism” movement and the “shop local” brigade. Some candidates questioned the logic of transporting Sauvignon Blanc from New Zealand if a similar wine could be made locally.

In too many instances, candidates limited their response here to consideration of what climate change would mean in terms of grape ripening, resulting in simplistic conclusions.

**Response of the wine industry:**

This section allowed for some original thought based on careful analysis of the findings of the research. Candidates needed to consider what could be done if climate change does follow the course of some of the projections. Once again, the scope here should have covered not simply grape growing, but the industry as a whole from individual growers to multinational drinks companies, yet many candidates failed to look at this wider picture. Another common omission was consideration of the practicalities and cost implications of any proposed responses, far too many candidates simply stated what could be done.

Thorough research and a bit of common sense would have led to a vast number of possible initiatives to explore here. The following list is not exhaustive, but an indication of what some candidates came up with:

- In Europe, grape growing may have to move north, and choice of grape variety grown will change, eg Riesling in Sweden, Chardonnay in England, Cabernet Sauvignon in the Loire, Syrah in the Cote d'Or, Carmenère reappearing in Bordeaux etc.
- Hot areas such as La Mancha, Central Valley USA or Riverland may be abandoned as unsuitable for quality wine production.
- Cool regions such as Rias Baixas, Carneros or Tasmania could become the "bulk wine" regions of the future.
- Research into winter frost resistant varieties will be vital if the Gulf Stream changes course. This research is actually already underway.
- Changes will need to take place in viticultural and oenological practices to maintain balance in wines eg alcohol/acid/flavour/phenolics. Once again this work is already underway in many regions.
- All of the above have massive cost and social implications such as reinvestment in new vineyard areas (which would almost certainly mean more involvement from global multinational companies).
- There would inevitably be loss of livelihood in some areas.
- Winery/transport implications could lead to an increase in prices. However, retailer power would probably drive these down so the grower is likely to be the one to suffer when already faced with costs incurred in relocating and adapting to climate change.
- Marketing – climate change could spell the end for "terroir" wines and lead to "brand dominance" in the market. This could result in wines produced anywhere to a set style just like beer or Coca-Cola production, eg Montana Sauvignon Blanc produced in NZ/France/USA/China.

Whilst most candidates were aware of the prospects for new wine regions and implications in the vineyard for existing ones, very few went beyond this.

## Assignment Title 2

### ***Establishing a vineyard in the region of your choice.***

#### **Required content and suggested approach**

Establishing a vineyard takes careful planning and budgeting. The candidate should formulate a strategy for the establishment of a vineyard in the region of their choice. This strategy should include an explanation of the rationale for the chosen business model and should give full consideration to aspects such as site selection, business plan, timetable of stages in the set up activities, costings and other relevant issues.

*Answers: 356*

*Passes: 286 (80%)*

This assignment offered less scope for the candidate to demonstrate flowing literary skills or personal opinion, but did require very sound factual knowledge to ensure success. The key sections were as follows:

#### **Introduction:**

The examiner was looking for a brief outline of the candidate's motives for planting a vineyard. These varied from candidate to candidate with the most popular being the production of quality wine or the setting up of organic/biodynamic production. It would have been nice to have seen some more imaginative scenarios such as contract grape growing on a large scale, or at the other extreme, hobby vineyards producing premium or boutique wines, but these

were few and far between with most candidates sticking to the obvious – production of QWPSR wines in classic regions.

**Site Selection:**

This was a key section where candidates were expected to show a thorough understanding of HOW and WHY certain elements of site selection determine production. The obvious issues to consider at this early stage are:

- Climate – macro, meso and micro
- Weather (rain, temperature, wind, hail, frost etc), and an understanding that data must be collected to monitor this properly
- Soil – depth, pH, temperature, drainage, nutrient content
- Water supply – does the area have heavy or light rainfall, what is the rainfall pattern throughout year, is irrigation required and is it allowed?
- Topography – altitude and aspect
- Surrounding area – natural wind breaks etc, if the vineyard is to be run as biodynamic, are neighbouring properties a threat?
- Proximity to key markets – is it easy to get the finished product to the final destination, be that a winery (in the case of contract grape grower) or consumer (in the case of wine).
- Proximity to skilled labour (is it readily available?)
- Use of technology – satellite imagery for vineyard mapping
- Budget – how much is available to spend?

**Strategy:**

This was a very straight forward section that required the candidate to put together a business plan with a timetable of activities, including vineyard preparation, installation and operation up to harvesting the first commercial crop. Whilst actual costs were not specifically asked for, candidates were required to indicate at what stage in the development costs would be incurred.

Most candidates launched straight into a financial costing rather than discussing what a business plan aims to achieve, such as providing a cash flow forecast, projected operating costs and likely profit. Very few were aware that this process had its own cost implications in the form of some initial consultancy fees.

In terms of vineyard preparation most candidates were thorough here, covering issues such as the initial evaluation of the proposed site (land survey), design work for the vineyard layout to include row direction, vine density, trellising system, fencing and gates, access/space for machinery etc. Most were aware of the need to cost out the purchase of machinery, but a considerable number forgot to address the more obvious issue of securing funds for the purchase or lease of the land itself. There was also very little evidence of the need to re-evaluate any budget following the initial design stage to make adjustments as necessary.

Bearing in mind that candidates had been asked to indicate at what stage in the process costs would be incurred, too many failed to appreciate that it is at the point of installation that most of these costs materialise. It is at this stage that planting materials are ordered, with decisions required on variety, clones, grafted or ungrafted vines. Cost implications are considerable here since grafted rootstock can be 4-5 times more expensive. Other costs include the planting of wind breaks with decisions required on which type of tree, the ordering of trellis materials, the installation of drainage if necessary, land preparation such as ploughing, landscaping, nutrient supplements, the marking out of vineyard rows and installation of training and trellis system (posts, wires, frames, staples, nails etc.) and finally the planting of vines, either initial planting in the case of a new site or field grafting if reformatting an existing site. These are all defined as capital costs as opposed to operational costs which are incurred at the next stage in the proceedings.

On-going operational costs include work such as weed control (you don't want competition with young roots of newly planted vines), use of cover crops, mulching etc. and other aspects of vineyard management such as pruning, spraying, and thinning in addition to pest and

disease control through the use of pesticides, herbicides, fungicides etc (providing the vineyard had not been set up as organic or biodynamic).

I suspect a large number of candidates thought this was one of the easier assignment titles. Results do not bear this out, as this factual assignment achieved the lowest pass rate. On the other hand, there were some outstanding submissions from candidates sitting in New Zealand, who very clearly had detailed knowledge of this topic.

### Assignment Title 3

<b><i>Trade bodies in the Sherry, Port and Madeira industries.</i></b>	
<b>Required content and suggested approach</b> During the last hundred years the Sherry, Port and Madeira industries have each given birth to trade bodies. Whilst there are common elements, the differences between the trade bodies often reflect the unique historical, cultural and commercial issues of the wines they serve. The candidate should indicate the reasons behind the creation of trade bodies in general. The candidate should then go on to demonstrate knowledge of the constitutions, objectives, responsibilities and activities of the specific trade bodies for Sherry, Port and Madeira. An appraisal should be made of the effectiveness of each of these trade bodies.	
<i>Answers: 216</i>	<i>Passes: 185 (86%)</i>

This assignment was clearly not popular and was probably the hardest of the three to find research material for. This was very apparent from the homogenous nature of most assignments as the majority of these relied on the website of the relevant generic body to provide the material to answer the various sections of the assignment brief.

The introduction should have outlined the three main roles of these trade bodies covering regulation, promotion of protection. From a regulatory point of view, they are usually involved in setting targets and defining issues relating to quality as well as undertaking research for the benefit of all producers. Promotion, PR and marketing are important and vary in terms of success between the three. Finally, they have a significant role to play in providing trade unity, lobbying governments etc and thereby offering protection to the regions they represent.

#### **Background to the creation of the trade bodies**

Some candidates were unsure which trade bodies should have been the focus of this assignment since these had not specifically been spelt out. The three key organisations concerned, together with brief details of their history are as follows:

- **Consejo Regulador** (de las Denominaciones de Origen Jerez, Manzanilla y Vinaigre de Jerez). Established in 1933 (at the same time as the DO system). Created in response to an increase in the number of “sherry” substitutes misusing this term and general fraudulent practices.
- **Instituto dos Vinhos do Douro e Porto (IVDP)**. Established in 2003 following a reorganisation after the Casa do Douro compromised impartiality by buying shares in Royal Oporto. This resulted in the creation of the Comissão Interprofissional da Região Demarcada do Douro (CIRDD), which eventually evolved into the IVDP when Douro light wines came under the control of the same body.

- **Instituto do Vinho da Madeira.** Established in 1979 by the new autonomous government of Madeira to protect and improve the flagging wine industry which was deemed important to the island's economy. EU regulations were implemented and wine quality improved.

### Tasks and responsibilities

An outline of the constitutions of these trade bodies was easy to establish from the relevant websites, as were the responsibilities and tasks of each. Too many candidates simply "lifted" this information without reinterpretation. Those who gained higher marks, made sure they expressed this information in their own words.

**Consejo Regulador** - An interprofessional organisation funded through a levy on numbered seals on bottles and through land registration. It comprises 18 representatives (9 each from growers and bodegas), with elections taking place every 4 years. Responsibilities and tasks include establishing and updating regulatory requirements in respect of all aspects of production (Regulamento), issuing numbered seals to guarantee authenticity, protecting the "sherry" name, and generally promoting the brand.

**IVDP** - An interprofessional organisation comprising 24 representatives (12 from producers and 12 from trade). Responsibilities and tasks include the establishing and updating of regulatory requirements (viticulture and vinification), but also the control of production and sale of wine in terms of quantity to guarantee and maintain quality levels by means of *cadastro* (vineyard classification), *beneficio* and *lei do terço* (law of thirds). They also encourage best practice and technological development, control, promote and defend the DO, and, likewise, promote the brand.

**Instituto do Vinho da Madeira** - Information on the Instituto do Vinho da Madeira was considerably harder to find and most assignments included the basics from the website which described it as an interprofessional organisation responsible for the implementation of EU regulations to improve quality of wines, the promotion of the removal of hybrid vines, the guaranteeing of authenticity through the issue of numbered seals on bottles, the regulation of the process of *estufagem*, and the promotion of education.

### Effectiveness of the trade bodies

In evaluating the effectiveness of each trade body, the candidate should ideally have based their findings on their own personal experience and opinions and sought the views of key individuals in the industry. It was encouraging to see that some candidates had done this as it clearly highlighted those candidates who brought a sound commercial bias to their work. Most agreed that the Consejo Regulador is reasonably effective. It has a relatively high profile and is proactive in terms of its presence at trade fairs and involvement in sponsorship and advertising. It also benefits from connotations with heritage and quality of the product. However, this is offset by the poor image Sherry has with the consumer and the ageing demographic means that they really need to target a younger market. Good candidates were aware that whilst the IVDP is reasonably effective, it is extremely bureaucratic with a number of issues relating to the *beneficio* system which are not conducive to maximising quality. On a positive note, a strong market has traditionally existed for Port wine, with clear loyalty to the "brand", and there are many signs of innovation on the part of producers. On the other hand, finding any evidence of effectiveness on the part of the IVM was challenging due to their very low profile. Like the IVDP, they are also overly concerned with EU bureaucracy, but they are further hampered by a limited budget for promotion and education. Any strengths they possess lie in the heritage of the product and the advantages that can be taken of a strong link with tourism.

### Conclusion and personal commentary

A good conclusion should ideally include some original thought. It is tempting to simply summarise what has gone before. Whilst this will gain a couple of marks, to gain full marks in this section, the examiner is looking for more. In this case, the candidate should have drawn together their findings to determine whether or not the trade bodies are doing a good job, and if not, suggest ways in which their performance could be improved.

## Assignment Title 4

### ***Social aspects of sensible drinking.***

#### **Required content and suggested approach**

There are currently very mixed messages regarding the consumption of alcohol. On the one hand, it is clear from research that moderate and sensible drinking is good for most people. However, on the other hand, it is equally clear that overindulgence creates increasingly serious social and medical problems, which are now appearing in relatively young people in a number of countries. The candidate should quantify the scale of the problem of alcohol abuse as it currently exists in their local market and identify the forms it takes. The candidate should then weigh up the tangible benefits of sensible drinking against the negative effects of alcohol abuse. Finally, they should consider possible methods for eradicating or controlling this problem, looking at both historical and current endeavours, and examining where the responsibility for implementing these lies.

*Answers: 358*

*Passes: 324 (91%)*

It was rather surprising that this was not as popular as title 1, since it is also very topical at the moment with plenty of coverage in the press and on TV. Some sections of the brief were very easy to address simply by using the information in the Diploma Study Notes. Other sections required more extensive research and a fair amount of personal input and lateral thinking on the part of the candidate.

Responses to this assignment varied in content considerably depending on where the candidate was studying, but the overall impression was that all markets are experiencing problems associated with alcohol abuse to some extent such as increased occurrence of liver cirrhosis in the young, binge drinking and crime with the antisocial behaviour associated with this.

#### **Benefits and risks to health, and social implications**

There was plenty of material freely available to help in putting this section of the assignment together. Most candidates went to the same sources for this and this section was handled well in almost all cases.

In considering what constitutes sensible drinking, the candidate needed to think in terms of the following:

- The so-called “safe levels” listed by various government departments and other authorities.
- Safe levels are dependent on age, size, sex, health, how and when alcohol is consumed, speed of consumption and whether drunk with food or not.
- The negative effects of “saving” units and binge drinking in one session.

#### **Positive effects (moderate consumption only)**

Plenty of candidates discussed the “French Paradox” here, and some reported very knowledgeably on the effects of resveratrol in red wine. The points that most candidates covered were:

- Reduction of coronary heart disease (by up to 30%) and strokes – alcohol thins the blood and increases the amount of “good” cholesterol, phenolic compounds help reduce “bad” cholesterol. – the “French Paradox”
- Increase in bone density
- Inhibition of stress, gastro-intestinal disease, arthritis, common cold



- Improved blood flow to the brain – positive effect on the intellect of the over 65s
- Protection against certain bacteria and viruses
- Reduction in cancer mortality (**but** increased risk if consumption is more than 2-4 units per day) – antioxidant effect of resveratrol acts as anti-carcinogen.
- Reduced risk of Alzheimer's if consumption is kept at 1-2 units a day – World Alzheimer's Congress

### Negative effects of excessive consumption

There was a tendency here to ignore the obvious (alcoholism) or the less dangerous side effects such as weight gain. The key ones we were looking for were:

- Alcoholism – and its associated problems
- Liver cirrhosis
- Pancreatitis
- Neural damage and memory loss
- Increased risk of many cancers (mouth, liver, breast)
- Damage to unborn child in pregnancy
- Alcohol is fattening (apart from low alcohol or dry white wine)
- Incompatibility with certain illnesses eg diabetes, or with some medication
- Danger of drinking prior to sport or physical exercise
- Allergic reaction eg asthma and SO<sub>2</sub>

Antisocial aspects were generally covered well, with drunk driving and the effects of binge drinking being cited most often. Many candidates covered the dangers that can arise from the loss of inhibitions resulting from intoxication, with drinkers being more likely to become victims of crime as well as perpetrators. There was also some discussion of the impact of underage drinking.

When it came to discussion of who should take responsibility for controlling and managing the problems that many countries are currently facing, most seemed to take it for granted that this was something for the Government to sort out. The other main option quoted was "education", but with largely "woolly" ideas on how to tackle this properly. Very few candidates acknowledged that the ultimate responsibility rested with the consumer themselves and that parents and schools also have a role to play along with the wine and spirit trade itself.

It was slightly disappointing that so few candidates came up with original options and initiatives for alleviating or eradicating alcohol abuse, and reference to what has or has not worked in other markets was rather scant. The most popular ideas were:

- Education – make information readily available
- Age restrictions – make them tougher
- Advertising restrictions
- Greater emphasis on drinking wine with food
- Designated driver initiatives – free soft drinks for drivers in bars and pubs
- Stricter drink/driving laws
- Restricted alcohol availability in certain locations eg sports venues
- Restrictions on "happy hours" and "2 for 1s"
- A move away from premiumisation of spirits (eg high alcohol spirits)
- A move away from large servings
- Restricted access such as through controlled liquor stores (as in Scandinavia or Canada)
- Ban on drinking in public places other than licensed premises (as in the US)
- Introducing alcohol to young drinkers in a controlled environment (as in France where wine is drunk by young children with meals)

The following is a short extract from one candidate looking at just one possible initiative:

*"It is critical that the restaurant and hospitality industries teach servers to recognize the signs of someone who has overindulged and to learn how to effectively stop serving guests. Most US restaurant associations are connected to server training programs such as TIPS. Managers need to be supportive when a member of their staff stops serving a guest. Incentive programs designed to increase sales often create environments where servers push*

*alcohol heavily. Managers should stay away from programs that encourage upsizing drinks and the number of drinks sold."*

This is cited simply because it is different from the majority of responses and made a refreshing change. Another candidate suggested that if everyone had to pay for medical insurance, however little, they would be less likely to end up in Accident & Emergency after a night out since this would affect their premiums. A number of candidates highlighted the effect of "celebrity drinking" and how this tended to glamorise drinking and suggest that it was "cool" to overindulge.

Conclusions are often one of the weakest sections in assignments. Most candidates just state what they have done, for example:

*"I have explained the scale of the problem and identified the benefits and hazards of consuming alcohol. It is clear where the responsibility for controlling this problem lies, but this will not be easy to resolve."*

Ideally, the conclusion should draw together the writer's views in the form of a summary. The best conclusions usually bring in an element of questioning, for example, in this instance; do the benefits of drinking alcohol outweigh the disadvantages? Is the problem likely to get better or worse?

## **Unit 2, Wine Production**

This report is not able to give examples of questions used on the Unit 2 paper as these are live questions and not in the public domain.

Nevertheless, it should be pointed out that statistics continue to show a very good pass rate for this paper. Whilst the questions are certainly not easy, candidates have little to fear providing they study the recommended reading thoroughly.

## Unit 3, Wines of the World

### Tasting Papers

Many candidates take advantage of the WSET examination feedback service because they do not fully understand what is required of them in the examination, or are unsure how marks are allocated. This chapter therefore will take each section in the tasting paper and explain how to maximise marks as well as highlighting common errors.

Firstly, some general comments about good and bad tasting notes. One way to lose marks on this paper is through poor application of the Systematic Approach to Tasting Technique (SAT). Missing out key features such as sweetness, acidity, body, alcohol etc is simply throwing marks away. Many candidates still do not appear to understand what is required in a professional, analytical tasting note. There is a general tendency amongst some to compare the three wines rather than describe them individually. This leads them to write imprecise comments such as “deeper than wine no 1”, “more intense than wines 1 and 3”, “higher acidity than wine 2”. This is not correct application of the Systematic Approach. Each wine must be assessed on its own merits with all attributes analysed according to the terminology defined in the SAT. Finally, the most common problem is that of smelling and tasting the wine and deciding what it is before writing the tasting note. This inevitably means the candidate writes the tasting note “to fit” their (often incorrect) conclusion rather than concentrating on the individual elements of what is in the glass and then drawing conclusions based on this information. It is vital to keep an open mind when writing tasting notes.

Finally, a small insight into how the Panel selects wine for the examination. In all tasting questions the examiners aim to select one wine which will be the “banker” of the three wines (the one that candidates should be able to identify immediately), another that is fairly obvious but requires a bit more analysis to reveal its origin, and one wine that will provide a challenge and differentiate the excellent candidates from the rest. When making their selection, the Panel tastes all potential wines blind, finally whittling these down to the three that best represent the wines they depict, yet work well together and allow the exceptional candidate to shine.

Looking at the key headings on the examination paper, these are the points to bear in mind:

#### **Appearance**

With three marks available for the appearance, the candidate needs to make three valid observations. By simply correctly identifying the colour of the wine, the intensity of the colour, and any variation between the rim and core, the three marks could be assured. Other observations that could be made where appropriate include comments on signs of development, viscosity or bubbles. Vagueness or inaccuracy in terms of colour will not guarantee any marks, such as describing a wine as “straw gold” in colour. Even worse, are the candidates who simply use the term “yellow” or “red”. There is also a tendency to use colours not defined in the Systematic Approach. This may appear dictatorial, but the SAT was established for a very good reason – to provide a means by which wines can be analysed systematically and precisely irrespective of language. The candidate who describes a red wine as “cherry red” is less precise than one using the term “ruby” or “garnet”. This is because “cherry” is open to interpretation. Is the candidate referring to red cherries or black cherries, or even those cherries that are golden with a pink blush? The examiner has no way of knowing. In addition, colour is an area where many candidates appear to get muddled. A large number use the terms ruby and garnet indiscriminately – there is a very clear distinction between the two. Garnet heads more towards the brown end of the red spectrum rather than the blue/purple side, which applies more to ruby.

#### **Nose**

Candidates often fail to say enough in this section. With seven marks at stake, one is allocated for commenting on development, one for intensity and five for aroma characteristics.

Candidates who only mention one or two aroma characteristics are therefore reducing their chances of gaining high marks.

### Palate

Many candidates are guilty of loose, unquantified or vague application of the Systematic Approach to Tasting Technique (SAT) here. Examples found on some scripts were “marked acidity” (this could imply medium or high and is not precise enough) or “tannic” (this simply implies that tannin is present, candidates need to specify whether it is high, low, medium, soft, harsh etc). Such comments do not specifically tell the examiner what he/she needs to know about the wine, and marks cannot be allocated. Examples of other terms to use with caution are “nice”, “good”, “some”, “fairly”, “reasonable”. In isolation, they convey nothing to the examiner, for example “nice tannins”, “good acidity”, “nice finish” – all far too vague to merit any marks. Many candidates use the term “balance” incorrectly. Consider the following comment “very balanced between alcohol, acidity and fruit/oak”. This tells the examiner nothing unless each of these attributes is defined in turn. They could all be “in balance” because they are all high or low or medium. On the other hand, the acidity could be high but the fruit intensity only medium yet still be “in balance”. This is precisely why such comments are not appropriate unless quantified using the parameters defined in the Systematic Approach.

Some candidates fail to apply the Systematic Approach in the correct way when referring to alcohol. In the Diploma examination we do not expect candidates to state what the level of alcohol is in terms of abv %. Instead, you should aim to assess the perceived **level** of alcohol using the terms defined in the Systematic Approach – low, medium, high etc.

Candidates also lose marks by stating under the palate that “fruit is the same as the nose”. This is not sufficient to gain any marks. Candidates must state what the flavour characteristics are, as in some cases they do **not** mirror those on the nose exactly, and at this level candidates should be able to distinguish between these subtle differences.

Other common reasons for low marks are notes which are contradictory, “hedging their bets”, or applying the scatter gun approach in the hope of a few correct observations amongst the incorrect ones. Consider the following extract from a script:

*“Ripe plum, prune and dark cherry, hints of pepper and vegetal notes, jammy and boiled sweets, hint of vanilla. A developing wine, simple.”*

This candidate is describing two very different styles of wine in this one note, one complex and aged and the other basic, simple and youthful. This is not a convincing note.

### Assessment of quality

Many candidates give insufficient information when assessing the quality of the wine or simply repeat the observations made under the nose and palate without explaining how they relate to quality. The assessment of quality should seek to place the wine in an appropriate quality category, and, **most importantly**, explain why it belongs in that category. It is not sufficient to simply state what the wine is. Ask yourself how you would describe it to a customer, is it a commercial, large volume wine that is correctly made but lacking in complexity? Is it a top quality, premium wine, and if so, what leads you to this conclusion? The components that contribute towards quality are intensity, structure, balance, complexity and length.

### Readiness for drinking/ageing potential

In June we changed the wording for this section on the paper from “state of maturity” as there appeared to be widespread confusion over what this actually meant with many candidates mistaking this for “age” and simply giving a vintage. The key points to consider here are:

- Is the wine ready to drink?
- If it is, how long will it continue to be ready to drink before beginning to decline?
- If it is not ready to drink, how much time does it still need?
- If it is ready to drink, will it evolve any further in bottle?
- If it will evolve, how long will it be before it reaches its peak and starts to decline?

### Country and region of origin

In most instances, one mark is allocated for correctly identifying the country and two for the region. This is to allow those candidates will superior skills to demonstrate these by identifying the wine in detail. However, the increased “homogenisation” of some wines makes it increasingly difficult to identify regional typicity in all cases and sometimes it is genuinely felt that some wines could be from a number of countries. In these cases, we sometimes reverse the emphasis of the marks, giving two marks for country and only one for region or we may instruct markers that marks may be allocated for more than one country or region. This is particularly true in the case of some New World wines and a case in point was a California Chardonnay in the June 2007 examination where marks were also awarded for identifying this as Australian. However, some candidates really do push this to the limit. It is never a good idea to list more than one alternative in your answer, particularly where these cover multiple styles of wine or simply appear opportunistic such as the following candidate:

*“This wine is from Italy, although it could also be from California or Australia.”*

Finally, a comment regarding tasting order. Do not assume the order the wines are presented is the best order in which to taste them. In any tasting examination, whether Unit 3, 4, 5 or 6, the first step should always be a quick nose of all three samples to determine in which order they should be sampled. This usually results in assessing the least intense wine first and working up to the most intense or complex. This ensures that your palate does not get blasted with a heavily oaked Chardonnay which then makes it impossible for you to detect the delicate neutral, yeasty aromas of a simple Muscadet for example.

## Tasting Paper 1

### Question 1: Wines from a single grape variety (not given)

The easiest way to loose marks in this paper is by failing to identify the grape variety. A number of candidates insist on giving a different variety for each wine despite being told in advance that one variety applies to all three wines. Another classic mistake is assuming the identity of the grape variety on the basis of the first wine tasted. It is easy to become distracted and attempt to make the remaining descriptions fit the variety chosen rather than use the information in the tasting note to arrive at the correct identity. A number of candidates give two varieties rather than one. This is “hedging your bets” and earns no marks at all even if one of the varieties is correct. If asked to give one variety, that is what you must do. In addition, the candidate must give evidence of the logic behind their decision. It is not sufficient to simply recognise what the grape variety is, you must be able to demonstrate how you arrived at this conclusion. This section carries four marks, and you should therefore aim to give at least four valid reasons for your choice.

<b>January 2007: Red wines from Syrah</b>	
<i>Answers: 74</i>	<i>Passes: 26 (35%)</i>

The three wines were Paul Mas Syrah Vin de Pays d'Oc, St Hallett Blackwell Barossa Shiraz, and a classic Northern Rhône, Chapoutier's Hermitage. Of these, the Barossa Shiraz was the wine that most easily enabled candidates to identify the grape variety. However, many were also seduced by the easy fruit of this wine, judging it to be higher quality than it really was. There seems to be increasing evidence of candidates confusing rich, ripe fruit, with quality in wine – the two do not necessarily go hand in hand. Far too many candidates dismiss subtlety, restraint or development in favour of “power”. This is a common mistake

and it is important for candidates to understand the difference between “ripeness and intensity” and “concentration and complexity”. Whilst the St Hallett had the former, it was the Hermitage that was the better wine as it had concentration (not really the same thing as intensity) and complexity. In many instances, where candidates identified the wrong variety, they also tended to lose additional marks in other sections of the tasting note, either through inaccurate identification of fruit character or in pinpointing country and region of production incorrectly.

This was an extremely poor pass rate and is a reflection of the large number of scripts where candidates left sections of the paper blank rather than attempting for example to place the wine in an appropriate country or region.

Since “assessment of quality” is a weakness of many candidates, it is hoped that the following examples of a poor and a good response will help to illustrate what is required here to gain all four marks:

This candidate is describing the Hermitage and gained no marks for their comments:

*“Acceptable as wine is well made. Out of balance as tannin and acidity dominate.”*

This is not only incorrect as it vastly underestimates the quality of this wine, but also contradictory since the wine cannot be well made if it is “out of balance” as they claim.

The following note is analytical and places the wine in the right quality context:

*“A good to outstanding wine. It has good structure with balanced acidity, tannin and fruit. The oak is integrated and supports the fruit character rather than dominating the palate. There is also complexity from the oak.”*

<b>June 2007: Red wines from Cabernet Sauvignon</b>	
<i>Answers: 355</i>	<i>Passes: 198 (56%)</i>

The three wines here were Domaine Boyar, Reka Valley, Bulgarian Cabernet Sauvignon NV, Château La Tour de By Cru Bourgeois 2000 and Wynn's Coonawarra Cabernet Sauvignon 2001.

There were a number of grape varieties named here – some logical such as Merlot, whilst others were clearly not contenders such as Pinot Noir (far too pale in colour). It is rather disappointing that so many were unable to identify this grape variety correctly, as it is arguably one of the easiest to spot. In terms of the clues that should have guided candidates to Cabernet Sauvignon, these included the deep colour, the obvious blackcurrant fruit together with other classic notes such as the herbaceous and mint character, the use of oak, and in particular the classic cedar wood and tobacco notes on the Bordeaux, and the firm structure (tannin and acidity) on all three wines. Good candidates were also able to detect the slightly hollow mid palate that is often found when this variety is used in isolation.

In this paper, the final wine (Wynn's Coonawarra Cabernet Sauvignon) was the benchmark. This was the wine that would generate all the right clues to enable candidates to identify the grape variety. This was classic Cabernet Sauvignon in its purest form and most candidates did recognise it as such. Whilst the classic red Bordeaux may have had them wavering between Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot, the Wynn's should clearly have confirmed their suspicion that this was indeed Cabernet.

## Question 2: Wines with a common theme

Despite being given information in the question regarding the common theme, an alarming number of candidates ignore this. The importance of reading the question cannot be stressed enough. There is often information in the stem that is there to help and guide you in your assessment of the wine – ignoring this is careless and simply throws marks away unnecessarily.

<b>January 2007: White wines with a common link in respect of grape varieties</b>	
<i>Answers: 74</i>	<i>Passes: 36 (49%)</i>

This was a rather disappointing result with only two candidates gaining distinction. It is clear that candidates find the format of the questions in Paper 1 more challenging than those in Paper 2.

The aim here was to deduce that these three wines were all made from a blend of Semillon and Sauvignon Blanc grapes. This really should not have been so difficult bearing in mind that the second wine in the flight was a classic Sauternes (the other two being a dry white Bordeaux and a commercial Australian blend) and that the question had pointed out that all three were made from a blend of two varieties. In fact, this was not the problem, it was explaining what characteristics in the three wines led to the conclusion that these were Semillon/Sauvignon Blanc blends. The following candidate had the right idea:

*“The green and grassy aromas of Sauvignon Blanc (nettles, currants) with the roundness and fullness that comes from Semillon (honey, lanolin). Acidity levels and use of oak and the colours of the wines are pointing in that direction as well, in addition to the sweetness of wine no. 2”.*

<b>June 2007: White wines with a common link in respect of origin</b>	
<i>Answers: 355</i>	<i>Passes: 180 (51%)</i>

This question had three very distinctive wines, Trimbach Riesling Réserve 2004, Jean Sipp Pinot Gris Réserve 2005 and Dopff au Moulin, Moulin Blanc Gewurztraminer 2005. Obviously the region we were looking for was Alsace and this appeared to be relatively easy for just about all candidates, including those who failed. The examiners were expecting this to be the case and had slightly adjusted the marks allocation with this in mind, allocating only four marks for naming the region leaving the remaining six marks for valid reasons for this choice. Not surprisingly, this part of the question was answered far less well. Nevertheless, this was a reasonable pass rate for a format of question that often trips candidates up because it relies not only on the accuracy of the tasting note, but also on the candidate's ability to apply logic and reasoning in reaching their conclusion in the final section. Although there were a good number of candidates achieving merit, very few excelled at this question with only 4% of candidates achieving distinction. There was also evidence of very basic errors such as identifying wines as “Semillon and Chardonnay from the Loire”, “Semillon and Viognier from Burgundy”, or “Gewurztraminer and Chardonnay from the Rhône”. It is bad enough that some candidates were not able to identify the region, but to list grape varieties not even permitted in the region they **do** think the wines are from is unforgivable at this level.



## Tasting Paper 2

### Question 3: Partly-Specified Wines

As the focus of this question is to test the candidates' ability to differentiate between the quality levels of the three wines, it is vital that the candidate fully understands how to demonstrate this skill. Unfortunately many are confused or not precise enough when it comes to the quality assessment. Comments such as "average quality" will not gain marks unless some reference is made to the quality level the wine is pitched at. For example, is it "average" for a Grand Cru or for an entry level £3.99 wine? This section of the paper carries 7 marks and comments such as "good" or "AC level" are simply not detailed enough. What the examiners are looking for here is a statement of the quality of the wine that is supported by well argued reasoning and analysis that demonstrates an understanding of the elements of a wine that contribute to its quality. The key to success with this question is being able to recognise the characteristics that point to quality in wine. Once the premium wine has been identified, the other two should fall into place.

This paper also requires the candidate to demonstrate an awareness of the commercial value of wines based on their quality. In some instances, this is woefully lacking, or candidates hedge their bets and give an answer that spans a wide range of prices. Whilst we do not expect candidates to pinpoint the price exactly to gain the 2 marks available, we do expect them to identify this as closely as possible. It is perfectly acceptable to price a £5.99 wine at, say, £5 - £6 or £6 - £7, but the candidate who prices it at £5 - £10 is not precise enough to gain the marks.

The format of this question allows us to select wines, which, in a blind tasting, could be considered too much of a challenge. In some cases, we might consider a grape variety that may be less familiar to some candidates. Removing the pressure of needing to "identify" the wine, means that candidates can concentrate on writing accurate tasting notes describing the wine and focus on relating the evidence they extract in this process to an evaluation of the possible quality level. In reality, for many, quality assessment is a significant area of weakness.

<b><i>January 2007: Riesling wines from the Mosel-Saar-Ruwer</i></b>	
<i>Answers: 75</i>	<i>Passes: 43 (57%)</i>

Although this was a reasonably good pass rate, the largest proportion of the scripts were in the 55% - 59% grade band, and therefore mediocre passes rather than anything better, with only eight candidates gaining merit and one with distinction.

Despite being told that these were three Riesling wines from the Mosel, one candidate who clearly could not have read the question, placed them elsewhere even though they had not been asked to volunteer this information. There was also some flagrant abuse of price estimations with price bands of £9 – 14 or £25 – 40. No marks were awarded to these candidates.

Most candidates were able to identify the top wine because of its very obvious maturity (Oberemmeler Hütte Spätlese 1998), but found it much more difficult to differentiate between the entry level wine (Waitrose Mosel Riesling QbA 2005) and the mid-priced wine (Dr Loosen Bernkasteler Lay Kabinett QmP 2005).

The following script is a classic example of someone who is seriously underperforming in this examination. Whilst this candidate is clearly not English speaking, it was not their lack of fluency that was the problem (in tasting questions we are looking for accuracy rather than literary skills), it is their failure to use the Systematic Approach to Tasting. This has resulted in vague, imprecise tasting notes with limited potential for awarding marks.

This tasting note refers to the Waitrose Mosel Riesling QbA.

*“Appearance: clear, pale straw, gives us information about young wine.*

*Nose: Quite intense nose, most predominant character is minerality, quite austere wine in the nose.*

*Palate: Elevated acidity, which informs us about youngness of the wine. Light and crispy with plenty of freshness. Aftertaste is short. Ideal as aperitif or by the glass.*

*Detailed assessment of quality: Good example of young Riesling, the wine lacks complexity, but easy drinking with plenty of freshness and pleasant character.*

*State of maturity: Young wine which can improve within the next 3-4 years.”*

On the appearance, there is no mention of the rim, or other observations such as pettillance in the case of this wine. No marks were awarded for the nose. The comments are vague and this was a simple wine with no minerality. However, there were plenty of other aromas that should have been mentioned but were not. The palate is equally weak. There is no mention of whether this is dry or sweet or anything in between. “Elevated” acidity could mean anything but low. There is no mention at all of flavour characteristics, body, fruit intensity, or alcohol. The assessment of quality is not so bad – they have identified this as a simple wine but have not really explained why it is only “easy drinking”. They have not indicated whether the wine can be drunk now and have overestimated its ability to age.

<b>June 2007: Pinot Noir from Burgundy</b>	
<i>Answers: 362</i>	<i>Passes: 245 (68%)</i>

Candidates were advised that the wines were all Pinot Noir from Burgundy. These wines were chosen to represent three distinct quality levels, a basic Bourgogne Rouge from the 2005 vintage (Domaine Jean-Jacques Girard), a mature Premier Cru from Louis Jadot (Beaune Chouacheux 1999) and a “modern” style Côte de Nuits Villages from Bertrand Ambroise which had very ripe, upfront fruit.

This was an extremely good pass rate, as this question is often more challenging since a large portion of the marks (21%) is attributed to the candidates’ ability to assess the quality of the wines and this is a skill that many struggle to demonstrate. In keeping with results for other tasting questions in the June exam, although pass rates were higher than in previous years, there were very few truly outstanding papers, with once again, only 3% achieving distinction here.

#### **Question 4: Unspecified Wines**

It is a common misconception amongst candidates that if they identify the wines correctly, they will pass this paper. This is simply not the case. If you total up the marks available for the conclusion compared to marks awarded for the sections on the appearance, nose and palate of each wine, you will see that the tasting note itself generates the bulk of the marks,

(20 marks for the description, 8 marks for the assessment of quality and state of maturity and only 5 marks for identifying the wine). This means it is quite feasible for someone to write accurate tasting notes, yet not identify the wines and still pass (sometimes even with a high grade), whilst someone else can identify all three wines yet fail because their tasting notes are inaccurate and short. It is not enough to simply recognise what the wines are (anyone can do this if they taste a wine often enough). The candidate needs to be able to strip the wine down to its component parts, describe these and make judgements based on this information. This is what professional tasting is all about. Without an extensive and accurate tasting note, the examiner has no way of knowing whether the correct identification was anything more than a lucky guess or the result of tasting something familiar – no tasting skills have actually been demonstrated. The answer lies in the accuracy of the tasting notes themselves and in the assessment of quality.

Candidates often fall prey to the common error of deciding what the wine is having smelt or tasted it, and then write a tasting note to match their conclusion, which in many instances may be incorrect. This is easy to do under examination conditions and very tempting when you think you know what the wine is. However, it is always a bad move as the tasting note is invariably less accurate as the candidate tends to describe how they “expect” the wine to taste rather than how it actually does taste. It is vital to keep an open mind until the tasting note has been completed and re-read.

<b>January 2006: Red wines – Chilean Cabernet Sauvignon, South African Pinotage, Fontanafredda Barolo</b>	
<i>Answers: 75</i>	<i>Passes: 44 (59%)</i>

This was a good result, but the majority of scripts were basic passes rather than anything better, and only one candidate achieved distinction. This was a recurring theme in the January exam.

For this question, candidates appeared to struggle in assessing the maturity of the wines. Too many interpreted medium plus and high tannins as equating to a wine that needed time irrespective of the fruit levels. This was a particular problem with the Barolo – a wine that was fully mature but had high tannin levels.

Irrespective of this problem, the Barolo was the wine the examiners commonly refer to as “the banker” – the one that we expect all candidates to identify and describe with no difficulty at all. There is usually one wine that requires a little application of logic to get to the correct information. In this case, the Pinotage. This is a very distinctive grape variety and once recognised as such, there would have been no problem in placing this wine correctly. The Chilean Cabernet Sauvignon was chosen to provide a vehicle for the exceptional candidate to shine yet still allow other candidates to gain marks in the descriptive section of the tasting note since they should have been able to identify the varietal character if nothing else, whilst those with sound tasting skills would have been able to deduce that this was not Bordeaux or Californian and certainly not Australian.

The script below is a good example of a very basic pass grade. The description relating to the Barolo is largely correct but missing out on full marks on the nose and palate either because something is not totally accurate or because more descriptors are needed. The note is rather short and unimaginative, but the assessment of the basic structure is correct. The assessment of quality is weak and rather repetitive, but they have pitched the wine at the right level, and the concluding sections are correct.

**“Appearance:** *Clear and bright. Medium intensity garnet core with pale garnet rim. Legs.*

**Nose:** Clean and medium + intensity. Developing nose of stewed fruits, plums, damsons, leather and tar.

**Palate:** Dry with high, ripe tannins and high acidity. Medium body and medium + fruit intensity of stewed fruit, damsons, leather and tar. High alcohol and long finish.

**Assessment of quality:** Excellent quality wine with high acidity to match the fruit flavour intensity and high alcohol. Well integrated and the high alcohol does not overpower the acidity and fruit levels are still high.

**State of maturity:** Can drink now but will age another 3-5 years as fruit and acidity are still present.

**Approximate age of wine:** 6 years

**Country of origin:** Italy

**Region of origin, if applicable:** Piedmonte

**Predominant grape variety / varieties:** Barolo

No marks were allocated for identifying this as Barolo, since it was grape variety that had been asked for and this information was not given.

**June 2007: White wines - Vinho Verde, Quinta de Azevedo 2006, Round Hill California Chardonnay 2005, Montana New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc 2006**

Answers: 362

Passes: 301 (83%)

This was an exceptionally high pass rate and there was some discussion by the Diploma Results Panel on whether this question had in fact been too easy. It was decided on balance, that it was no easier than previous questions as it followed the same format, one very distinctive wine that candidates would find easy to identify (the New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc), one that was straight forward but required some analysis to get the full answer and one that would challenge candidates and allow good candidates to shine. The California Chardonnay was easy to describe and the grape variety was pretty obvious, but candidates did need to think about where this style of wine might be produced. It was far too ripe and overt for classic Burgundy and lacked the elegance and “nerve” of a cool climate wine. This meant candidates should have been drawn to the New World and specifically to a warmer climate where use of new oak is common. This left the US and Australia as the most obvious contenders and the examiners were prepared to accept either as an option. In fact, the homogenisation of wines is making it increasingly difficult to “pigeon hole” some wines in the way that we used to be able to. The Vinho Verde was clearly the wine that stumped many candidates, although it was gratifying to see that a large number of those who were unable to identify this correctly, applied logic and came up with plausible options such as Muscadet sur Lie. This was the wine that allowed the examiner to differentiate between good and exceptional candidates.

## Theory Paper

There is definitely a technique to answering questions in the Unit 3 theory paper and a few simple, common sense rules can help to maximise marks.

1. With a requirement to answer five questions in total in three hours, some candidates clearly do not pace themselves appropriately, producing three answers of reasonable length, then two (or in some cases only one more) that are skimpy or rushed. More practice at writing essays precisely, and within the time allowed is essential examination practice. Candidates should allow themselves a maximum of 30 minutes to answer each question. This will leave them half an hour to spare. The best way to use this time is to read through the examination paper and decide which questions to attempt, spend around five minutes on an essay plan for each question, and read through responses before submitting them for marking.
2. There is often very little evidence of candidates planning their responses. It is always a good idea to make a quick essay plan before starting to write. This ensures that the key points are covered in a logical way. Those who do not follow this advice often fail to address specifically the key words in the question. The five minutes spent jotting down key facts is never time wasted. This is often the best way of determining which questions are the best ones to attempt. A question that seems easy initially may be one that is difficult to come up with hard facts for. An essay plan is the best way to see if this is the case.
3. When drafting questions for the Diploma examination, the Examination Panel takes great pains to ensure that the wording they choose leads candidates to the answer they require. This means that questions contain vital, key words that form the basis of the question and therefore, by default, the answer. It is a really good idea to underline these key words and use them as the basis for the essay plan. This ensures that all aspects of the question are covered and the writer does not stray "off topic".
4. Some candidates do not appear to read the question carefully enough. This is often a problem with "multi part" questions where the candidate may be asked to write about four or five topics from a list of six for example. Candidates who mistakenly answer all six sections are creating unnecessary work for themselves as the examiner will only mark the number of sections requested in the question and ignore any surplus.
5. A number of candidates simply write generally "around" the question, without actually answering it as set. Remember, questions are set with a purpose – none of them are phrased "write all you know about....." Examiners work from a marking key or marks schedule that details the scope and detail required in an answer. They will not allocate marks for information that is not relevant to the question as set.

The following section takes the two theory papers for the January 2007 and June 2008 examination and comments on the key points that should have been covered in an answer for each question.

## January 2007

### Group A: Compulsory Question

<b>Describe the classification systems for each of the following:</b>  a) <b>Bordeaux</b> b) <b>Germany</b> c) <b>Italy</b>	
<i>Answers: 70</i>	<i>Passes: 41 (59%)</i>

59% was a good result for the compulsory question as this is the means by which we are able to ensure that candidates have studied the whole of the Unit 3 syllabus. This allows us clearly to differentiate between those candidates who have good all round knowledge and those who may know a great deal about a few areas only. The compulsory question always focuses on a mainstream topic and the classification system for three key wine producing regions clearly fits the bill as this is taught on WSET courses at all levels.

The vast majority of responses were accurate with almost as many merit grades and pass grades. However, a significant number (20%) made fundamental errors gaining less than 45% of the marks.

In many instances, scripts lacked detail, listing the classification categories for each region but offering no further details. Bordeaux appeared to be the easiest part of this question, but even here, there was confusion over the difference between districts and communes and some candidates mistakenly placed Chateau d'Yquem or Pétrus in the Medoc or cited them incorrectly as 1<sup>st</sup> Growths. Knowledge on the classification system of Italy was weakest, with a significant number confusing it with Spain. There was also a tendency to focus only on the upper levels of the classification system and forgetting therefore to comment for example on generic Bordeaux or table wine in Germany and Italy. The usual confusion was still evident in terms of the German system, with too many candidates still believing this to be based on the sweetness of the wine rather than the ripeness of the grapes.

Some candidates missed out one whole section of this question. This meant they missed out on a third of the marks available. In such instances, there is a strong likelihood of them not achieving sufficient marks to gain a pass grade for this question.

### Group B: 4 questions to be answered from a choice of 6

<b>Discuss why Viognier has become such a fashionable grape variety. Illustrate your answer with examples produced in both northern and southern hemispheres. (An essay format is COMPULSORY for this question.)</b>	
<i>Answers: 31</i>	<i>Passes: 15 (48%)</i>

This was one of the least popular questions and may in part have been due to the fact that an essay format was compulsory in this instance.

Responses here were very polarised - candidates fell into two camps – those with good knowledge and those who hoped to bluff their way through. This was reflected in the results with 52% of those who answered this question receiving a fail grade and of these, a large percentage (32%) were what we refer to as “borderline fails” with marks of between 50% - 54%. There was a good distribution of marks amongst those who were successful – 23% with pass, 16% with merit and 10% with distinction. This is exactly the kind of progression we expect.

Despite the warning that this question specifically required an essay format answer, some candidates still chose to ignore this instruction. They were penalised in the marking process as a result. Whilst the actual content of essays forms the bulk of the marks for this style of question, candidates should not underestimate the importance of the introductory and concluding sections when adopting an essay format. In some instances, the examiner is able to allocate bonus marks for style and clarity, particularly if the candidate is able to show that they have a good understanding of the focus of this question.

In general, candidates described Condrieu or Chateau Grillet well. Comments were also good in terms of the aroma, structure and texture of Viognier and most commented on the growing consumer appeal of this variety.

Common errors were as follows:

1. Believing Viognier formed part of the blend of Cornas or Hermitage (both red and white). In fact, there was general confusion on the varietal composition of Northern Rhône white wines.
2. Confusion over which countries are defined as Northern or Southern hemisphere – far too many thought California was in the Southern hemisphere.
3. Believing the purpose of Viognier in Shiraz/Viognier blends is simply for adding acidity, perfume and finesse. It is to help fix polyphenols.
4. Ignoring the appeal (or not) of this variety to the producer.
5. Confusing the concept of “blending” with “co-vinification”.

As always with this sort of question, it is vital to support observations with specific examples of actual wines, and to consider the whole spectrum from inexpensive to premium.

Descriptions of wines and lists of facts may generate some marks, but when the question starts with the words “discuss why...” it is essential to realise that reasons must be given to show an understanding of the points being made.

**With reference to Spain and/or Portugal as appropriate, write a paragraph on FIVE of the following: (each paragraph carries equal marks)**

- a) **Tempranillo/Tinta Roriz**
- b) **Bairrada**
- c) **Reserva**
- d) **Miguel Torres**
- e) **Alvarinho/Albariño**
- f) **La Mancha**

*Answers: 63*

*Passes: 37 (59%)*

Candidates often perform poorly in paragraph questions so this was a good pass rate. However, there was a huge variation in the quality of responses here with marks ranging from a low of 5% to a high of 91% for the top candidate with as many merit grades and pass grades.

The essence of a good paragraph answer is plenty of relevant facts in clear, simple English, rather than opinion or argument. Leave these for the more discursive style essay questions. To do well in a paragraph question you need to get as many facts down as possible in a short space of time, making sure that you can provide sufficient facts for all sections of the question. You should aim for around 5 or 6 key points with explanatory detail for each paragraph. A paragraph should equate to roughly one third to half a page of average handwriting. Do not assume that you can gain enough marks by writing a great deal about a few subjects only. Each section of a paragraph question carries equal marks and by failing to answer one section only, you forfeit one fifth of the marks available in this instance. It is easy to see how missing out sections or providing weak answers will affect overall chances of success.

The paragraph on Tempranillo was answered well in most instances, probably because Rioja is an area that most candidates are reasonably comfortable with at this level. It therefore seems strange that the section on Reserva wines was less good with many forgetting to comment on white wines, or failing to include reference to Portugal (the criteria differs in these two countries). In fact, this was a recurring problem with paragraphs a), c) and e). The inclusion of both spellings of the variety in a) and e) should have been enough to indicate what was required here, but many choose to ignore it and lost marks as a result.

The following candidate gained a scant pass grade. Their response covered the key points but lacked the detail that was necessary for a merit or distinction. Their response is shown in italics with the examiner's comments in brackets and bold type below each paragraph. In general, this is on the short side and rather simplistic but factually mostly correct.

a) *Tempranillo/Tinta Roriz*

*This is a red grape variety grown extensively in Spain but also found in Portugal. Tempranillo is a grape that gives intense colour in the wine, very fruity and easy to grow. In Spain the Rioja region produces wines made from 100% Tempranillo, but Garnacha is sometimes blended with it. The grape also adapts well to oak treatment and wines can age extremely well. Tinta Roriz is the name used in Portugal where red wines are becoming higher quality with the use of more modern winemaking techniques.*

**(Other names for this grape variety, more detail on characteristics of the grape (eg climate and soil for best results) and the style of wine produced, more detail on other regions where this is grown.)**

b) *Bairrada*

*This is a wine growing region in Portugal on the costal area south of Vinho Verde. The main grape produced here is Baga, a red grape. The soil is predominantly clay. This is an up and coming region with modernisation in winemaking. The influence of the Pacific is important for wine making here.*

**(This is very brief and superficial. More detail required on location, climate and trade structure, eg smallholdings and co-operatives. No mention of white wines and very little on the style of wine produced.)**

c) *Reserva*

*This is the term used in both Spain and Portugal for wines either aged longer or of better quality. In Portugal "Reserva" applies to wines from one vintage with a panel tasting, whereas in Spain this is the grade above Crianza whereby the wine has been aged for a minimum of 3 years with one year minimum in cask. The following grade in Spain would be Gran Reserva. In Portugal, the next and last grade is Garrafeira.*

**(No differentiation between the use of this term for red and white wines in Spain. No indication of the size of cask used. No indication that it is used for Vino de la Tierra, Do and DOCa wines. No indication of length of ageing in Portugal.)**

d) *Alvarinho/Albarino*



*Alvarinho is a white, scented grape from Portugal which benefits from coastal influence and produces refreshing wines called Vinho Verde. They often have a slight spritz in them. Albarino is the same grape with a different spelling from the North West of Spain producing similar wines, fresh and scented. It comes from the Rias Baixas region.*

**(Needs more detail on the characteristics of the grape and the style of wine produced such as aromas, production levels, demand, price – particularly in Spain, blending with other varieties in Portugal, region of production in Portugal.)**

e) *La Mancha*

*This is the wine growing region in central Spain. The climate here is very hot and arid and the main grape is the white Airen which is heat resistant. Wines have long been cheap and nasty in La Mancha but more recently modernisation in the winery enables the production of better quality wines made from Airen. The other name for this region is "Meseta". Irrigation is permitted in Spain since 1996 and used in La Mancha as long as they can prove they need it.*

**(More detail on the region, such as size, altitude, type of producer, other varieties used apart from Airen, details of modernisation taking place.)**

**Select FIVE still wines from Central and South-eastern Europe which demonstrate the breadth of styles and quality levels available from these countries. Describe the wines and give reasons for your choice. Your selection should include no more than two wines from any one country. (It is not necessary to specify particular producers or vintages.)**

Answers: 19

Passes: 4 (21%)

Questions on Eastern Europe are seldom popular, but quite often those who do attempt them do well because it is their area of expertise. Sadly this was not the case here with no candidates achieving distinction and only two with merit. This question clearly divided those who knew about these regions and those who knew a few basic facts about a couple of wines. In the case of the latter, many scripts covered barely half a side of A4 paper. This is seriously inadequate for this level of qualification.

There were a number of reasons for failure here beyond brevity. Some candidates simply did not read the question properly and listed more than two wines from one country. In many instances, the wines selected did not illustrate sufficient breadth in styles and quality levels and very few indeed gave reasons for their selection beyond the most simplistic such as "good example of a mid priced wine". There was a great deal of confusion concerning what qualifies as "central and south-eastern Europe". Candidates who had studied their way through the suite of WSET qualifications should have been familiar with this concept (in simplistic terms meaning countries to the east of Germany). One candidate even thought Lebanon qualified as central and south-eastern Europe. Others mistakenly took this to mean EITHER central Europe (eg France or Germany) or south-eastern Europe (eg Italy). There were some other appalling demonstrations of ignorance such as "Grüner Veltliner is a wine made from Welschriesling", "Tokaji is a fortified still wine", "Bull's Blood is a Bulgarian wine".

Most candidates included Tokaji in their answer and in the majority of cases, this was described well. Other popular choices were Retsina from Greece, Grüner Veltliner from Austria, Cabernet Sauvignon or Chardonnay from Bulgaria, Chasselas from Switzerland.

The following candidate was one of the top scoring in this question, with a borderline merit grade. Their opening comments are good and clearly set out the reasons for their particular choice of wines:

*“Central and South Eastern Europe has a dominantly continental climate tempered variously by altitude, proximity to sea or other bodies of water and other topographical features. Greece is an exception to this where the climate is predominantly Mediterranean. The variety of wines emanating from these areas is enormous. Five wines are:*

*crisp, light aromatic Riesling from Wachau in Austria,  
sweet, rich, superlative Tokaji from Tokaji in Hungary,  
unusual, unique Retsina from Greece,  
commercial, simple Cabernet Sauvignon from Bulgaria,  
deep, age-worthy, rich Bull’s Blood from Hungary’s Eger region.*

*This choice covers dry and sweet, accessible and heavy as well as quirky wines. They also cover international varieties such as Riesling and Cabernet Sauvignon as well as some of the many local varieties available: Hersleveu, Furmint, Savatiano, Kekfrankos, Kekporto.”*

There are clearly some errors here, such as the misspelling of Harslevelu and not being able to name the region of production for Tokaji, but the choice of wines is very good – varied in both style and quality levels. This candidate has clearly understood the question and what is required of them. What followed were tasting notes for each of the wines. Whilst these were accurate, there was very little in terms of reasons for this choice beyond the opening comments which should have been expanded within the various sections on each wine.

**Describe Beaujolais Villages and Chambertin Clos de Bèze Grand Cru under the following headings:**

- a) Climate**
- b) Soil**
- c) Pruning and training**
- d) Fermentation**
- e) Maturation**

*Answers: 51*

*Passes: 19 (37%)*

This was another extremely poor result for a question that should have been relatively easy. These two wines were selected because they are both very well known and differ enormously in terms of each of the criteria listed in the question.

Taking each paragraph in turn, the examiner made the following observations:

**a) Climate**

Many candidates did not go much beyond stating “continental” for both wines, with the comment that “Beaujolais is warmer than the Côte d’Or”. It is disappointing that so few were able to give any detail, particularly in the case of the Chambertin where local conditions can be so variable year on year.

**b) Soil**

There were varied accounts here – some right and some obviously guesses or “hedging their bets”. Most cited a basic “granite” for Beaujolais Villages and “limestone” for Chambertin, but few went on to give the kind of detail that would lead to anything more than a very basic pass.

**c) Pruning and training**

Once again, the basics were mentioned in terms of “gobelet” and “guyot”, but very few bothered to describe these. A couple of the better candidates commented on the difference between spur and cane pruning and went on to describe how these principles are applied in these two locations, but on the whole responses were very simplistic.

d) Fermentation

A significant number of candidates had a good understanding of carbonic maceration and this information boosted marks in a number of cases. There were some good descriptions of the process, but equally some hazy comments with candidates simply aware that it was not a “normal fermentation”. When it came to the Chambertin, responses were much weaker, with far too many indiscriminate references to “traditional fermentation” without explaining what this actually amounted to (eg, selection, crush, partial destemming to retain tannin and ease drainage of juice through the cap, period of maceration, chaptalisation, fermentation in open vats, pumping over and pumping down, malolactic fermentation).

e) Maturation

Once again, responses tended to be basic such as minimal ageing for Beaujolais and ageing in barrique for the Chambertin. Very few considered that some Beaujolais Villages undergo ageing in large oak vats (with minimal influence on the wine) and none considered the period of maturation in bottle for Chambertin.

**Describe and discuss the various styles of still wines produced from Chenin Blanc in the Loire and South Africa.**

*Answers: 55*

*Passes: 24 (44%)*

The exam panel expected better results for this question as this has been asked in various formats frequently in the past.

Alarmingly, 31% of scripts fell in the 30% - 39% band. Unfortunately this was a common occurrence in most of the questions in the January examination.

On the whole, candidates' knowledge of the Loire was better. The versatility of the grape was generally acknowledged and candidates referred to the sweet wines of Anjou-Saumur such as Coteaux du Layon, and dry wines such as Savennières. Knowledge of the vinification techniques for these wines was fairly good and quite a few candidates understood how the vintage variation affected the style of wine produced (particularly in Vouvray). South Africa was covered well by a much smaller number of candidates with most commenting in very broad terms.

Some candidates tended to treat the Loire as a complete entity, never mentioning any specific areas or ACs. Even those who did cover it well often forgot about the more basic ACs of Touraine, Anjou and Saumur or Vin de Pays. Where these were mentioned, they were simply referred to as “basic Chenin Blanc from the Loire”. Hardly anyone mentioned that in these areas Chenin Blanc could be blended with other grape varieties. It is always important to illustrate answers with examples of wines from specific producers, this shows sound commercial awareness. Unfortunately, these were very sparse.

In terms of Chenin Blanc in South Africa, a good script should have included information such as:

**General comments:**

Also known as Steen and grown throughout South Africa accounting for around one fifth of vineyard plantings. Worcester has particularly high production. It retains acidity even in the heat but its distinctive flavour is often lost. All styles of wine are produced, from dry to sweet, oaked to unoaked, basic to premium. This tends to vary depending on the method of production.

### Styles of wine

It was important here to cover a variety of styles, such as:

Basic level: Large amounts of neutral, crisp, simple wines aimed to be drunk young. Often sold in box rather than bottle. These tend to lack the aromatics and concentration shown in the Loire and are generally cool fermented with a slight spritz. In the past they have tended to be medium-dry in style, but now there is a move towards drier wines.

Mid level: Young wines with concentrated fresh fruit, fruit salad, apple, melon, apricot, guava, pineapple, floral, spice, mineral, medium to full bodied with crisp acidity. Grapes for some wines are picked riper, barrel fermented and matured in oak resulting in wines with more body, toast and oak flavours. Key producers for the dry/off dry fresh style include Nederburg, Kanu, Raats, Groote Post. Mulderbosch make an off dry lightly oaked style using a small percentage of new French oak and second fill American oak.

**Write a paragraph on FIVE of the following: (each paragraph carries equal marks)**

- a) **Margaret River**
- b) **AVA**
- c) **Jacob's Creek**
- d) **Central Otago**
- e) **The Andes**
- f) **Opus One**

*Answers: 53*

*Passes: 30 (57%)*

New World questions tend to be popular, as do paragraph questions, so it was no surprise that this was the choice of around three quarters of candidates sitting the January paper. The pass rate was reasonably sound compared to some of the previous questions, with a similar number of candidates gaining either pass or merit. However, the largest percentage of scripts (19%) were in the 55% - 59% band, and therefore basic pass grades.

Failure was either due to brevity, lack of detail, writing fewer than five paragraphs, answering all six paragraphs (and therefore covering the required five in superficial terms only) or incorrect factual knowledge. It was surprising how many did not know what Jacob's Creek was, or thought it was in New Zealand rather than Australia. Most also only focussed on the commercial wines and were unaware of the premium wines it produces. A number of candidates did not know what AVA stood for – one suggestion was "Australian Viticultural Area". This has to be worrying as this is covered in the lower level qualifications and should be general knowledge at this level. Central Otago also caught out many, with suggestions that it was an area in California or Chile. The paragraph on the Andes caused the fewest problems with most candidates able to cover the basics such as where they are and how they impact on wine production in Chile and Argentina.

For those who struggled to know what to write for Margaret River or Central Otago, the following candidate gained high marks in both sections:

### **"Margaret River"**

*This is a wine region in the south west tip of Australia. It is a relatively new starter. These wines have only been in the UK on any reasonable scale volume for the last 5 years. Because it is not part of the large area of South East Australia, blending options are much more limited and the area has tended to look to produce better quality wines at a higher price point. There are some cooler areas due to the cold current coming up the west coast and the vines are healthier than most because of the "Freemantle Doctor" – a wind that blows in the summer. This reduces rot and dries grapes after rain. Though as it is strong, wind breaks are necessary. The area is quite wooded and this fact is its "terroir" and can be picked up in its wines. Birds are a problem at harvest time. The soils are relatively infertile and have good drainage and varieties like Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot produce both good single varietal and blended wines. Semillon is also produced in a style not unlike Sauvignon Blanc.*

*Margaret River is small in size. Western Australia, which is largely Margaret River plus Frankland River produces only 3% of Australia's wine. Some of the best known estates are Cape Mentelle (which also produces a good Zinfandel at 16% abv and therefore not available in the UK) and Voyager.*

### **Central Otago**

*Central Otago is a wine region on South Island in New Zealand - at 46°S it is the southernmost vineyard area in the world. This area is towards the east side of the island and wine production here is made possible by the range of mountains running north south down the island. Firstly they protect the area from the fierce westerly winds, which also bring rain. The rain falls on the west side of the mountains leaving the eastern side dry, in fact, pretty dessert like. The mountains provide run off water for the vineyards in what would otherwise be a dessert. The area has only appeared on the international wine scene in the last decade. It has become an area where Pinot Noir in particular excels though white varieties like Chardonnay and Riesling, Pinot Gris and Sauvignon Blanc also do well in this cooler climate. The area produces very good alternative Pinot Noir to Burgundy at the premium to slightly less than premium price point. The average UK bottle price is around £14.99 for a good Central Otago Pinot Noir. They have the typical raspberry fruit and though they age faster than Burgundy Pinot Noir, can last 5-6 years acquiring the typical vegetal quality of red Burgundy."*

The section on Margaret River is particularly good – the Semillon wines do indeed have a grassy character similar to Sauvignon Blanc. The only detail missing is perhaps reference to the high rainfall (1,150mm per year mainly in winter), and the fact that vineyards are approximately 90m above sea level. Coverage on Central Otago is also very good. Perhaps they could have said more about the climate, such as the effect of the considerable diurnal swings in temperature and the vintage variation due to seasonal temperature variability. It would also have been good to mention the most successful district – Bannockburn.

## Theory Paper June 2007

### Group A: Compulsory Question

Describe the two wines below under the following headings:

- a) Climate
- b) Harvesting
- c) Vinification
- d) Maturation



Answers: 308

Passes: 213 (69%)

This was a very good result, particularly as this was a compulsory question and was answered by all candidates, both good and bad alike. In addition to the high pass rate, there was also a significant percentage of candidates (25%) achieving a pass with merit, although distinction grades were rather less abundant.

This format of question appears to have been popular with candidates sitting the Unit 3 exam since its introduction three years ago. The purpose of this question is to test the candidates' factual knowledge regarding production of the two wines depicted. The wines were selected because they provide a clear contrast under all the headings. The danger with this type of question, is that candidates fail to pay close enough attention to the detail on the labels, simply describing the wine in generic terms rather than concentrating specifically on the actual wine shown. This is particularly important from the point of view of vintages, producers and other small print that might have a bearing on the answer.

In terms of climate, some candidates overstated the summer temperatures in the Mosel – it is not hot, the average July temperature is a warm 18°C. There was also some very poor knowledge regarding what is actually responsible for the development of noble rot in Tokaj-Hegyalja. Various options cited were large lakes not even located in Hungary (Balaton and Neusiedl), various seas (Mediterranean, Black Sea, Dead Sea) and real and fictional rivers (Danube, Bodega, Bodag and Tiszi). It was of course the Bodrog and Tisza River.

When discussing ripening conditions for Eiswein, some candidates totally ignored the necessity of cold winters for this style of wine or forgot the importance of climate/temperature in terms of harvesting grapes when frozen. It was often unclear that it is the freezing of the water in the grapes that causes the concentration not just the late harvest. In addition, a

number of candidates were unsure of what actually happens during this process with comments such as “ice pierces the grape and the water escapes”, or “freezing causes the water to evaporate”.

For the Tokaji, harvest dates varied wildly from May (far too early for the development of fully ripe, nobly rotted grapes) to August, and use of terminology was poor with the picking in “tries” described as “tirage” (this is what initiates the second fermentation in bottle in sparkling wine) or “tri”. Unless you know the correct word to use, it is better to use nothing at all as this simply shows a lack of knowledge. The vinification process for Tokaji was generally described well (ie the use of “paste” and base wine), although some candidates appeared very confused with some believing the grapes were dried on mats. There was also a variety of explanations for the term Aszu, with some believing it was the name of the region or a grape variety or a Magyar word for “sweet”.

## Group B: 4 questions to be answered from a choice of 6

<b>What makes Barolo special? Account for the different styles produced. (An essay format is COMPULSORY for this question.)</b>	
<i>Answers: 181</i>	<i>Passes: 93(51%)</i>

For a compulsory essay style question, this was not a bad pass rate with an equal and reasonably significant number of merit and distinction grades (14% each). However, the fact remains that half the candidates who attempted this question did not provide the information that was required to pass. With this type of question, it is not just a case of getting the facts across - structure is also important. Any responses submitted in formats other than an essay, such as separate, disjointed paragraphs or bullet points were graded as fail. Other reasons for failure were either because submissions were factually incorrect, lacked detail or were simply too short. It is extremely unlikely that a single side of text will contain enough detail to gain 55% of the marks available. This is equally the case where the candidate writes more, but pads their answer out with information that has not been asked for. Once this superfluous information has been eliminated, there is rarely enough of real merit to justify a pass grade.

The following is one example of the key points that would have secured a pass for this question:

**The introduction** – setting out how the question will be answered and making a few key observations about the wine.

**What Makes Barolo Special?** – ie, what is the nature of Barolo? This would be characteristics such as colour, aroma, bouquet, palate, ability to age, ability to complement food.

**What makes Barolo the wine it is?** – ie, the facts relating to production.

Very small delimited area (demand exceeds supply).

Wealthy part of Italy (important historically and culturally – no real history of “bulk wine”).

Plenty of cash has been invested over the last 20 years by committed growers.

Strong export markets (USA, Germany, Switzerland) most of the time.

Continental climate with hot summers, long damp foggy autumns giving long ripening season, cold winters resulting in great balance in grapes, cooling Alpine influence.

Weather: Rainfall throughout the year, peaks in April/May and October/November, summer hail. Vintage variation common (average 2 excellent vintages per decade) – adds to the “uniqueness” and desirability of the wine.

Soil: (calcareous marl of La Morra and Barolo vs. compressed sandstone of Monforte d’Alba and Serralunga d’Alba).

Aspect: (important for ripening).

Grape variety: Nebbiolo (very important for structure), vine age affects quality, concentration and style.

Pruning and training, vineyard husbandry, low yields (maximum 56hl/ha), vinification, maturation.

### **Different Styles:**

General style - Pale colour ruby to garnet, brick with age, complex aromas of plums, floral, violets, roses, tar, liquorice, white truffles, full bodied, intense flavours with substantial tannins, high alcohol. Excessive extraction and/or cask ageing can cause wines to be tannic and bitter. With age, wines become savoury, meaty, mushroom, leather.

Newer style – There is now a move to fruitier, less tannic wines that can be drunk young.

Softer styles are produced by Renato Ratti, Paolo Cordero di Montezemolo, and a “Ceretto” style is the result of shorter fermentations (10 to 14 days), less ageing in wood with extended bottle ageing before release.

### **What accounts for differences in style?**

Terroir (village and vineyard designations are now very much part of the premium Barolo market).

Vine age - there are a lot of young vines, (this contributes to the difference between the old and new style).

Picking times (super ripe style or wines that are not phenollically ripe with high tannins that need time).

Fermentation and extraction - very important, as this can vary from 10 days to 2 months, temperature control, maceration, pumping over, use of rotofermentors, maturation in either botti or barriques and length of maturation, (traditional min 2yrs in botti and 1yr in bottle), filtered wines vs. unfiltered wines.

Vineyard and producer - La Morra and Barolo are softer, fruitier, aromatic and age faster, Monforte d'Alba and Serralunga d'Alba are intense, structured wines that age slowly, wines from Castiglione Falletto have elegance and the forward character of Barolo and structure and backbone of Serralunga.

**Conclusion** – what have you deduced as a result of your discussion of the topic?

Many scripts were simply too short. In the time available for each question (1/2 hour), the examiner expects about two sides of A4 paper, yet many scripts were barely one side or even less, resulting in an inadequate answer. The following script is a classic example of this, and achieved a fail grade:

*“Barolo is one of the first DOCGs in Italy, situated in the north-west of the country in the Piemonte region. It is one of the most famous wines of Italy alongside Chianti and Vino Nobile de Montepulciano. Barolo is near the town of Alba, literally “at the foot of the mountains” (meaning of Piemonte) and all the best vineyards follow mountain valley paths. Barolo is made from the black Nebbiolo grape – said to be “the king of Barolo”. Nebbiolo is a grape that gives acidity, tannin and structure, and can age for many years if treated well. Some of the best Barolos need extra bottle ageing or decanting to soften them out. The DOCG system does not define minimum ageing requirements, (examiner’s comment: yes it does) however most good Barolos are aged for up to 5 years. For example, Barolos from Pio Cesare are thick, intense wines with a good balance of fruit, tannin and structure and are aged for over 5 years in oak. Barolo is introducing more French oak for its ageing, compared to the once traditional Slavonian oak. Some lighter styles of Barolo may include blending with Barbera, a lighter bodied variety, however international grapes such as Cabernet Sauvignon are not permitted in order to gain the Barolo DOCG. Producers such as Michele Chiarlo produce Barolo in a slightly less tannic style, but Barolo wines will always be famous for their power, acidity and structure. Perfect with the meat and pasta influenced cuisine of Italy.*

*The essential Barolo style has certainly moved on from fermentation in large oak vats to smaller oak “botti”, the type of oak used has evolved as mentioned earlier from Slavonian to French, maceration times have changed from very long (60 days) to very short (5 days),*



*yields have decreased and a more fashionable “boutique” wine style has emerged that is more rounded, and more influenced by expensive new oak.”*

This is far too short (just short of one side of lined examination paper), it contains factual errors and does not get to the heart of the question as outlined in the essay plan above.

<p><b>With reference to Spain and/or Portugal as appropriate, write a paragraph on FIVE of the following: (each paragraph carries equal marks)</b></p> <p>a) <b>Dão</b>  b) <b>White Rioja</b>  c) <b>Toro</b>  d) <b>Irrigation</b>  e) <b>DOCa</b>  f) <b>Monastrell</b></p>	
<p><i>Answers: 173</i></p>	<p><i>Passes: 113 (65%)</i></p>

Considering that this question is about two wine producing countries that can generate poor results, this was an excellent pass rate. In fact, a large number of candidates attempting this question, did very well, with more candidates gaining Distinction than those gaining a straight pass grade – this is extremely unusual.

However, the examiner commented that many submissions were far too short – some with only a few lines on each paragraph. Some candidates also fell foul of the effect of not being able to answer all five sections well. Every year, this report warns candidates not to attempt this style of question unless they can confidently write a good paragraph (around 12 – 15 lines of text) on ALL FIVE sections.

There were clearly sections in which candidates hoped to get by with a combination of “intelligent guesswork” and generalisations – most notably on irrigation. When answering paragraph questions, the trick is to get as much information across as possible within the “paragraph” format. This means sticking to hard facts rather than prosaic descriptions. For example, in the case of White Rioja, the candidate should explain what this is, where it comes from (as precisely as possible), what it is made from, how it is made (including ageing requirements), what it tastes like. For each of the remaining sections, the issues to consider are:

**Dão** – what it is, where it is, what it produces, how it produces it, what the style of wine is, details of the region that contribute to this (grape, climate etc), details of trade structure, eg large producers, co-operatives etc.

**Toro** – a similar approach to the previous section.

**Irrigation** – what it is (definition), when, where and why it is permitted, how it is achieved, where it is used, effects on wines.

**DOCa** – what it is, where it is used, what the criteria is.

**Monastrell** – What it is, where it is found, what it produces, what the key characteristics are.

Compare the following paragraph on Toro from a candidate who failed with the following one from a successful candidate. It is clear that the first candidate is relying largely on guesswork. There are no concrete facts specific to this region other than the reference to grape varieties. All other comments are very vague and could apply to any number of regions. This is produced as written (including errors).

*“One of Spain’s growing regions. It is not Rioja or Ribeira de Duero, since Spanish producers are trying to show the world that there is more to come from Spain. Red wines based on Tempranillo as well as international Cabernets and Merlot along Grenache and Carinina. Wines can range from light to full bodied reds, and climate is relatively warm in summer with a long ripening period.”*

There is very little of any value in this, whereas the following submission is accurate and contains some detail specific to the region.

*“Toro is a Spanish wine area situated in the region of Castilla-y-Leon in north-central Spain near the River Duero. Almost exclusively red wines are produced here, made mostly from Tinto de Toro (Tempranillo). The climate is very continental, with very hot summers and cold winters, there is a big difference between day and night temperatures and wines from Toro have a clean fruity profile, crisp acidity and are mostly deep coloured. For the maturation, both American and French oak are used. Toro is a DO area.”*

Whilst this is by no means outstanding, it is a vast improvement in the previous paragraph. The kind of detail that would have generated top marks would have been things like soil types, more detail on climate and the effect on wine style (extreme summer heat can lead to high potential alcohol), examples of well known producers, more detailed description of the wines including vino joven, Reserva and Gran Reserva and use of Cabernet Sauvignon in non-DO wines.

**What causes California’s climatic diversity? Select three wine regions in California that reflect this diversity and describe the climate of each. For each region, select two wines that are typical of the area and write a tasting note for each.**

Answers: 202

Passes: 114 (56%)

Results for this question, as with many others, fell into two distinct camps, those who failed and those who passed comfortably. In fact more candidates achieved merit than pass. Failure was often due to covering only two regions rather than three (and in some instances, only one was mentioned), or due to lack of detail on climate in the regions or weak tasting notes. In most instances, candidates ensured that their choice of regions and wines actually did reflect the diversity referred to in the question.

Ideally, the three regions selected should have been from different climatic zones. This meant that candidates could potentially either cover a single region from each of three broad areas e.g. North Central Coast (Zones I-III), Sierra Foothills Zones (III-V) and Central Valley Zones (IV-V) and achieve climatic diversity, or opt for smaller zones such as three areas from the North Coast Region e.g. Oakville AVA in Zone 1, Potter Valley in Zone 11 and Clear Lake AVA in Zone 111. The vast majority of candidates went for the first option as very few had the detailed knowledge that the second option would have required.

In general, far too many candidates launched straight into describing the three regions and the wines without paying enough attention to the first part of the question, ie looking at what causes the climatic diversity. These are largely latitude (this is an extensive region - 1,100km north to south), altitude and, probably most importantly, proximity to the Pacific Ocean (in areas where the current from the Pacific does not have any influence temperatures can reach 40°C or more).

The following candidate covered this well with specific examples of regions to illustrate the points made:

*“Climatic diversity in California is caused by:*

- Distance from the ocean and ocean currents
- Altitude
- Distance from the equator.

The above list whilst by no means exhaustive (for example, proximity to large bodies of water may have an influence), does cover the major factors. Comparing say the Napa and Sonoma Valley on the one hand with Santa Barbara, one of the main climatic influences is that of distance from the equator with Santa Barbara being considerably warmer. Similarly comparing coastal vineyards in say Carmel Valley with the Central Valley, the distance from the moderating influence of the ocean means the central valley is warmer.

*The three wine regions selected to illustrate this diversity are Carneros, Santa Cruz Mountains and Central Valley."*

In the majority of scripts, the choice of regions and wines, were fairly predictable – most candidates identified the Central Valley as a hot region and Napa as a cooler region. However, some struggled to come up with a third region that offered diversity in terms of climate **and** style of wine produced – in addition, an awful lot of candidates selected the same grape varieties from different regions (inevitably Cabernet Sauvignon and Chardonnay) and came up with very similar tasting notes in each case. A good example of diversity was shown by the candidate who chose Cabernet Sauvignon and Pinot Noir from Sonoma, Ruby Cabernet and Emerald Riesling from San Joaquin Valley and Sauvignon Blanc and Syrah from Livermore. This was good because a small portion of the marks in this question were allocated at the discretion of the examiner for covering three suitably diverse climates and two different wines from each climate.

Once the issue of climatic diversity had been addressed, the best way to approach the rest of this question was to take each region in turn, name it and describe the climate by establishing if it is cool, warm, hot etc (including temperatures if known) stating which Zone it is in, considering the topography and how this influences climate (eg is it coastal, mountainous, inland etc), the affect of latitude and altitude and finally the usual weather pattern (eg are there sea breezes, mists, fogs, humidity, very dry, arid etc). Having done this, the two wines should have been described, ideally relating the attributes of the wine to the climatic conditions, for example "hot" alcohol in central valley wines due to the very high temperatures and lack of coastal influence.

**Select FIVE of the grape varieties listed below. For each, describe the style(s) of wine produced and state the characteristics of the variety that contribute to that style. (Each paragraph carries equal marks)**

- Pinotage
- Torrontés
- Grüner Veltliner
- Dornfelder
- Tannat
- Xynomavro

Answers: 219

Passes: 121 (55%)

Many candidates come unstuck when answering this style of question. They mistakenly think this is an easier option than, say, a question that requires a full essay-style answer – this is not necessarily the case. Whilst this style of question may favour those whose literary skills are less adept, it does carry its own drawbacks. As all sections of this question carry equal weighting, it is important to be able to cover all sections competently. It only needs one poor section to result in a mediocre pass grade. Two poor sections (unfortunately all too common) are likely to result in failure, as this leaves very little room for error elsewhere in the question. Equally damaging is not reading the question properly and writing something for all six

paragraphs rather than five. This inevitably means that each section is too brief to achieve high marks, and the candidate's efforts in answering the sixth paragraph are discounted when calculating the overall mark.

In general, although candidates described the wines well, there was very little in the way of acknowledgement of the characteristics of the variety that contribute to that style. There was also a tendency to think only in terms of one style of wine rather than considering how styles might vary, where for example varieties are cultivated in differing climates or handled in other ways. Pinotage was a case in point here, where the style of wine can vary from light, simple juicy reds or rosé to serious, full-bodied structured reds commanding high prices.

Taking Grüner Veltliner as an example, candidates should have aimed to cover the following in their paragraph:

A white grape which is the most commonly planted variety in Austria (approx 1/3 of vineyard plantings) with a small amount grown elsewhere in Eastern Europe. The style of wine is typically pale in colour, dry, with high acidity, medium (+) alcohol, medium to full bodied with flavours of spice or white pepper, citrus, green grapes, salad and mineral notes. Not dissimilar to the wines of Alsace. Some may improve with bottle age and develop honey and toasty characteristics, not unlike Burgundy. Good examples may be oaked and a little is used for the production of sweet wines. Large quantities are also drunk very young in Viennese Heurigen bars.

The characteristics of the grape that can influence style are yields (it tends to be high yielding especially if trained by the Lenz Moser system) and hardiness (it is therefore suited to cool climates). It is also late ripening (so not suited to some Northern European regions), but tolerant of many soil types. In particular, it expresses mineral notes when grown with low yields on appropriate soils such as in the Wachau in Austria.

<p><b>Select three white wines from Burgundy that illustrate the range of styles and qualities available. Explain the factors in the vineyard and the winery that result in these differences. (No more than two of the wines should be produced from Chardonnay.)</b></p>	
<p><i>Answers: 251</i></p>	<p><i>Passes: 128 (51%)</i></p>

This was a rather poor result for a question on one of the classic wine regions of the world. The quality of responses ranged from the truly awful at 9% to exceptional at 90%. Those who failed generally did so because they either did not explain sufficiently (and in some case not at all) the factors in the vineyard and winery that result in differences in styles of wine, or because they chose inappropriately for their third (non Chardonnay) wine. In some instances, these were simply another Chardonnay wine, a red wine or a wine from an entirely different region or a white variety that simply is not cultivated in Burgundy. There were a significant number of candidates who seemed to be under the impression that Condrieu is produced in Burgundy. Whilst some errors are clearly down to the candidate not reading the question properly, factual errors of this nature are particularly worrying at this level and not acceptable.

There are also a large number of candidates who seem to think they can get by with wide sweeping generalisations such as the one who commented *"the grapes are harvested in autumn and vinified in the normal way."* This is telling the examiner absolutely nothing at all and merits no marks at all. Equally simplistic was the following observation *"Mâcon is the centre of production of Mâcon wines."*

The choice of wines (with the exception of the comments made above) was generally good. The key thing here was to cover a range of quality levels in addition to at least two different grape varieties. So, for example, the candidate who selected two Grand Cru wines would

have been penalised for lack of diversity. Most candidates opted for Bourgogne Aligoté in the case of the third wine. Sauvignon de Saint Bris was another valid contender. Chablis (at varying quality levels) was another popular choice and was usually described with a good level of detail. Candidates who included a sparkling wine such as Crémant de Bourgogne were also penalised as these lie outside the scope of the Unit 3 syllabus.

Candidates who described the wines and clearly wrote a paragraph about vineyard factors, followed by a separate paragraph about winery factors did very well provided they explained how the factors affect the style of the wine (eg cool, marginal ripening conditions leads to light alcohol and body and high acid, or high yields lead to low levels of flavour concentration and little complexity etc.) The real key to doing well in the Diploma examination, irrespective of the question, lies in preparation before committing pen to paper. It is vital to underline key words in the question and jot down a brief essay plan based on these key words. This is the best way to ensure that the answer contains the information that was asked for rather than, as some candidates did, simply writing "everything I know about" the three wines including irrelevant padding such as food and wine matches, key export markets and other unnecessary detail.

The following candidate made a good choice of wines of three distinct quality levels. They then compared the three wines in terms of production. This script is however far from perfect. Spelling and grammar are a particular problem with some appalling errors as can be seen below (the script is reproduced as submitted). There was also a complete disregard for any accents where appropriate (eg Aligoté etc) and stylistically, it is rather clumsy and stilted. There is one other significant error with this script. The candidate has misread the question as "...styles and **quantities** available" rather than "qualities". Fortunately for them, this has not really shifted the emphasis of the question too much as the two very often go hand in hand (ie quality is often influenced by quantity produced). This means that this script does address the all important second part of the question and for this reason gained a reasonably high mark. There was also a good level of detail for each of the three wines, indicating that this candidate had good knowledge of the region despite the very poor presentation of this script.

*"The white wines that illustrate the range in styles and quantities of wine available in Burgundy are: white AC Bourgogne Vin Ordinaire, Macon's Pouilly-Fuisse AC and Grand Cru Chablis AC. (Examiner's note – whilst this candidate has selected these on the basis of "quantity", they do in fact represent three distinct quality levels and therefore address the question as set.)*

*The white AC Bourgogne Vin Ordinaire is a regionally produced wine, made from grapes anywhere in Burgundy. The varieties used are typically Aligote and Melon de Bourgogne (also known as Muscadet). The factors in the vineyard here are based on quantity. Where a fine Grand Cru white has an AC limit of 40 hl/ha, the regional wines here are produced in excess of 80 hl/ha. These grapes may be trained by single guyot and heavily cropped, and planted in the fertile valleys of the Saone River or on the plains of the Macon hills of the Chalonais or on the outlying areas of Chablis in the Yonne. In the winery (typically a co-op) the wine is most likely pressed immediatly, fermented in large open vat and fined and filtered to produce simple quaffing wine lower in alcohol (10.5%) without complication.*

*In the Macon, the region of Pouilly-Fuisse AC is very different in the yields produced (max of 50 hl/hc) and therefore the concentration and flavour is different in this warm area. It is made from Chardonnay and produces wines in excess of 13% alcohol. The amphitheatre that these vines are grown in has calcareous subsoil and produces grapes that illustrate the micro-minerals in the soil. Due to the warmth of the area and lower rain than the Cote d'Or, the Chardonnay ripens into the autumn producing clean rot free fruit. In the winery the wine is typically fermented in stainless steel temperature controlled tanks, followed by oak maturation – some new oak, resulting in some oak flavours in the wine. The wine is usually held 9 months to a year (vs Bourgogne Ordinaire which may be 6 months) and when bottled the wine can age well due to the calcareous soil allowing the preservation of acidity in the wine, and due to the full body and flavour of the wine produced.*

*A Grand Cru Chablis AC (Blanchot, Bourgros, Grenouilles, Les Clos, Preuse etc) are planted on the riverside hills across from the town of Chablis at a slope to maximise sun exposure (versus the Bourgogne Blanc of fertile river valleys). In addition the soil is not just calcareous like in Pouilly Fuisse, but is a particular clay – jurrasic limestone from the old sea bed called Kimmeridgean clay. The micro-nutrients in this soil give great complexity to the 7 grand cru vineyards. Yields are very low (35 hl/hc) and the region has more challenges than the warmer Pouilly Fuisse, being prone to frost risk, hail and even winter freeze. The area is so cold some wineries must be heated to induce fermentation. Mainly stainless steel is used in the winery. The wine is fermented then moves to barriques and although some new oak is used it is rarely evident (versus Pouilly Fuisse which may be mistaken for a New World wine due to the richness and degree of oak, and different than Bourgogne Blanc Ordinaire AC with no oak). The wine is aged in barrique longer than either other wine, sometimes up to 2 years. The cool climate of Chablis causes Chablis Grand Cru AC to exhibit steely qualities that develop with age into complex perfume and stone fruit (particularly Les Clos).*

*The quantities vary extremely between these three wines, not just in their hl/ha production, but due to the delimited areas. Chablis Grand Cru AC is the smallest, being split over only 7 vineyards and being susceptible to vintage variation (frosts in spring can greatly reduce crop). Whereas Pouilly Fuisse is a little larger and can more consistently produce a larger amount of wine due to the warmer temperatures. Bourgogne Blanc Ordinaire AC can be produced in vast amounts, virtually to demand specifications due to it being able to be sourced from many different regions in Burgundy from mass-producing vineyards. It should be noted that Pouilly Fuisse's quantity can be increased by the satellite vineyards of Pouilly Fuisse Loche and Pouilly Fuisse Vinzelles which surround Pouilly Fuisse to the south-east and are allowed to use the name."*

This is a good example of how much more important factual content is than stylistic elegance. However, it is also a lesson in the importance in reading the question properly. This candidate was very lucky that their incorrect interpretation of the wording of the question did not lead them too far in the wrong direction – this really could have been disastrous if they had misread this as say "two white wines" instead of three, or "red wines" instead of white.

<b>Compare and contrast the production and style of Barossa old vine Grenache, Châteauneuf du Pape AC and Navarra Rosado DO.</b>	
<i>Answers: 200</i>	<i>Passes: 109 (55%)</i>

As with some of the other questions, although the pass rate for this was reasonably good, it hides the fact that not one single candidate achieved a distinction grade. This is not totally surprising as candidates never do well in questions where they are asked to "compare and contrast". This is particularly disappointing as this is addressed in this report every time this type of question appears in the examination, with clear examples of what is expected in terms of the approach that should be taken.

Where candidates simply described the three wines, mark were restricted to pass only or below. Merit was only awarded to the 28% of candidates who specifically highlighted the similarities and differences between the wines, in other words, they compared and contrasted them.

In terms of comparisons, the key things to focus on relate to grape variety, climate and wine style. These can be summarised as:

All three are made partly or wholly from the Grenache grape.  
All three show the characteristics of grape (large, thin skinned berry, high sugar levels, low acidity) resulting in full-bodied wines with red fruit character (strawberry, raspberry), spicy notes (white pepper, liquorice, cloves), high alcohol, low in tannin, colour and acidity. All

three wines share most of these characteristics (even the Rosado is full bodied). With age, the spicy notes evolve into toffee and leather as with the Barossa old vine Grenache and the Châteauneuf du Pape.

Grenache needs a hot climate to ripen – all three regions provide this.

Grenache has strong wood and is suited to bush training – this is normal practice in all three regions.

None of these regions uses irrigation (not even Barossa).

Barossa is regarded as the best Australian region for Grenache, with wines mimicking those of the Rhône such as Châteauneuf du Pape in terms of style.

When it comes to contrasting the three wines, the answer lies in focusing ONLY on the differences between the three. This means covering issues such as how the grape is used in the wines. For example the single varietal Barossa compared to the blended Châteauneuf du Pape. Viticulture is another area where differences can be identified such as the use of old vines in the Barossa versus much younger vines for the Navarra or soils and yields.

Winemaking techniques should also be addressed such as the traditional red winemaking of the Barossa and Châteauneuf du Pape and the very different approach required to produce a rosé wine. Finally there are clear differences when it comes to wine style both in terms of flavour profile and quality with the Barossa clearly a premium wine whilst the Rosado is aimed at a completely different market.

It is vital that candidates understand what is required of them with this style of question as it is a format that comes up time and again. When asked to “compare and contrast” it is not sufficient to describe each wine in isolation. No comparison or contrast has been made. Instead, answers should seek to set out the similarities that the three wines share and the specific differences between them. All other information is superfluous.

## Unit 4, Spirits of the World

In the 2006/07 academic year, we changed the style of question for units 4, 5 and 6 to a three part paragraph question. This style of question requires good all round knowledge for the candidate to do really well, but also allows those who may know enough about two sections to pass the paper as a whole, providing their tasting paper achieves high marks.

The approach to this question is no different to that for paragraph questions in the Unit 3 examination, you should aim to get as many facts down as possible – in fact these are just about the only type of question where it is acceptable to write “all you know”.

In terms of the tasting question, there is significant evidence that candidates do not add water to their samples when assessing them. It is vital to evaluate the nose and palate both before and after adding water as the character of spirits can change considerably as a result of being broken down in this manner.

The examination for Unit 4 was run on three separate occasions in the academic year 2006/07, in November, March and June. The overall pass rate for the unit as a whole for all these dates combined was 69%.

The questions and individual pass rates for each of the three examination dates were as follows:

### November 2006

Question 1 - Zubrowka Bison Grass Vodka, Appleton Estate White Rum, Pernod	
Answers: 236	Passes: 139 (59%)

Results for this question were pretty solid with fewer really low marks (less than 30%) than have been recorded in other questions for the closed book assessments. This was almost certainly due to the inclusion of Pernod which provided a vital lifeline to many candidates.

The script below is a good example of a candidate who correctly identified the samples but still failed. The descriptions are weak, - short, often inaccurate and simplistic and price estimates are too low in each case. Markers comments appear in brackets in bold type.

#### *Spirit No 1*

*Appearance: Bright, pale lemon and pale intensity* **(Rim, legs?)**

*Nose: Clean, youthful, light to medium intensity, floral, oily fragrance with a hint of citrus peel with grass and herbs.* **(Good description)**

*Palate: Medium sweet, medium bodied with a balanced and complex finish. Flavour intensity is medium with a creamy, grassy flavour.* **(Alcohol? Length? Not completely accurate)**

*Raw material and/or flavouring: Rye grain/buffalo grass*

*Style of spirit: Vodka*

*Price: £9.99* **(Too low)**

#### *Spirit No 2*

*Appearance: Bright, clear and colourless* **(Legs?)**

*Nose: Clean, quite closed nose, does not have an intense aroma. Very light aroma of fruit (cooked apples) and candy.* **(Repetitious and inaccurate – this was intense with plenty of aromas)**



*Palate: Sweet, light bodied with quite a short finish with a creamy, light intensity. Alcohol level is quite balanced with a flavour characteristic of cooked apples, sweet candied fruit.*

**(Inaccurate and too short)**

*Raw material and/or flavouring: Sugar cane (Molasses is more correct)*

*Style of spirit: Rum*

*Price: £11.99 (Too low)*

*Spirit No 3*

*Appearance: Bright, intense golden lemon (Yellow/green, legs?)*

*Nose: Clean, aged development, pronounced aniseed aromas. (Far too short, not totally accurate)*

*Palate: Sweet, full bodied spirit, long length and complex aniseed, creamy finish. Intensity of liquorice aromas are pronounced and the alcohol is balanced. (Not completely accurate, too simplistic)*

*Raw material and/or flavouring: Grapes/aniseed (No marks for grapes)*

*Style of spirit: Pernod*

*Price: £9.99 (Too low)*

**Question 2 – In relation to spirits, write a short paragraph on each of the following:**

- a) Fruit spirits not made from grapes or apples**
- b) Districts of Cognac**
- c) Parts of a Pot Still**

*Answers: 203*

*Passes: 108 (53%)*

There were plenty of scripts with relevant facts for each individual paragraph, but very few candidates were able to do this consistently for all three paragraphs.

Some candidates were unsure what counted as a “fruit spirit” and included inappropriate categories such as fruit flavoured spirits and fruit liqueurs. As a result there were comments relating to Gin, Limonella, Grand Marnier etc. Others included spirits produced from things like potato or agave. Nevertheless, the majority were able to list the most common fruit distillates as those made from Plum (Mirabelle, Slivovitz, Quetsch), Cherry (Kirsch), Peach, Pear (Williams and others). However, far fewer were able to go beyond this and explain how they are produced or give any other relevant detail.

In a similar vein, there were plenty of lists of the districts of Cognac (although Borderies was often omitted), but not much in the way of further detail such as style differences or the importance of chalk. Quite a few candidates included simple maps to illustrate where the districts lay in relation to each other. Where these were accurate they served a good purpose, but many were far too vague and sketchy (or simply inaccurate) to merit any marks. A significant number of candidates included irrelevant information on the Compté System. This was pointless and gained no marks.

There were some good responses on the parts of a Pot Still. This is a classic situation where a picture can explain this so much better than words, and many candidates included a diagram in their response. This was an easy way to gain marks provided these were correct. However, a diagram in isolation was not sufficient. The various parts needed a degree of explanation as well.

The key parts that should have been mentioned were:

**Furnace** – heats the pot by direct heat, usually gas.

**Pot** – made of copper (acts as a catalyst) and holds the wash.

**Still head** – “Chapeau”, collects vapours, affects the style and quality of the spirit, the taller the neck the lighter the character of spirit produced.

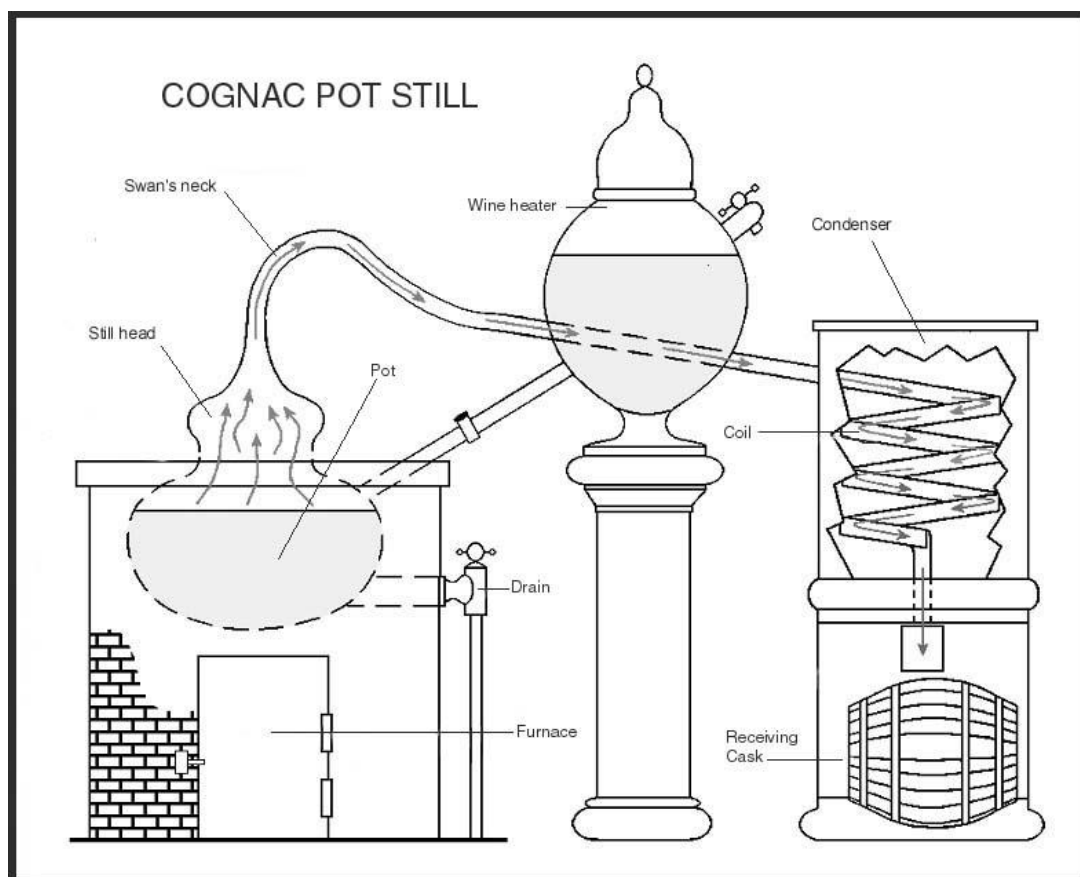
**Swan's neck** – “Col du cygnet”, vapours pass through this to the wine heater.

**Wine heater** – “Chauffe vin”, vapours from the swan's neck passing through a pipe in the wine heater partly warm up the next batch of wine before this is drawn into the pot.

**Condenser** – vapours condense as they cool and pass down the coil.

**Receiving cask** - distillate is collected, at approx. 23% abv from the first distillation and approx. 72% abv from the second distillation (hearts).

Diagrams should have resembled the following:



One candidate who was clearly totally confused described the “distillate held in a barrel which is heated in a kiln fired by peat.”

### March 2007

#### Question 1 - Soberano 5 year Old Spanish Brandy, Martell VSOP Cognac, Grappa Nonino Tradizione

Answers: 157

Passes: 113 (72%)

This was an excellent pass rate with an equal number of candidates gaining merit and pass. However there were relatively few really outstanding scripts.

The examiner noted the following problems with this question:

- A significant number of candidates (12% in fact) did not read the question which stated “Spirits 1 – 3 are all of grape origin”. This meant they lost marks in the concluding sections of the tasting note because they selected inappropriate spirits such as Rum or Tequila.
- Many missed the grapey character of the Cognac.
- Some did not follow the Systematic Approach to tasting spirits – this differs from that for wine.
- Often, insufficient aromas were noted on the nose to generate maximum marks.
- There were a number of candidates who continued to use vague terminology for which marks could not be awarded such as “rich robust body”, “good length”, “palate less dry than nose”. Others wrote their notes in a style more suited to wine journalism than an analytical assessment - such as “intriguing, demands another sip”.

The purpose of basing this paper on three spirits of grape origin was to test the candidate's ability to assess the quality of two very different Brandies, a fairly cheap and slightly coarse Spanish Brandy and a very good quality VSOP Cognac. Those candidates who did not read the question would therefore have missed the significance of the quality assessment here.

One further comment – many candidates struggle to find enough to say when describing the appearance of a white spirit. The following description is excellent, covering all aspects of the appearance:

*“Clear, bright, water-white, colourless spirit with significant legs. Oily appearance when water is added.”*

<p><b>Question 2 – In relation to spirits, write a paragraph on each of the following:</b></p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;"> <b>a) Malting</b>  <b>b) Vodka Styles</b>  <b>c) Brandy grape varieties</b> </p>	
<i>Answers: 157</i>	<i>Passes: 107 (68%)</i>

Like the tasting question, this was also a good result with more candidates gaining merit than pass.

In terms of malting, the best responses gave an explanation of what this process is and what it achieves. There was some confusion over when the malting process ends and a significant number of candidates did not explain why it takes place. Some thought a peat fire is used for malting rather than explaining that burning peat is added to the heat source for kilning. There were also some candidates who did not understand that malting is only part of the conversion process, not the full process.

There are three basic Vodka styles that the examiner was looking for in the second part of this question – Western, Eastern and Scandinavian. The other style now clearly worthy of mention is the growing plethora of flavoured Vodkas on the market. Some candidates failed to understand what was meant by “styles” and structured their response on base material used or (less successfully) market position. Where this approach resulted in the relevant information, they gained the marks, however a number simply discussed the base material without linking this to the style of the spirit while others described the production process or commented on branding and packaging without reference to the actual style of the spirit.

When it came to Brandy grape varieties, there were clearly four regions of relevance – Cognac, Armagnac and Jerez and Penedés for Spanish Brandy. Bonus marks were awarded to those candidates who thought beyond this and included reference to Grappa or Pisco for example. Obviously examiners were looking for more than just a list of the relevant varieties.

Those candidates who included additional information gained high marks, such as acknowledging that varieties used for quality spirit production need high acidity to give stability as the wine is fermented without SO<sub>2</sub>, or that entry-level (eg. non-AOC) brandies are made using whatever is grown locally.

The following candidate provided plenty of detail relevant to the various grape varieties and is clearly an expert on Pisco!

*“Brandy grape varieties are determined by the origin of the product in most circumstances.*

*Cognac uses 95% Ugni Blanc which gives high acidity, florality and pastry aromas. Folle Blanche and Colombard are also used (the former for weight, the latter for aromatics and acidity).*

*In Armagnac there are 12 permitted varieties allowed, although most use Ugni Blanc, Baco 22A (the only hybrid allowed in French AOC – being phased out), Colombard and Folle Blanche.*

*Other French brandies use the local varieties as with “Fine” which is controlled by the AOC. Bordeaux uses Ugni Blanc and Colombard – Champagne used disgorged Champagne from Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and Pinot Meunier.*

*Spanish brandy again uses local varieties. In Brandy de Jerez, the main varieties are Palomino and Airen which gives high alcohol and low acidity.*

*Pisco, a Latin American brandy (Chile, Peru and Bolivia) usually uses Muscat d’Alexandria and Pedro Ximenez, with a pure Muscat brandy in Bolivia known as “Mate”. An aromatic version of Pisco (Pisco Aromatico) is also produced which can be based on Muscat, Torontel or Albilla. Pisco Fur is from the same variety and Pisco Cuivre is from Quebranta Mollar or Negra Corriente.*

*Other grape brandy countries include Italy and South Africa (the main New World producer) often using the grapes available locally.*

*German brandy is the exception as most of the wine used in distillation is from abroad (probably from the EU wine lake) so grape variety is difficult to determine.”*

This was an excellent and extensive response – the examiner certainly was not expecting candidates to come up with this level of detail on Pisco. Some of the detail was not totally correct, for example it is Pisco Fur which is produced from Quebranta Millar or Negra Corriente rather than Pisco Cuivre but this is a very minor point bearing in mind the level of detail supplied.

## June 2007

<b>Question 1 - Jameson's Irish Whiskey, Laphroaig 10 year old Malt Whisky, Maker's Mark Bourbon Whiskey</b>	
<i>Answers: 93</i>	<i>Passes: 64 (69%)</i>

The examination paper advised candidates that all three samples were Whiskies, yet inevitably there were those who did not read the question and identified some samples as Rum or Cognac. The information in the question is there to help. If you do not read it, you will certainly throw marks away.

It was no surprise that the best descriptions were those for the Laphroaig with its obvious peaty, iodine, medicinal aromas. The Maker's Mark threw some (most notably those who had not read the question). For those who had, it was really quite obvious that this had to be a Bourbon with its strong caramel and burnt, smokey aromas. The Jameson's was obviously more of a challenge with most candidates identifying this as a straight grain whisky. This was not a problem as the marking key allocated one mark for the country and one for the style of spirit, so at most they lost one mark only.

**Question 2 – In relation to spirits, write a paragraph on each of the following:**

- a) Armagnac Maturation**
- b) Tequila styles**
- c) Production of London Dry Gin**

Answers: 91

Passes: 47 (52%)

The discrepancy between the number of answers for the tasting and theory question in this paper indicate that two candidates made no attempt at all the answer this question. They must surely have done no preparation of all if they were unable to write anything about any of these topics.

Responses here were clearly split between the 37% of candidates with extremely good knowledge who gained either merit or distinction and the 48% who did not know enough for this level of qualification and failed.

Setting aside the 48% who failed, all three topics were answered well by those who passed, although Armagnac maturation was perhaps the weakest section. Most candidates were aware of the Compté system, the different ages at release, the various types of oak used for maturation and the fact that it matures slowly because it comes off the still at a lower strength. However, having identified the types of oak used in maturation, quite a few candidates failed to describe what happens to the spirit in the barrel and the interplay between the wood and the spirit. There was also often too much on Armagnac prior to maturation such as reference to viticulture or distillation. The styles of Tequila were identified and described well, with some candidates providing additional information on "terroir" and how this, together with different methods of production can influence style. But, as with Armagnac, there was sometimes too much general information on method of production that was **not** linked in any way to style. Production of London Dry Gin seemed to be the easiest paragraph for most candidates. The majority knew the definition of a London Dry Gin and described the method of production well although there were a few who mistakenly thought it could be produced by cold compounding. There were some good references to the different types of still used such as the Carterhead still and the use of water cooling jackets to encourage reflux.

The following candidate gave a textbook, faultless response in all three sections. Congratulations to candidate no. 03000897.

**"ARMAGNAC MATURATION**

*Armagnac like the other AC controlled brandy Cognac, has specific ageing requirements built into its AC structure.*

*Armagnac is typically distilled to 52-70% abv and traditionally at the lower end of this scale. Such a low percentage abv means a full flavoured spirit with plenty of congeners remaining to give real character. Because of this, Armagnac really needs time in barrel maturation to soften and remove any harsh and fiery character to leave a fully flavoured, yet smooth spirit. Paradoxically this isn't built into its AC ageing requirements and it in fact requires by law less time maturing than Cognac to reach the various ageing levels: 1 year for VS, four for VSOP and five for XO (versus 2, 4 and 6 for Cognac). Although many producers will age longer*

than this, it has meant that a lot of Armagnac is released too young and therefore too rough. Producers are now sometimes distilling to nearer the 70% abv mark to produce a lighter, earlier maturing product, and some simply mature for longer to a style.

Armagnac must be aged in French oak barrels of a 400 ltr capacity. There are three different sources of French oak used, each having their own maturation characteristics usually depending on the tannin content and grain size. Both Limousin and Trancais oak have a tight grain (**marker's comment – Limousin has a loose grain**), whilst the other barrels have a looser grain and higher tannin content.

Armagnac also has been able to release vintage dated Armagnacs from a particular year, of which it will be 100%. VS, VSOP or XO will be an average age and blended product.

#### TEQUILA STYLES

Although Tequila has for a long time been seen as either a cocktail ingredient or shooting spirit, there has been a movement in recent years to premium Tequilas and different styles.

Firstly there is 100% Blue Agave Tequila which is, as the name suggests, made of 100% Blue Agave and usually produced in pot stills. These are the premium Tequilas. Mixto Tequila will be 51% minimum blue agave with the remainder made up of either a grain or molasses base or other agave (eg green). These are usually column or continuous still production at the bulk end of the market. There is even a "terroir" of highland and lowland agave, the highland having a higher sugar content and consequently producing a heavier style.

Ageing also comes into play and produces various styles:

Blanco or silver Tequila is an unaged, and un-coloured product. Similarly, Golden Tequila will have some caramel colouring to provide a golden hue. Reposado Tequilas are aged in barrels for 6 months which helps to impart some colour and aged character. Anejo styles are aged for a minimum of 1 year. Research however has shown that the agave character is most pure in the Blanco styles, although the premium Anejo styles made from 100% blue agave provide a premium product for consumers who want it.

#### LONDON DRY GIN

London Dry Gin may be produced anywhere, unlike say Plymouth Gin which may only be produced in Plymouth.

It must be produced by re-distillation of a neutral base spirit with botanicals and so cannot be produced by cold compounding. Various methods are available for the re-distillation but there are several common themes.

Firstly a neutral base spirit, usually of grain origin distilled to a minimum of 96%, will be diluted to a distilling strength of c. 60% abv. Different producers then distil with botanicals in different methods to produce the gin. Juniper will always be the main botanical, along with others such as coriander seed, angelica root etc. Some will soak the botanicals in the spirit to help macerate flavours before distillation in a pot still. Others will distil several times with a different botanical, or mix of botanicals, in order to layer the flavour required. Some such as Bombay Sapphire will suspend botanicals above the spirit to produce a more delicately flavoured gin. However, whichever method is used, London Dry Gin must be a gin distilled in the presence of botanicals.

It is of better quality than a product labelled simply "Gin", which could simply be a cold compounded product, and will have a fuller, sweeter and more aromatic profile."

## Unit 5, Sparkling Wines

The examination for Unit 5 was run on three separate occasions in the academic year 2006/07, in November, March and June. The overall pass rate for the unit as a whole for all these dates combined was 61%

The questions and individual pass rates for each of the three examination dates were as follows:

### November 2006

<b>Question 1 - Prosecco di Valdobbiadene La Marca, Pommery NV Champagne, Jacobs Creek Chardonnay Pinot Noir</b>	
<i>Answers: 189</i>	<i>Passes: 150 (79%)</i>

The emphasis in this question was on recognising differing levels of quality. For each wine, candidates were required to write an accurate tasting note, assess the quality and give an indication of the grape variety(ies) used in production. This was an excellent pass rate with 40% of candidates gaining a merit. Some candidates confused the Prosecco with Asti. There were some similarities, but this lacked the grapey character of Asti and was slightly more neutral. Most candidates spotted the Champagne and wrote good tasting notes, focussing on the autolytic character. Some also identified the Jacobs Creek as Champagne, thinking one was non vintage and the other vintage. Although the Jacobs Creek did have autolytic character, the acidity was not noticeable enough for it to be Champagne and the fruit had a distinct ripe quality to it.

<b>Question 2 – In relation to sparkling wine, write a short paragraph on each of the following:</b>  a) <b>Sekt</b> b) <b>Cava grapes</b> c) <b>The Aube</b>	
<i>Answers: 164</i>	<i>Passes: 68 (41%)</i>

In comparison to the tasting paper, submissions for this question were very poor. However, even with a low pass rate of only 41%, there was still a good distribution of marks at the upper level with 17% gaining a pass, 17% merit and 7% distinction. This implies that candidates either did very well or very badly with 59% failing and of these, 34% gaining what is now referred to as a “fail unclassified” grade of few than 45% of the marks.

This high failure rate was almost certainly due to lack of knowledge on the Aube as the following extracts show:

*“The Aube is an area in Germany where Sekt is produced.”*

*“The Aube is light and fruity medium sweet Austrian sparkling wine.”*

The key points we were looking for were that it is an area in Champagne, to the south of the main areas of Montagne de Reims, Vallée de la Marne and Côte des Blancs, approximately 112km south east of Epernay. It was originally a separate 'second zone' of Champagne when they were defining the region in 1911 but was eventually included in the main appellation when boundaries were finally fixed in 1927. The soil is Kimmeridgean marl (ideally suited to Chardonnay) and it has no Grand Crus. It covers an area of approximately 5,500ha and plantings are 85% Pinot Noir, 8% Chardonnay, 7% Pinot Meunier (the two Pinot's were planted when Gamay was grubbed up). It produces ripe fruity wines.

Many candidates tried to bluff their way through this by writing general information on the Champagne region as a whole (referring to chalk soil and the three main grape varieties). Whilst this would earn a couple of marks, it was insufficient without other information specific to the region.

### March 2007

Question 1 - Codorniu Rosado 2004, Taittinger Rose NV, Beringer Sparkling Zinfandel	
Answers: 167	Passes: 83 (50%)

This was an adequate pass rate but not exceptional. 20% of candidates gained a merit grade, but there were very few distinctions indeed. Most candidates were comfortable with the identity of the Cava but a considerable number underestimated the quality of the Taittinger and overestimated the quality of the Beringer. This is an error that we are seeing more and more often in all tasting papers with candidates confusing overt fruitiness and ripeness with complexity. Quality is not a direct correlation to fruit intensity – it is far more subtle than this. The finesse and elegance of the Taittinger was often misread as a “lack of character”.

The examiner also commented that in some cases the descriptors appeared to describe a wine the candidate thought they were analysing rather than what was actually in the glass. It is absolutely vital to keep an open mind until the tasting note has been written and only then to reach a conclusion based what has been observed. This is one of the most difficult things to do when tasting wine (particularly under examination conditions), but is the only way to achieve really accurate tasting notes. It is important to look behind the bubbles and analyse the wine itself. All too often the clues the base wine offered up were ignored, and candidates shoe-horned their tasting notes to fit their preconceptions.

Equally illogical are the candidates who do write accurate tasting notes and then fail to use the information in them to reach a logical conclusion. This was illustrated perfectly by the candidate who wrote the following assessment of quality for the Cava:

*“Acceptable, tank method rose”.*

This same candidate picked up clear signs of autolysis on the nose of this wine. This is unlikely to be evident on a tank method sparkling wine, therefore it was far more probable that this wine was either traditional or transfer method. This candidate should have read back through their tasting note and used the information they have gathered **before** drawing any conclusion regarding quality or provenance. This is the most common mistake candidates make in tasting exams and is the difference between “analysis” and “jumping to conclusions based on gut instinct”.

In general, the assessment of quality seems to trip up many candidates irrespective of whether they are dealing with still wines, fortified or sparkling. The following candidate was clearly on the right lines when describing the Cava, but needs to be more analytical:



*“Good, though light on fruit flavours. The sparkle seems well balanced with the mild strawberry flavour.”*

This really is a bit too vague although the comment about the fruit flavours is a step in the right direction. However, it is really more a question of lack of complexity or simplicity rather than “lightness” as the fruit intensity was medium rather than low. Most candidates are not analytical when it comes to the assessment of quality – they often repeat observations from the nose and palate without placing the wine in a quality context.

Some candidates make very heavy weather of describing the appearance, particularly the mousse. The two things to comment on are bubble size and persistence of the mousse. The Systematic Approach makes this very straight forward – there are three options for bubble size (small, medium, large) and three options for persistence (short, medium, long). There is no need therefore for alternative words which usually result in imprecise descriptions such as:

- “slow persistence of bubbles” - this could be anything from short to long
- “fast persistence of bubbles” – as above
- “rich persistence” – as above
- “**large** bubble size primarily with a secondary sheen of **persistent small** bubbles, the persistence of the mousse was **short** for the most part” – this note is so contradictory, it is impossible to allocate marks.

It is never a good idea in an examination environment to resort to informal or colloquial language such as *“it is light and cheerful but falls well short of boggling the mind”*. This is far more suited to “wine journalism”. Equally inappropriate are flippant comments such as *“this wine is lightweight and short which would be a disadvantage in most cases but is a positive advantage here given the lack of appeal”*.

<p><b>Question 2 – In relation to sparkling wine, write a paragraph on each of the following:</b></p> <p>a) <b>Transfer Method</b> b) <b>CIVC</b> c) <b>Tasmania</b></p>	
<p><i>Answers: 166</i></p>	<p><i>Passes: 102 (61%)</i></p>

61% is a good pass rate for a compulsory theory question and there were certainly some very good scripts here with one candidate achieving 92%. However, at the other end of the scale, there were some truly awful responses, some not even managing to get enough marks to put them into double figures

Whilst most candidates could explain the mechanics of the transfer method, there was the inevitable confusion between this and the tank method and a few candidates were unable to correctly explain the difference between “liqueur de triage” and “liqueur d'exposition”. Good candidates not only described the process accurately but also commented on the main advantages and disadvantages.

A surprising number of candidates had no idea what the CIVC was. Some wrote nothing at all and therefore threw away 33% of the marks they could potentially have gained, whilst others took a wild guess and decided it as a type of Cava or a method of carbonating still wine. The following is an excellent response from a candidate who gained top marks for this paragraph:

*“The Comité Interprofessionnel du Vin de Champagne was set up to take over from the Comité de Chalons run by the man who headed up Moët at the time. It came to force in 1941 and aimed to represent all sides of the Champagne industry. Both growers and cooperatives have a president and Merchants and Champagne Houses – this ensures total fairness for all.*

*The CIVC covers all aspects of production, regulations and research. It is currently researching the yeast chains of calcium alginate with Moët to end the riddling process for ever.*

*In 1959 the CIVC managed to protect the name “Champagne” and since then it has only been used in America, although these wines can’t be imported into the EU.*

*They manage to keep going by placing a levy on production of Champagne and a tax on all Champagne sales. Since the CIVC has set up it has proven itself to be very efficient and hence Champagne and its industry is one of the most organised industries in the wine trade.”*

This was very detailed and the only criticism is that there could perhaps have been a little more on its involvement in terms of production such as how it regulates the size of the harvest and has the power to decree that part of the harvest is retained as juice rather than vinified and sold.

The paragraph on Tasmania was answered well by those who were able to provide solid facts. Unfortunately a large number of candidates had to rely on “educated guesswork”. In some cases they got away with this, for example by referring to high quality sparkling wines made by the traditional method from Pinot Noir and Chardonnay grapes. However, it was those who had really prepared well for the examination who were able to provide the specific detail that was relevant for Tasmania by mentioning the other varieties also used such as Pinot Gris, Sauvignon Blanc or Riesling. Most referred to a “cool climate”, but once again it was the better candidate who clarified that whilst the climate is generally cool, the complex geography results in a diversity of climates and terroirs. These same candidates were also able to name key vineyard areas such as Launceston in the north or Hobart in the south and gave examples of producers of significance.

## June 2007

### **Question 1 - Schramsberg Blanc de Blancs 2002, Freixenet Cordon Negro NV, Diel Riesling Sekt NV**

*Answers: 107*

*Passes: 67 (63%)*

A good pass rate with a solid number of merit grades but very few distinctions. It is not uncommon for a Cava to feature in the Unit 5 tasting examination as it is quite distinctive and therefore usually easier to identify. It was surprising therefore that in this instance, this was the wine that caused the most problems with many candidates failing to pick up the characteristic rubber aromas.

The Schramsberg was often identified as Champagne. This was not a problem as the examiner had been instructed to accept either the US or Champagne as a valid response in this instance. However, candidates who simply put “France” did not get the mark. The Riesling Sekt was a challenge for many as this was a very good quality Sekt. The Riesling character was there (peach, apricot, mineral, petrol) but this was overlaid by light autolytic aromas as well. This confused some who thought it was a New World sparkling wine. Prosecco was another choice for many. It was really too aromatic for this.

**Question 2 – In relation to sparkling wine, write a paragraph on each of the following:**

- a) LVMH
- b) Crémant de Bourgogne AC
- c) Tank Method

*Answers: 106*

*Passes: 47 (44%)*

This question certainly drew a clear line between those with sound commercial awareness and those who simply learned the Diploma study notes by rote. The problem was very obviously the paragraph on LVMH. It was amazing how many candidates simply had no idea what this was with some suggesting it was a German classification for sparkling wine and another claiming it as the organisation that controls the quality of sparkling wine. Amongst those who did know that was an acronym for Moët Hennessy Louis Vuitton S.A. (and not one single candidate got the name in the right order), most just listed its brands rather than giving plain and simple facts about the company itself.

A good place to start here was to explain what LVMH is, eg a Paris-based holding company with over 60 luxury brands covering leather goods, fashion, watches, jewellery and cosmetics as well as wines and spirits. Some background information about the formation of this group or when the merger took place would have been useful. Good candidates were able to do this, and one candidate was even able to name the President of the company. Obviously in terms of the brands they own the important ones here are those relating to Unit 5 of the Diploma – the sparkling wines (Moët et Chandon, Krug, Mercier, Ruinart and Veuve Clicquot), although mention of the other interests helps in giving a “rounded” picture. Once again, those candidates who keep in touch with the trade press were aware that they were also the previous owners of Champagne Pommery and Lanson. Other points of relevance would have been some indication of their importance in the Champagne market (eg Champagne sales of approximately 60 million bottles per year. This is the kind of detail and commercial awareness that examiners give top marks for. Some candidates quoted key markets such as the US or the far east (31% of sales are to the US). Others discussed their huge influence in advertising and sponsorship or mentioned their involvement with the CIVC in research work on the use of alginate beads and other initiatives.

In terms of the other sections of this question, there was a tendency to write in general terms about Crémant de Bourgogne AC, ie by describing the traditional method of fermentation in bottle rather than focussing on issues specific to Crémant as a category of sparkling wine and those produced in Burgundy, ie grape varieties, yields, regions of production.

Inevitably there were those who confused the tank method with transfer or came up with a version that was a combination of the two. Nevertheless, this was on the whole the section that candidates were most comfortable with.

## Unit 6, Fortified Liqueur Wines

The examination for Unit 6 was run on three separate occasions in the academic year 2006/07, in November, March and June. The overall pass rate for the unit as a whole for all these dates combined was 70%.

The questions and individual pass rates for each of the three examination dates were as follows:

### November 2006

Question 1 - Lustau Don Nuno Dry Oloroso, Blandy's 1998 Harvest Coheita Malmsey Madeira, Ramos Pinto 10yr Tawny Port	
Answers: 183	Passes: 129 (70%)

Despite the high pass rate, there were a number of errors that prevented some candidates from achieving high marks in this question, or in some cases, a pass grade. Many did not follow the Systematic Approach, losing many marks by forgetting to consider tell-tale characteristics on the nose and structural components on the palate. Most candidates seemed more comfortable with the Tawny Port – perhaps they felt it to be the more “classic” profile of a fortified wine. Certainly a large number were confused by the high aldehyde character of the Oloroso, mistaking it for acidity. The sweetness and the acidity of the Madeira and the Port were both underestimated in many cases and a number of candidates hedged their bets in describing these wines as “developing”. They were all fully developed with high levels of oxidation.

Colour definition is a common problem. The Systematic Approach is designed to help in this respect and candidates should not need to go beyond the colours listed. Instead we had descriptions such as “*pale topaz*”, “*rusty peach*”, “*copper*” when amber was the correct term to use. Worse still was the candidate who came up with the following three descriptions:

Dry Oloroso – “*clear intense colour, brown core with beige/yellow rim*”.

Malmsey Madeira – “*clear intense colour, brown core with darker tinges*”.

Tawny Port – *clear, light intensity (for a red wine), tawny core with yellowing rim*”.

These were all very poor, imprecise descriptions.

Question 2 – In relation to fortified wine, write a short paragraph on each of the following:	
<p>a) Flor</p> <p>b) Greece</p> <p>c) LBV</p>	
Answers: 183	Passes: 71 (39%)

This was a very poor result, particularly bearing in mind that there were two very mainstream topics in this question in terms of “flor” and “LBV”. Detailed knowledge of Greek fortified wines was clearly a problem for a large number of candidates. The examiner also

commented that there was a tendency to generalise rather than answer the question specifically. For example, many candidates wrote about Sherry rather than flor, or Port rather than LBV.

Whilst the results of flor growth were usually mentioned, there was little indication of what it feeds on (glycerine, oxygen, polyphenols, some alcohol, fuse oils and volatile acidity) or the fact that it continues to ferment sugars in the must, and when all fermentable sugar is consumed it feeds on alcohol and oxygen. Many candidates spent far too much time discussing the various stages of the solera system rather than limiting this to its relationship with flor, ie the fact that flor needs to be refreshed periodically and that this is achieved through the mechanics of the solera system.

In terms of the paragraph on Greece, we were looking for information on the key fortified wines produced there - Mavrodaphne of Patras, Muscat of Samos and Muscat of Patras. Far too many candidates wrote in detail about Commandaria which of course comes from Cyprus not Greece.

### March 2007

<b>Question 1 - Harveys Bristol Cream, Hidalgo Napoleon PX, Gonzalez Byass Del Duque Amontillado VORS</b>	
<i>Answers: 217</i>	<i>Passes: 153 (71%)</i>

This very good pass rate generated an equal number of pass and merit candidates but very few distinction grades. This was a common pattern in the March examination.

Candidates sitting this paper were told that all three wines were from the same country. Despite this, a considerable number, who clearly had not read the question, placed the wines in three different countries. On the other hand, some of those who had read the question made the mistake of making their decision regarding country of origin on the basis of the first wine and then “pushed” the other two wines into the same country either rightly or wrongly. It cannot be stressed enough – it is vital to keep an open mind until all three wines have been assessed and only then, after re-reading the tasting notes should the candidate attempt to complete the concluding part of the question. Some candidates made the examination more difficult than it needed to be by identifying the samples as wines which are not on the Diploma syllabus such as Marsala or Setúbal.

Once again, the assessment of quality caused problems for a number of candidates with comments ranging from what the wine was, whether it was ready to drink, or how much it cost. None of these can be defined as an assessment of quality. Compare the following assessments for the Harvey's Bristol Cream Sherry. The first is poor and the second gained all three marks in this section of the paper:

Poor example – *“Good quality, aged in wood for about 3 years. High priced. Drinking very well now and should be served slightly chilled. Can be pared with chocolate.”*

Good example – *“A commercial style of Sherry of acceptable quality. The alcohol is a little too hot to be fully in balance with the fruit and sweetness. It has simple dried fruit and caramel character and lacks complexity.”*

<b>Question 2 – In relation to fortified wine, write a paragraph on each of the following:</b> <b>a) Sanlucar de Barrameda</b> <b>b) VDN</b> <b>c) Tinta Negra Mole</b>	
<i>Answers: 216</i>	<i>Passes: 153 (71%)</i>

Results for this question ranged from the excellent number of candidates achieving merit and distinction (34% and 20% respectively) to those who clearly had not done enough work like the candidate who was awarded a total of 4%.

As the results show, responses were generally good to very good. Pretty much every candidate knew that Sanlucar de Barrameda was a coastal town in Jerez de la Frontera. Some candidates suffered the dreaded “Sherry panic” and ended up writing everything they could think of about all styles of Sherry. Unfortunately marks were only available for information that was relevant to Manzanilla Sherry.

In respect of VDN, the relevant grape varieties were identified as Muscat based wines and Grenache based wines. In most instances the relevant ACs were also mentioned with brief descriptions of key wines. Good candidates started their paragraph by explaining what VDN means and how the wines are produced (eg Mutage).

Most candidates made the link between Tinta Negra Mole and the wines of Madeira and mentioned that this grape is used for the production of lower quality wines. Fewer were able to provide further detail specific to the grape and so concentrated on describing the Estufagem process which was not the focus of this question. The relevant information was as follows:

- Portuguese black vinifera grape variety grown on Madeira.
- Possibly a crossing of Pinot Noir and Grenache .
- Most widely grown Madeira grape.
- Versatile, high yielding, high sugar levels but not ‘noble’ quality.
- Used for lower quality wines.
- Planting altitude and vinification methods enable wines to mimic the “noble” styles.
- Skins may give a slight tint of colour to the wine, imitating age following the estufa process.
- Formerly used in varietally labelled wines, but this practice is no longer permitted.
- Wines now marketed as Medium, Rich etc.

## June 2007

<b>Question 1 - Muscat St Jean de Minervois 2005 Dme de Barroubio, Gonzalez Byass La Concha, Taylors Ruby Port</b>	
<i>Answers: 190</i>	<i>Passes: 162 (85%)</i>

A number of candidates simply did not read this question, which stated that all three wines were from three different countries. Nevertheless, this was an excellent result with more candidates (35%) gaining merit than any other grade. Despite this, the examiner did note some very basic errors in a few scripts such as not knowing when Port or VDN are fortified or thinking that Beaumes de Venise is in the Loire or Languedoc Roussillon. I mention this

because most people identified the Muscat St Jean de Minervois as Beaumes de Venise. This is not a problem – the key here is to identify it as a French VDN made from Muscat, but any benefit gained from logical lateral thinking in identifying it as Beaumes de Venise is lost if the candidate cannot then locate this region in the right part of France.

<b>Question 2 – In relation to fortified wine, write a paragraph on each of the following:</b>	
<b>a) VORS</b> <b>b) Estufagem</b> <b>c) Douro Valley districts</b>	
<i>Answers: 190</i>	<i>Passes: 112 (59%)</i>

VORS was the spanner in the works for many candidates here. There were very few good answers despite the recent publication this new category of Sherry has received. A number of candidates even covered two sections of the question only, preferring to avoid this altogether. This seldom results in a pass grade as each section carries equal weighting and this means a loss of 33% of the marks.

The best way to approach this was to explain:

- what it stands for - 'Vinum Optimum Rare Signatum' or 'Very Old Rare Sherry'
- what it is – a designation for top quality, old Sherry
- what it applies to - only Amontillado, Oloroso, Palo Cortado and Pedro Ximenez can be considered
- what it involves - each 'saca' (production lot) must be individually tested and certificated before bottling, it must have a minimum age of 30 years, proven by carbon dating of each 'saca', Bodegas apply to the Consejo Regulador for certification of a 'saca' which must be in a tank, the Consejo take samples for analysis and blind tasting and as a reference for future applications, then seals the tank, if approved, paper seals are issued and the wine may be bottled and sold
- what the style of the wine is.

Estufagem was generally answered with descriptions of the various methods - Cuba de Calor, Armazem de Calor and Canteiro. There were also some good responses on Douro Valley districts although some candidates padded their paragraph out with irrelevant detail on grape varieties rather than the regions themselves. The main points to cover were the names of the regions, comments on how climate and soil varies between them, what their significance is in terms of production and the styles of wine produced, and ideally to name some key producers in each.