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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 2007-08 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. Therefore, the candidate preparing for Unit 4, 5 or 6 may find comments relating to both tasting and theory in Unit 3 helpful.

On a final note, as always, I would like to convey my thanks 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 teams in the Diploma Approved Programme Providers, 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
December 2008

**DIPLOMA EXAMINATIONS 2007/08
STATISTICAL ANALYSIS**

Paper	2008		2007		2006		2005		2004	Paper	2003
Unit 1	(1)									NO DIRECT EQUIVALENT PAPER	
Unit 2	84%		81%		84%		79%		79%	Section I (A)	48%
										Section I (B)	43%
Unit 3 tasting 1 & 2	JUNE 69%	JAN 63%	JUNE 63%	JAN 55%	JUNE 49%	JAN 55%	JUNE 62%	JAN 48%	JUNE 59%	Section IIA Tasting	60%
										Section IIB Tasting	51%
Unit 3 theory	JUNE 63%	JAN 50%	JUNE 59%	JAN 42%	JUNE 54%	JAN 42%	JUNE 41%	JAN 24%	JUNE 27%	Section IIA Theory	50%
										Section IIB Theory	59%
Unit 4	60%		70%		61%		69%		76%	NO DIRECT EQUIVALENT PAPER	
Unit 5	63%		69%		61%		58%		70%	NO DIRECT EQUIVALENT PAPER	
Unit 6	61%		61%		67%		45%		65%	NO DIRECT EQUIVALENT PAPER	
NO DIRECT EQUIVALENT PAPER										Section III (A)	83%
NO DIRECT EQUIVALENT PAPER										Section III (B)	78%

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 2007/08 EXAMINATION CYCLE

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 style of assessment serves a different purpose to the closed book assessments of the other units. Here the aim is to assess the candidates' ability to carry out structured research on a given topic and present their findings in an academic format. The 2007/08 academic year saw the piloting of a revision to the assessment methodology of this unit, which retained the focus of assessing research, analysis and presentation skills but achieved this by means of a closed book case study and one slightly longer coursework assignment. One of the key drivers for this change was a recognition of the considerable workload candidates had to take on in order to research and write up four separate assignments for this unit. Despite the indisputable high calibre of some of the work being generated, there was clear evidence that this was often at the expense of the other units with some candidates clearly not devoting sufficient time to examination preparation.

The results of the pilot study were very good and fully validated the viability of the proposed changes. With effect from 1 August 2008, the revised assessment methodology for Unit 1 became compulsory for all new candidates. Those already part way through their studies were given the option of either remaining with the "old" format of four coursework assignments or transferring any credits held into the new format. Special arrangements will remain in place to allow these transitional candidates to complete all four coursework assignments under the old system by **31 July 2010** at which point they will have any passes held transferred to the new format on the following basis:

CANDIDATE HOLDS	EQUIVALENT TO	NEEDS TO COMPLETE
One coursework assignment (25% weighting)	No direct equivalent	Closed book case study (75% weighting)*
Two coursework assignments (50% weighting)	Open book coursework assignment (50% weighting)	Closed book case study (50% weighting)
Three coursework assignments (75% weighting)	No direct equivalent	Closed book case study (25% weighting)*

* The default weighting for the closed book case study examination is 50%, however in the case of transitional candidates this will be adjusted in accordance with the number of open book assignments for which a pass grade is already held.

Unit 2 - the Production of Wine

Results for the multiple choice examination format for Unit 2 are very consistent (see statistical analysis on page 3). The multiple choice format of this assessment 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. However, the high pass rate should not be taken as an indication that this is an easy paper.

Unit 3 – Wines of the World

Pass rates for Unit 3 continue to fluctuate between January and June. The lower pass rates in January are certainly the result of a larger percentage of candidates re-sitting having failed at a previous attempt. This inevitably has a detrimental effect on the pass rate as those achieving very low marks at the first attempt often fail again at the second attempt. Results for June however were extremely good, with the highest pass rate for the theory paper recorded since June 1998. There was also a marked improvement in the pass rate for Tasting Paper 1. This was very encouraging as this paper requires not only an ability to accurately describe wine, but also use the information within the tasting note to demonstrate that the candidate is able to process this information and argue their case. A number of outstanding candidates have been identified from both the January and June examinations and 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.

GUIDANCE ON EXAMINATION PREPARATION

The Candidate Assessment Guide provides plenty of valuable guidance on how to approach the various assessments of the WSET Diploma qualification. This report contains additional information, not only here but also under the sections on individual question types.

This report covers some general comments on the issues and problems that come up year after year and also gives guidance on pitching responses at the right level and an insight into examination grading criteria.

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, and for candidates intent on achieving high grades, the importance of study beyond the “required reading” cannot be underestimated. 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, as well as general exam technique. 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 and, with effect from 1 August 2008, the closed book case study. 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 2008/09 coursework assignments are on the WSET website under www.wsetglobal.com/qualifications/diploma. Candidates should click on the link for “coursework assignments” and take particular care to make sure they download the correct titles depending on whether or not they are categorised as “transitional” candidates. If in doubt, you should contact your Approved Programme Provider for further guidance. Titles for the 2009/10 academic year will be published at the end of May 2009.

Examination Technique

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 run such schemes for 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.

Levels of Assessment Skills

Having an idea of the kinds of skills that are being assessed will help candidates to direct their study effectively and write an answer that demonstrates they have these skills. Consider the following types of assessment, and how each successive one requires a deeper level of expertise:

- Factual Recall - (how things are)
- Explanation - (how things could be and why)
- Analysis - (how things might become and how they ought to be)

Factual Recall

Factual recall tests basic knowledge. This usually takes the form of an answer to a ‘what’, ‘where’ or ‘who’ question. This knowledge can be simply recalled, if known. This is the simplest form of assessment and success can be achieved “learning by rote”.

Sample question	What style of wine is Châteauneuf-du-Pape?
Answer	Full-bodied red wine with relatively soft tannins, lowish acidity and high alcohol.

Factual Recall + Application

Factual recall can be combined with application to assess to a greater depth. This is commonly achieved by putting the question into a relevant context, eg:

Sample question	A customer asks you to recommend a soft, full-bodied red wine. What would you recommend?
Answer	Châteauneuf-du-Pape. (<i>This is obviously only one of several legitimate answers.</i>)

No matter how many facts the candidate has memorised, these do not constitute an **understanding** of a subject area. If the facts have been learnt by rote, the candidate

either knows the answer or not. Using insight to work out what would be a correct answer, when the answer is not known, only comes at the next level: explanation.

The lower level WSET qualifications (Foundation, Intermediate and Advanced Certificate) mostly limit themselves to testing factual recall, assessed via multiple-choice format questions.

In the Diploma, the multiple choice Unit 2 examination, and the questions that require the candidate to write a paragraph about given topics which appear in units 3, 4, 5 and 6 are also mainly testing factual recall and recall + application. Factual recall will get candidates a reasonably long way in the WSET Diploma, but is not sufficient to guarantee success in Unit 1, and is unlikely to be adequate for the Unit 3 theory paper either.

Explanation

Explanation goes beyond 'what', 'where', and 'who', and asks 'why'. This type of question tests not just memorised knowledge of the subject, but understanding as well. This is because in order to explain something, the candidate needs to know not just '*what is the case*' but '*what would be the case if things were different*'. This kind of 'counterfactual' understanding is achieved by spotting patterns in the basic facts, and deducing explanatory mechanisms behind them. Alternatively, a tutor could explain the mechanisms. However, if the candidate then finds that they have to memorise this information, it is a clear sign that they have not really understood it, and will not be able to apply the mechanism themselves in other scenarios, such as in the examination itself.

The human brain naturally tries to find patterns in data – though some people are able to do this more easily than others. These patterns mean that a lot of information can be deduced from a few simple principals. The skill of explanation is a higher order skill than recall, but the amount of data that needs to be memorised is less.

Sample question	Why is Châteauneuf-du-Pape a full-bodied, high-alcohol red wine with relatively soft tannins?
Alternatively	Account for the style of Châteauneuf-du-Pape, or explain the style of Châteauneuf-du-Pape.
Answer	The Grenache grape naturally gives wines that are high in alcohol, and full-bodied, but with soft tannins. The hot ripening conditions due to the location in sunny Southern France, aided by low-trained bunches benefitting from heat reflected from the ground also helps achieve fully ripe tannins and speeds sugar accumulation in the grapes.

A much more detailed explanation is also possible of course, and would be expected in the examination itself.

The basic facts (hot climate, Grenache-dominated blend) could be memorised and recalled, but what makes this a question about *understanding* rather than *factual recall* is the implication that if these causal factors were altered, then the style of Châteauneuf would change. For example, if the climate were cooler, then alcohol levels would be lower, and the tannins less ripe, or if more Carignan (or Cabernet) were used in the blend, then the wine would have firmer tannins, lower alcohol and less body.

Explanation + Application

Just like factual recall, explanation can also be applied to a particular situation to assess explanation combined with application. This is where the counterfactual implications of the causal process are explicitly put to work. For example, if X were not the case, then B, rather than A would be the outcome.

Sample question	You are a producer of Châteauneuf-du-Pape and one of your important clients has requested a wine with lower alcohol. How can you meet this demand?
Answer	This would take the form of a list of things you could do to achieve this style, such as altering the blend to include less Grenache; sourcing grapes from cooler sites; increasing yields; using the vine canopy to shade the ripening fruit; retraining the vines to raise the fruiting zone; using open fermenters and low-conversion yeast strains, etc, etc.....

The WSET Diploma assessment, particularly the essay-format questions in Unit 3, aims to test *understanding* of the subject, rather than an ability to *recall facts*, but there is another level above this which should be considered during preparation for Unit 1. This is *analysis*.

Analysis

Analysis requires you to draw conclusions from the facts and the causal mechanisms behind the facts. This might involve issues such as:

- identifying and extrapolating trends to make predictions.
- identifying which of a set of explanations is the most likely, or which of a set of causes is the most important.
- identifying what the consequences of something are.

Sample question	Average alcohol levels in Châteauneuf-du-Pape have been rising over the last ten years. What are the main reasons for this and to what extent is the trend likely to continue?
Answer	An important point here is that in this context the inclusion of the word 'main' (as in 'main reasons') is not making life easy by limiting responses to <i>some</i> rather than <i>all</i> of the possible reasons. It is challenging the candidate to identify which, of all the possible reasons, are the most important ones. Once these have been identified, the candidate would have to argue to what extent they are likely to continue to have an effect.

Analysis + application

In the same way that recall of knowledge and explanatory skills can be “applied”, so can analysis. This usually takes the form of making recommendations.

Sample question	What, if anything, should producers in Châteauneuf-du-Pape do in order to slow or reverse the trend towards increasing alcohol levels?
Answer	Note the subtle difference between 'what can they do' (a list of possible responses, as set out under 'explanation + application' above) and 'what should they do'. In order to establish what producers should do, it is necessary to consider the possibilities, and argue which of these are going to be the most prudent or effective and this forms the basis of the response to the question.

Summary

As candidates progress from Foundation and Intermediate Certificate to Advanced Certificate, they move from learning 'what wines are like' to understanding 'why they are like that'. An understanding of the six factors taught at Advanced Certificate level will form an excellent foundation for Units 3, 4, 5 and 6, but Unit 1 offers the chance to go beyond 'what the world is like' and 'why it is like that' to examine 'what the world could be like', 'what it should be like' and 'what we should do about it'. These are far more interesting and challenging questions than mere factual recall. They should inspire candidates to explore the possibilities as they ponder them and hopefully find some convincing solutions.

Examination Grading Criteria

Grade bandings for the Diploma examination are largely determined by the content of the submission judged against the “marking key” or “marks schedule” for each question. For example, the candidate covering 75% or more of the content defined in the marking key has a good chance of achieving a distinction grade. However, there are also other elements that come into play beyond pure factual content. The grade bandings are summarised below:

Fail Unclassified **<44%**

Seriously inadequate answer, through lack of information, or errors, demonstrating in general a very weak understanding of the subject. Insufficient evidence of understanding to award a pass, through brevity, lack of detail or inaccuracies.

Fail **45 to 55%**

Borderline candidate, who whilst close to a pass does not give the examiner enough to award a Pass grade. Insufficient evidence of understanding to award a pass, through brevity, lack of detail or inaccuracies.

Pass **55% to 64%**

The candidate demonstrates an adequate understanding of the topic, covering sufficient of the main points to be “more right than wrong.” A basic answer, with limited use of examples and depth of information, which may contain some errors.

Pass with Merit **65% to 74%**

There should be evidence of clear understanding here, with a greater factual coverage, and better depth and accuracy of information and examples. Very sound, but without the extra edge for a pass with distinction.

Pass with Distinction **>75%**

The candidate should demonstrate a thorough and accurate understanding of the subject in depth, and show some flair, creativity or originality in analysis, argument or choice of examples.

COMMENTS ON INDIVIDUAL QUESTIONS

Unit I, The Global Business of Wines and other Beverages

Before commenting on each specific assignment title, first 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 such as 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 errors 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. This is where the "reference notes" or footnotes come into play. 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.

Coursework Assignments

Assignment Title 1

<i>The co-operative movement in wine production.</i>	
Required content and suggested approach The co-operative movement in wine has been around for close on a century. It is responsible for a significant proportion of wine produced globally and for many styles of wine. Co-operatives have evolved to encompass many aspects of production and marketing and have a unique management system. Despite their importance, co-operatives have suffered in the past from a poor image in the eyes of the trade and the consumer. The candidate should determine through their research whether this is justified for not.	
<i>Answers: 258</i>	<i>Passes: 227 (88%)</i>

The pass rates for open book assessments tend to be high as one would expect, and the median mark in this assessment sat within the merit gradeband. However, the examiner did comment that a number of assignments were poorly structured, failing to follow the approach as set out in the Assignment Brief. This is a common complaint and means the examiner has to search within the body of the assignment to try and extract information that may be relevant for each of the required sections of the brief. This inevitably requires them to make assumptions on behalf of the candidate in terms of interpreting what they have written, and this is never a satisfactory situation.

For this assignment, candidates were required to outline the circumstances that led to the creation of co-operatives, citing examples from at least two different continents. They then needed to describe the key roles of wine co-operatives and evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the co-operative movement. This evaluation was often the weakest section of this assignment, with candidates either writing too little or failing to understand what was required in an answer. This could have been done by means of a SWOT analysis and should have resulted in observations such as

Strengths

- size (power)
- quality and consistency of wines is now very good in some instances
- now well established with strong membership
- some co-operatives are very profitable and successful
- advantages to be gained from blending wines (the sum is often better than the component parts)
- pooling of costs and resources
- access to a number of financial advantages such as EU subsidies

Weaknesses

- perception – wines still regarded as low quality in the eyes of many customers
- lack of “individuality” in wines
- limited potential for “terroir” wines
- lack of brand recognition in many instances (except perhaps for large co-operatives such as La Chablisienne or Badisher Winzer-genossenschaft)
- management can be bureaucratic
- limited control over quality of fruit in poorly run co-operatives

These are just some of the examples candidates raised in this section.

Finally, candidates were asked to select a co-operative winery of their choice and explain the membership and management structure, giving a profile of the operation, to include the scale of production and types of wine, key markets and the perceived reputation of the co-operative. This needed to include an evaluation of the success of this particular organisation. In effect, this was a case study of a wine co-operative in operation. This was the part of the question that was generally addressed well in the majority of cases, although candidates often appeared to rely rather too heavily on websites and publicity materials issued by the co-operatives themselves rather than conducting their own primary research.

As in all assignments, candidates were also expected to summarise their thoughts in the conclusion, by considering whether the negative image of wine co-operatives in general is justified or not. They were also required to offer an opinion on the long term future for wine co-operatives. This required original thought on the part of the candidate – something many struggle to do well, with the result that conclusions are often the weakest sections in assignments with far too many simply summarising what has gone before rather than bringing any new debate to the table. The most interesting submissions came from candidates who put some thought into this, perhaps by questioning whether co-operatives could adapt to future markets or even debating whether or not they actually needed to.

Assignment Title 2

<i>Supply and demand in the Champagne region.</i>	
Required content and suggested approach The apparently never-ending rise in demand for Champagne has led to severe problems for the region. The current delimited area is fully planted and production is nearing capacity. To overcome this, a number of solutions are being discussed, but all are contentious and difficult to implement without severe repercussions for the industry, the trade and the consumer. The candidate should research and consider these solutions before drawing their own conclusions on how to resolve this dilemma.	
<i>Answers: 466</i>	<i>Passes: 431 (92%)</i>

The high pass rate for this assignment does not tell the whole story, since there were very few exceptional scripts amongst those who passed. This was invariably down to low marks achieved in section d) which required the candidate to demonstrate that they had undertaken their own research to determine some of the differing opinions held within the Champagne Industry but also to take into account the views of the wine trade in their local market. There are strongly divergent views across the industry both for and against the different options that candidates were required to discuss in this assignment. These ranged from those who believe enlargement of the region is necessary (such as Claude Tattinger), to those who feel the best option is to re-position themselves within the market. This meant candidates needed to consult and represent views from a variety of sources throughout the industry such as growers, negociants, the INAO and CIVC, importers and distributors, journalists, retailers and consumers. There were very few indeed who showed much evidence of having done this. Too many seemed to think that a general view (usually extrapolated from previous sections of their assignment) was sufficient. Much better marks were given to those who showed that they had really pursued this side, often by corresponding with, or interviewing winemakers or retailers.

The examiner marking this assignment raised concerns over the large number of candidates relying almost entirely on articles and internet sources in their bibliography, with very little evidence of other research. In fact, a worrying number of candidates quoted from "Wikipedia", - something that really should be avoided because of the method used to compile the information. This begs the question, "do candidates realise that this source relies on anyone posting information and that it may very well be inaccurate."

There were also a large number of assignments that have clearly used the same articles and internet sites for their research. The examiner recognised the same phrases cropping up again and again. Sometimes even whole paragraphs were given word for word from articles. Candidates who acknowledge the source for this and identify it as being a quote rather than their own work, are following the right path.

Those who do not are guilty of plagiarism, whether knowingly or not. The correct approach is of course to read the source and then paraphrase the information in your own words.

A large number of candidates showed considerable naivety regarding the aspect of yields and size of the harvest – clearly not understanding the Champenois' point of view on this. This showed failure to do serious research. Surprisingly few mentioned that the, then current, economic crisis over the American sub-prime mortgage business just might have a huge impact on whatever the final decisions in Champagne are. Those who did mention it, tended to be amongst the higher rated papers. Many papers showed a lack of understanding of the true situation regarding land ownership – *Contrôle des Structures* – and the tax implications for growers who are holding stocks back. This meant they took the easy way out, saying they should be forced to sell stock to alleviate the position. This was over-simplistic.

Having said all this, there were a small number of very good assignments from candidates who clearly did their own research and were prepared to draw their own conclusions. The examiner was particularly interested by the small number who actually queried the content of the assignment, and felt that the apparent imminent shortage was manipulated to ensure that more Champagne could be made in case of future problems. Most candidates taking this approach blamed the major groups for this.

The following script was one of the few which achieved higher marks. It is well written, clear and concise. It is also an excellent example of the correct approach to referencing of sources and correct use of footnotes. For this reason, we have reproduced it in its entirety, including the bibliography as this is an excellent example of what all candidates should be submitting.

Supply And Demand In The Champagne Region

Introduction

Crise de prosperité

In 2007, Champagne shipments reached an all-time high of 338.71 million bottles. The total value of shipments grew by 9.1% over 2006, itself a record-breaking year. Following seven consecutive years of growth, exports hit a record 150.9m bottles, a 7.3% increase over 2006.

Twenty countries imported in excess of a million bottles in 2007¹, up from fourteen in 2006, with Russia, where sales soared 41%, recording the most spectacular growth. Exports to China leapt 30% to 656 000 bottles, and Japan, now the world's sixth-largest market with 9.1m bottles sold, grew by a very respectable 14.1%.² Champagne never had it so good.

"A crisis of prosperity," Yves Bénard, then president of the Union des Maisons de Champagne (UMC), declared in 2006: sales were rising too fast; the houses were unable to procure sufficient quantities of grapes to keep up their replacement stock; and grape prices and prices of *vins clairs* were rising inexorably. Every year has seen the retail price of Champagne increase in response; increases as high as 10% have been forecast for 2008.³ Is it not but a matter of time before consumer resistance will cause the bottom to fall out of the market—particularly if a global economic downturn starts clouding the golden Eastern horizon?

Addressing the problem: 2008 update

Done and dusted?

In a bid to address the crisis of supply, the CIVC, the umbrella body representing the growers and the *Maisons de Champagne*, successfully lobbied the Institut National de l'Appellation d'Origine (INAO) to consider the expansion of the vineyard area, and to allow yields to be increased—initially to allow reserves to be built up to around 218m bottles.⁴

Both these solutions—as well as allowing the price of Champagne to float up to dampen demand—have been debated for years. Now, officially sanctioned yields that would cause raised eyebrows in a humble *vin de table* are a reality⁵; 40 villages have been nominated for inclusion in an extended AOC⁶—and consumers are still snapping up the product, price increases despite. Is that it then, for Champagne? Done and dusted?

Increasing yields and extending the AOC will not remake a system that many perceive to be fundamentally flawed.⁷ Floating prices into a completely free market certainly will, but with tremendous upheaval.

This document reviews the CIVC's solutions and the impact of allowing prices to rise, before highlighting the more fundamental structural issues at the heart of the imbalance between supply and demand in Champagne.

¹ CIVC bulletin, 1^{er} trimestre 2008, "Les expéditions de vins de Champagne en 2007", p42-45.

² The Australian, "Champagne exports pop all-time record", 28 February 2008.

³ Decanter, "Champagne prices to rise by as much as 10% next year", 5 December 2007.

⁴ Harpers, "INAO permits yield increase in Champagne", 7 December 2006.

⁵ Tom Stevenson, Wine Report 2008: Champagne, p29.

⁶ just-drinks, "INAO approves Champagne region revision", 14 March 2008.

⁷ "[Some of the] leading heads of the houses ... do indeed feel that, in the absence of a *deus ex machina* in the form of fixed grape prices or land reform, a crisis is nigh." Harpers, Champagne supplement, March 2005, p3.

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The merits of the measures

Raising yields

Winning at the yield game

Of all the measures proposed and adopted, increasing the permitted yield should be the least contentious: it really just boils down to not throwing away what's already there.⁸

In 2004, when the maximum AOC yield was 13000kg/ha, press-house records show that yields averaged 23000kg/ha.⁹ The AOC grapes ripened among the discarded 43% of the harvest, sharing the resources of the vine. Growers may have practised rigorous selection, but the quality of the harvest was determined by the overall yield. It is disingenuous to argue that the excess yield did not matter because it was not used.

The *Champenois* had little choice but to raise the permitted yield: the sheer growth in sales experienced over the period 2004-2007 demanded that additional grapes be released onto the market to replenish négociants' stocks and to bolster the region's reserve. Raising yields will reduce pressure in the short to medium term, through creating a buffer that will allow the region to continue growing its sales.

The increased availability of grapes may also reduce speculation in the overheated grape, *vins clairs*, and *sur latte* markets, and might reduce the incidence of some of the decidedly dodgy practices that grew up around the manipulation of numbers to adhere to DPLC requirements.¹⁰

Washout

The most significant disadvantage of raising the permitted yield is that it can only bring relief in the short to medium term, unless the *Champenois* can muster the courage to go the whole hog and use all the grapes they grow on their land.¹¹

Erstwhile opponents of this measure also argued (incorrectly) that quality may suffer, or feared that the perceived quality of the product and the reputation of the region might be tarnished.

The most cogent argument against relying on consistently high yields of healthy grapes comes from Tom Stevenson, who points out that history has demonstrated—and climate change may guarantee (my aside)—that it is more likely than not that it will rain during the harvest, turning a bumper harvest like 2007 into the disaster of 2001.¹²

Expanding the appellation

Too little, too late?

"Expanding" the Champagne appellation is a long-term endeavour: the first wines from newly planted areas are unlikely to hit the shelves before 2021.¹³ It is also by no means a final solution to Champagne's woes.

⁸ "In the long term, Champagne must reduce yields, not increase them, but in the here and now, using what is grown (rather than just a fraction of it) is the only policy that makes sense."
Tom Stevenson, Wine Report 2008: Champagne, p30.

⁹ Harpers, Champagne supplement, March 2005, p4.

¹⁰ Abolished when yields were raised to 15500kg/ha, the DPLC (*Dépassement du Plafond Limite de Classement*) is the portion of the harvest above the AOC limit that is not allowed to be sold. All kinds of creative practices sprang up to enable growers to sell at least part of this portion of their harvest. For details see: Harpers, "Playing the yield", 25 May 2005.

¹¹ Quite how INAO might be convinced to permit this practice in the face of Champagne's already notoriously high *official* yields is not clear, but grow the grapes they do in Champagne.

¹² Harpers, Champagne supplement, March 2006, p46.

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Estimates of the area that will be added to the AOC range between 1200 and 5000 hectares¹⁴, with just-drinks plumbing for 1500ha.¹⁵

Farmed to the maximum yield of 15500kg/ha, 1500ha will increase production by a scant 19.8m bottles. 5000ha, planted at the earliest opportunity, will deliver 65.9m bottles—in 13 years' time.

In contrast, permitting yields up to 15500kg/ha to be used brings 72.3m bottles of reserve wines into the fold overnight. Had Champagne used half the grapes harvested above 13000kg/ha that it threw away in 2004, stocks would have increased by 145m bottles.

Impact of increased acreage and yield

Hectares	kg/ha	hl/ha	Bottles	Increase
34,000	13,000	82.9	375,658,678	
34,000	15,500	98.8	447,893,333	72,234,656
34,000	23,000	146.6	664,626,891	288,968,213
35,500	15,500	98.8	467,653,333	19,760,000
39,000	15,500	98.8	513,760,000	65,866,667

Opposing the expansion, critics such as Carol Duval-Leroy have claimed that Champagne risks losing its biggest selling point, the uniqueness of its *terroir*, as "the best sites are already being used."¹⁶ This is incorrect. Many areas of high potential were not included in the 1927 classification.¹⁷ Consolidation, rather than expansion is proposed: filling in existing gaps between or adjacent to existing villages.

The quality of Champagne will not suffer due to the expansion of the AOC—it could quite well improve.¹⁸ Rather, it is the lawyers' battles, as everyone scrambles for a slice of the pie, which might tarnish its image.

Let prices be?

Up, up and away

Allowing prices to rise to where the market establishes a natural equilibrium is not really an option for the *Champenois*. It would be very difficult to engineer a soft landing.

The price of Champagne is a function of grape prices as much as of the Houses' desire to make a profit. And whereas the Houses are not likely to shoot themselves in the foot by willingly pricing their product out of the

¹³ "An enquiry process will follow INAO's announcement, allowing for any objections or recommendations to be reviewed [...] planting is not expected to take place until 2015".
Decanter, "New Champagne Areas Defined", 14 March 2008.

¹⁴ Tom Stevenson, "Champagne's €6 billion expansion", as published in Tom Cannavan's wine-pages, at: <http://www.wine-pages.com/guests/tom/Champagne-expansion.htm>, November 2007.

¹⁵ just-drinks, "Champagne faces down critics and plans for growth", 20 March 2008.

¹⁶ Harpers, Champagne supplement, April 2007, p7.

¹⁷ Tom Stevenson, "Champagne's €6 billion expansion", November 2007.

¹⁸ Wine Business International, "Two communes excluded from Champagne's expansion", 22 February 2008

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market, they have very little control over the price they pay for the grapes or *vins clairs* that make up their wines.

Since 2004, grape prices have been rising steadily, as has the price of Champagne in response.¹⁹ Few in the region would willingly see prices rise to the point where the market again collapses—as it did in 1982 and 1992, when high grape prices forced the price of Champagne up beyond what the consumer would bear²⁰—yet this appears to be precisely where the region is heading, lacking a means of stabilising grape prices.²¹

Should Champagne stumble on into its next crisis, it would not take much of a decline in demand to leave the region with a huge surplus: for every unsold bottle three bottles in stock become redundant.²² The growers in particular, who have been overstocking on wines to the detriment of the Houses, will suffer as their investment loses value and grape prices drop.

In the event of the market again imploding, industry sources forecast a radical shake-up and consolidation of the market in favour of the larger houses and the growers with the means to survive the crisis.²³

Perspectives in the trade: Ireland

The previous section summarised the opinions held within the trade with respect to the measures proposed and implemented by the CIVC. This section examines the views of the industry in the Irish market.

“So long as quality is not compromised”

The proposed expansion of the appellation provoked most comment. David Whelehan, wine buyer and marketing director for the O'Briens chain of off-licences, confides that his initial reaction was to seek reassurance from INAO that quality would not be compromised. Lorna Rouse, brand manager for importer Febvre, expressed concern that Champagne might lose some of its exclusivity in the eyes of consumers, as the majority would not be aware of the rigour of the approach adopted by the CIVC and INAO. She felt that, even in the trade, some would see the proposed expansion a very opportunistic move.

Both executives felt that Champagne could tolerate high yields, and that consumers would be largely unconcerned with yields. “So long as Champagne does not go acidic and green—as it has in the past.”

David believes that price increases will pose the greatest threat to brand loyalty, €50 being the price point at which consumers will start defecting the brand²⁴—some of them for upstart Prosecco, which has managed to cultivate an air of sophistication around itself.

¹⁹ In the Irish market, Champagne cost 7.5% more in 2007 than it did in 2005 (see appendix), and price increases of a similar order of magnitude are expected in 2008.

²⁰ “In 1982, 1992 and 2001, the industry faced a [...] strong decline in price and in demand for bottles made with grapes harvested three years earlier and purchased, by historic standards, at a high price.”: Declerck, F. (2004), p6.

²¹ “Without a fixed price for grapes, Champagne will inevitably move towards a serious crisis”: Jean-Claude Rouzaud, Chairman of the Board, Champagne Louis Roederer, interviewed in Harpers' 2005 Champagne supplement, March 2005, p28.

²² Given ageing requirements, the preferred ratio of stock to sales is 3.2 - 3.5:1 in Champagne.

²³ Claude Taitinger, interviewed in Harpers' Champagne supplement, March 2005, p26.

²⁴ The average price of a bottle of branded, non-vintage, major label Champagne was €43.74 in 2007. International Wines and Spirits Record, 2007, p34-35.

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In conclusion

It is hard to disagree with Tom Stevenson, Jean-Claude Rouzaud, and others who believe that all the tinkering in the world—with yields, appellation borders and déblocage of reserve stocks—will not resolve Champagne's crisis of supply.

At its root, Champagne's perennial crisis of supply and demand is due to the distortions built into the Champagne trade as a consequence of deliberate anti-competitive practices, resolutely maintained by growers and Houses alike.²⁵ The Houses own (the lion's share of) the brand and the profitable export market; the growers control supply. Growers are free to sell Champagne, but the *négociants* are not free to buy the land they need to secure their supply of grapes.²⁶ The interests of the two parties are forever out of step—as is evident most starkly when the markets contract.

How then, might this structural dilemma be resolved?

Taking the bull by the horns

On the one hand, there are those who would tinker further to ameliorate the symptoms (and tinkering does have its place—though one will never fiddle the region into health); on the other there are those who espouse fundamental change.

Initiatives to tackle the root causes of Champagne's woes include:

- Using all the (healthy, ripe) grapes harvested (Stevenson);
- Fully liberalising the market by mandating the implementation of EU free market policies through the courts, to break the monopoly of the growers on land ownership (Stevenson); and
- Successfully challenging the EU's stance on price control (Rouzaud and the trade press).²⁷

Other initiatives, to provide symptomatic relief, are to:

- Cease damaging practices such as selling low to gain market share;
- Ensure that every bottle is well sold; eliminating the 60-90m bottles that don't do justice to the category: Cuménal (Moët & Chandon), Bonneford (Veuve Cliquot) and Billecart's top priority²⁸; and
- Attack the tax problem (withholding of stock) and speculation: ban all *sur latte* sales for at least a five year period: Bénard's pet initiative.²⁹

Worth-while causes:

- Use the data from the Zonage project to improve quality whilst expanding the appellation: overhaul the *échelle des crus*, to classify the land on a parcel by parcel basis; and
- In the longer term, reduce yields to improve quality (both Stevenson's).

²⁵ Tom Stevenson, "An Unequal Divide", from Harpers' 2005 Champagne Supplement, p11.

²⁶ The houses are allowed to add to their holdings only under very restrictive conditions. The CIVC may intervene to cancel prospective sales of land—or even to swop the beneficiary of the sale—at any time during the process.

²⁷ "There is also the EU, which still refuses to accept that a fixed grape price would be very much in the interests of consumers as well as producers." Harpers editorial, Champagne supplement, March 2005, p3.

²⁸ Harpers, Champagne supplement, March 2006, p22 (Cuménal); Harpers, Champagne supplement, May 2005, p16 (Bonneford); and Harpers, Champagne supplement, April 2007, p7 (Billecart).

²⁹ Harpers, Champagne supplement, April 2007, p15.

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Assignment Title 3

Trading up in wine consumption.	
Required content and suggested approach The majority of wine consumed globally is sold at low price points. There are many advantages in encouraging the consumer to trade up, both for the trade and the consumer themselves. However, most consumers are reluctant to spend more on a bottle of wine. The candidate should explore possible strategies for changing the purchasing pattern of the consumer through trading up and explain how this might best be achieved.	
<i>Answers: 220</i>	<i>Passes: 194 (88%)</i>

There were a lot of very unimaginative assignments here achieving basic pass grades. The examiner commented that often excessive numbers of charts or tables were lifted from internet sources and included as appendices, but were either badly referenced within the text, or not referred to at all. This was particularly pertinent in the introduction where candidates were expected to provide statistical evidence to provide an overview of wine sales by price point within their local market. They were then required to consider what factors determine low price points, and identify the benefits of trading up from the point of view of the consumer, the supplier and the producer as well as suggesting initiatives to achieve this aim.

Examples of key points in each of these sections were as follows:

Factors determining low price points

Answers here would have been market specific but may have included factors such as:

- Accessibility – wine is now more widely available to purchase and from a vast number of different countries
- Supply often outstrips demand
- Consolidation within the industry resulting in the creation of “super brands” with huge marketing budgets
- Cross border shopping
- Expansion of the multiple retailer makes wine part of the weekly shop
- Often used as a loss leader
- Discounting – BOGOFs
- Perception – cheap wine is viewed as a commodity product (FMCG), not the luxury product the trade wants it to be
- The “Liebfraumilch effect” on the market – once it has been sold cheaply, it is extremely unlikely the consumer will pay more if the price increases
- Consumer knowledge – the “fear factor” associated with making an expensive mistake prevents many from taking risks with higher priced wines

- Advertising and wine columns – these tend to focus on lower price point wines
- Internet and mail order - no need for expensive high street location may result in lower priced wines
- The effect of monopoly markets (where appropriate)

The benefits of trading up

These were largely common sense, for example:

Consumer Benefits:

- Better quality wine
- Better value for money proportionally, due to the duty element

Supplier Benefits:

- Increased value of sales and increased per bottle profits
- Possible increase in sales due to increased interest
- Possibly fewer complaints/returns due to better quality (however, this is contentious in view of the debate over cork vs screwcap)

Producer Benefits:

- Increased value of sales
- Less need to cut corners during production
- Enables them to build a reputation on the basis of “better quality”

These are just some of the benefits identified.

Initiatives to encourage trading up

This is where the candidate got to show some initiative and imagination. Large numbers listed initiatives such as in store tastings and the value of consumer and staff education. Many discussed the importance of image in the form of packaging, marketing, advertising and merchandising. There was a lot of discussion of the merits of clearer labelling and the benefits of giving customers value for money in terms of quality vs price ratio. Some candidates raised the issue of sensible discounting whilst also warning of the danger of “selling cheap”, which can have the reverse effect

In the section looking at the benefits of trading up, candidates were asked to list wines that are currently being consumed at the lower price points and suggest which higher priced wines would constitute a natural progression for the consumer. There was very little evidence of any thought going into this in the vast majority of assignments with far too many candidates simply listing five cheap wines, with five “slightly less cheap” alternatives with no explanation for the choice or logic behind the alternatives. The following is a classic example of this, including the original misspellings:

“Some possible examples of trading up are:

*Jacobs Creek Cabernet/shiraz £5.19 – Tour St Bonnet cru Borgeious - £6.99
Gallo chardonnay – Bourgogne Blanc or Macon from France*

*Pinot Grigio – Sauvignon Blanc from Marlborough or Loire
Vin de Pays Cabernet franc blend – St Nicolas de Bourgoeil
Valpolicella – Chianti Classico“.*

The choice of wines here is so simplistic that it barely serves any purpose at all. For example, “Pinot Grigio” could be anything from an inexpensive, neutral “Supermarket own label “ from the Veneto to a high quality, aromatic wine from, say, Trentino, whilst the proposed “upgrade” of Sauvignon Blanc from the Loire could also span a number of different quality levels. The same could be said of the last pairing – what evidence is there to suggest that a Chianti Classico is better than a Valpolicella? Both wines come in so many different styles and quality levels.

Compare this to the following candidate who gives “specific” examples and explains the thought process behind the “trade up”.

“Below are five examples of wines that are currently at lower price points, with recommendations for higher priced wines which constitute a natural progression:

Hock – a difficult example due to extremely low prices, high consumer loyalty and specific style of wine. However, Reh Kendermann’s Black Tower brand can be considered a success story as it has managed to up-sell many consumers by approximately £1.50 per bottle through distinctive packaging, higher quality (but similarly styled) wine and effective brand building.

Basic Italian IGT Pinot Grigio – from a producer’s point of view, based on rapidly expanding demand, costs are already increasing, but will resulting selling price increases be sustainable for what has always been promoted as a light, inexpensive “bistro” wine? Higher prices will need to be justified, and in this instance, a key point of difference will be provenance, i.e. customers may pay £7+ for Alto Adige Pinot Grigio but perhaps not for Veneto Pinot Grigio.

Mateus Rosé – this brand, considered unfashionable of late, has taken the decidedly “new world” step of introducing a varietal wine at a higher price point: Mateus Rosé Tempranillo. At this level, there appears to be consumer acceptance towards trading up from “generic” wines to varietal wines. A classic example would be Blossom Hill Red/White, with trading up option to Blossom Hill Cabernet/Chardonnay.

JP Chenet varietal wines – sharing some similarities with Mateus, this was a brand built on good value wines and distinct packaging. Perhaps because of its cross-channel shopping origins, this is a difficult wine from which to trade consumers up. The introduction of a higher tier/“Reserve” level: the “Terroir series” has now given consumers an opportunity to trade up.

Sherry – the opportunity for trading up here is through consumer education in a much misunderstood category. Initiatives from brands such as Tio Pepe and the Consejo Regulador of Jerez, such as the “Ten Star Tapas” campaign are aimed at directing consumers from cheap, sweet styles to more premium , dryer, more food-friendly Sherries.”

Assignment Title 4

<i>The crisis in the French wine industry.</i>	
<p>Required content and suggested approach</p> <p>For large parts of the French wine sector the last ten years have been miserable. Although the premium end of the market has flourished, this has not concealed the severe problems facing many wine producers and regions. The wine industry press has been filled with stories of distressed growers and companies. Attempts have been made to reform the wine sector, but these propositions seem to provoke as much anger and protest as does maintaining the status quo.</p>	
<i>Answers: 273</i>	<i>Passes: 217 (79%)</i>

Unit 1 gives us the opportunity to consider subjects that are particularly topical at the time, and this title certainly comes under this category.

Most students cited the AWRI data on the WSET website in their assignments. Those who did not, often missed the fact that France's exports have actually **increased** over the period of this crisis, in both volume and value. France's **share** of the world market is falling, but the statistics show that the market is still **growing** despite this, so citing declining market share is not sufficient to demonstrate a crisis. It was definitely a pitfall to focus on declining market share, especially as the main cause of the crisis is actually a declining **local** market rather than loss of share in any particular export market. The examiner commented that there was a tendency for candidates to take headlines at face value rather than looking beyond to the underlying true story. For example, it is true that from a statistical point of view France exported less in 2000 than in 1999, but this was because of the exceptionally high export of Champagne in 1999 (the millennium effect) not because of a crisis in 2000. Similarly, France exported less in 2004 than in 2003, but this was because the 2003 production was depleted by both frost and drought and this led to less wine being available for export in both 2004 and 2005. Similarly there were some who overemphasised the significance of high profile newsworthy events such as the 1976 Paris tasting – claiming this “destroyed the reputation of French wines”. Only the better candidates really seemed to understand the significance of changes in the local market, with many viewing volume decline as a problem, ignorant of the fact that in this case, it has usually been accompanied by value growth due to repositioning away from basic wine exports.

The following script achieved a high grade. It has excellent use of statistics to support the arguments made (not reproduced here), and good discussion of the causes of the crises and proposed reforms together with a strong conclusion. On a negative note, the candidate could have given more attention to the decline in the local market since this is the main cause of the crisis.

THE CRISIS IN THE FRENCH WINE INDUSTRY

France is the world's second largest producer of wine after Italy with a share of around 20% of global production (Vinexpo/IWSR 2005). The French wine industry employs 800,000 people and as France's fifth largest export wine is an integral part of its history, society, culture and economy.

Following World War II, demand exceeded supply and France produced and exported vast volumes of wine from high-yielding vines. However, a declining domestic market and the development of New World countries principally Chile, Argentina, Australia, South Africa and the USA has created intense competition on the markets and a global surplus of wine resulting in a crisis for the French wine industry where since 2005, the EU has been subsidising the distillation of surplus wine into pure alcohol.

The nature and magnitude of the crisis

The main export markets for French wine are the UK, the USA and Germany, representing around 50% of sales (Pike, 2007). In the UK market, New World wines had a 10% market share a decade ago, now they have a 50% share. Imports of New World wine into the EU have risen by 10 per cent each year since 1996, squeezing out low- to mid-range home-grown wines such as those found in Languedoc (Samuel, 2007). In the last decade, the volume of French exports has decreased to the extent that there is now a crisis.

The French wine industry is mainly made up of independent growers, with three quarters of producers exploiting less than 10 hectares (Pike, 2006). Recent consolidation within the global wine industry by multi-national drinks companies such as Diageo, Pernod-Ricard and Constellation is making it harder for independent growers to compete as they are unable to benefit from economies of scale and they do not have the distribution channels and marketing budgets. There are regions which are exempt from the "crisis" notably Champagne where demand is outstripping supply and fine wine producers such as classed Bordeaux and premium Burgundies. It is the mid and lower end of the market that is struggling and the question on France's lips is will these independent producers survive in the ever more competitive global market?

The production by independent growers is mainly AOC wines which are suffering most in the crisis. Vin de table and vin de pays wines are dominated by large producers and co-operatives who buy in grapes producing larger volumes of wine with fewer regulations, reduced costs and who can afford to invest in marketing.

Figure 1 below shows that while production has remained fairly constant since 1996 consumption has decreased along with exports although the value of those exports has increased due to the buoyant market for premium wines.

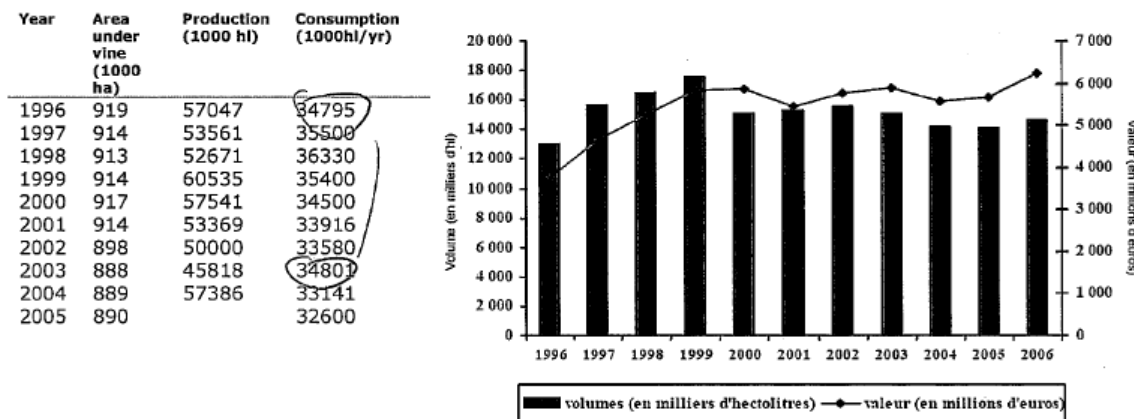


Figure 1 – Table of French production and consumption from 1999-2006 (figures from Harpers, 2007) with graph of exports of French wine 1996-2006 (from Onivins)

In terms of exports, (see Figure 2) the regions of Beaujolais and the Languedoc Roussillon are experiencing the worst problems in France. Beaujolais is suffering as it is not adapting to the economic realities of its market (just-drinks, May 2007).

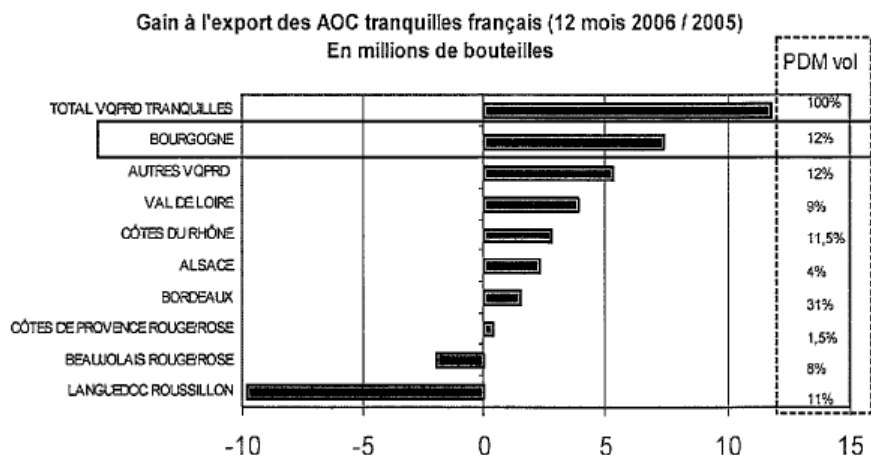


Figure 2 – Percentage change in exports of still wines by regions in the 12-month period 2005-2006 (millions of bottles).

Exports by volume been hit by increased competition, and this has led producers to reduce the price of their wines. Figure 3 below shows that for AOC wines in the South West and Aquitaine regions, Alsace, Languedoc Roussillon, Beaujolais and most significantly the Rhone, loss of revenue over the last three years has been dramatic.

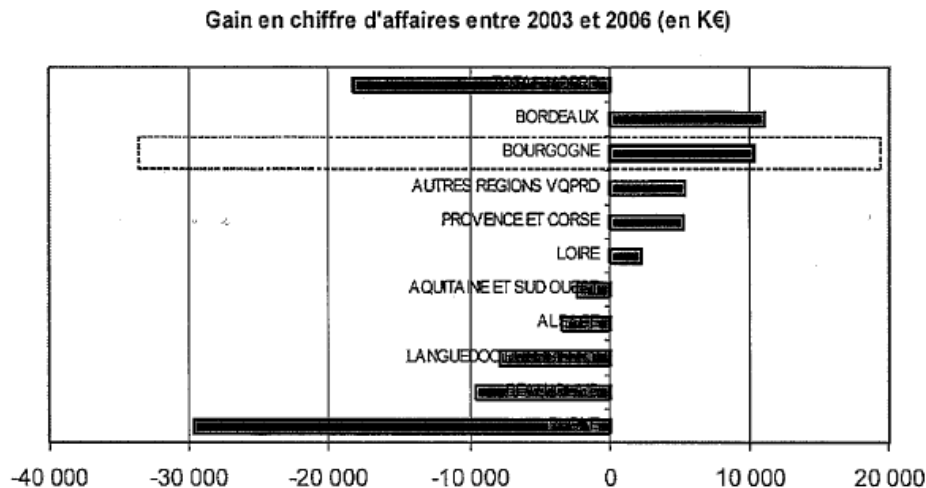


Figure 3 – Change in revenue between 2003 and 2006 by region (1000s of Euros)

Bordeaux is seeing unprecedented demand for its premium wines (shown as growth in Figures 2 and 3) but the mid and low priced wines have flooded the market due to increased plantings in the 1990s (just-drinks, 2007).

Causes

Regulation

Strict production laws on irrigation, chaptalization and use of oakling techniques for wines from vin de table all the way to AOC make it difficult for French wine producers to compete with their new world counterparts. Labelling law prohibits stating the grape variety on AOC wines and the vintage on vin de table wines which impacts on how the consumer views the product. The AOC system with its 462 AOCs and subsequent 2229 different products is complex and difficult to understand. Also, the AOC system, whilst preserving the diversity of French wines, does not guarantee quality. Regulating vitification and vinification does not ensure a quality end product and there are inferior AOC wines on the market which undermine the value of the better wines.

Loss of faith in AOC by the consumer

AOC wines represent 44% of production, a share that has doubled since the 1970s (Samuel, 2007). In a recent market survey in France, consumers criticised the AOC

system saying it had allowed too many substandard wines AOC status, undermining the entire classification (Mercer 2007).

In the New World, wine producers do not have an AOC equivalent to propel their brand forward so they have a strong incentive to maintain quality. They are also more likely to examine the market and produce a wine to fulfil a need and a price point.

Globalisation and Competition

Tastes of consumers from new markets are influencing the style of wine production. Consumers want easy drinking wines ready for consumption contrary to the evolution in bottle many French wines need.

Wines from New World wineries are labelled with grape varietals and memorable estate names such as "Oyster Bay" or "Frog's Leap" rather than a Chateau or domaine name in French which can be forgotten amongst the many other hundreds of similar names. ⁶⁰

When New World wines came onto the UK and US markets, they were fruity, easy-drinking wines at highly competitive prices and the average price per bottle for French and Australian wines is currently the same at £4.71.

Attitudes

France has a long history of wine making with many vineyards handed down through generations. Jamie Goode says "growers feel entitled to make a living out of the land irrespective of achievement, merit, or their ability to provide what the market wants". This is compounded by the fact that many winemakers sell their grapes to cooperatives where they may be paid for the amount of grapes thereby encouraging high yields. Inheritance laws which divide all property equally amongst children leads to increased fragmentation. This fragmentation results in higher production costs from labour and equipment.

Marketing

Independent growers are farmers who lack the business skills, marketing knowledge and money to advertise and market their wines. They cannot compete with huge brands such as E&J Gallo which have marketing budgets of \$2.5m. Even on a regional scale, this was twice the entire annual spend for Bordeaux (Business Week, 2007).

Charles Collard of Sopexa says "the main problem for France is that we have not been properly market-orientated – not only in terms of consumers, but also in terms of the trade."

Domestic consumption

The oil crisis of the 1970s saw a move from industrial to service-based employment, and with it a decrease in domestic consumption. In 1980, 50% of French accompanied their daily meal with wine, this figure dropped to 25% in 2000 (Pike, 2006). Nationwide anti-alcohol campaigns to reduce alcoholism rates and deaths through drink driving further stigmatised consumption of alcohol and today's youth are choosing beer or spirits over wine.

The reforms proposed to address the crisis

The EU has an annual budget of 1.3 billion euros (£880 million) to help the wine sector but currently spends around 500 million euros a year subsidising the distillation of wine for which there is no market. The EU agriculture commissioner, Marianne Fischer Boel estimates that if reforms are not made, excess wine production is forecast to reach 15 per cent of annual production by 2010.

The reforms proposed to by the European Commission are to increase the competitiveness of French producers, win back their position in the market, balance supply and demand and simplify legislation whilst preserving the traditions of wine regions and production and maintaining social structure within communities. They plan to do this through:

1. The **abolition of "market management measures"** such as crisis distillation. The reasoning behind abolishing these subsidies is based on the fact that if you fund surplus production then it will continue.
2. **Banning enrichment with sugar** which will oblige producers to make wine purely from grapes and unsubsidised must. This should reduce surplus production by forcing growers to use only the means they have available in their vineyards to produce wine.
3. A **grubbing up scheme** where growers who participate will be offered money to grub up their vines. The offer would decrease in value over a 5-year period to encourage people to start immediately but would be limited to 10% of the country's total area under vine. This idea has been praised by those who think that instead of subsidising growers to produce something no-one wants, they should be compensated for digging up their vineyards and doing something else instead.
4. Allowing vineyards to qualify for a **Single Farm Payment**, including those that are grubbed up, so that the land is maintained in proper agricultural condition. This should help promote the continued use of the land as a source of income.
5. **Ending planting restrictions.** The current system will end on 1 January 2014 to allow successful producers to expand their production thereby rewarding them with the potential to become more successful. This should create an ambitious and innovative winegrower generation.
6. **Updating the list of accepted oenological practices** to allow producers to compete with New World producers in the export markets. Bans on imports of

musts for vinification and on blending EU wines with imported wines will be maintained to ensure the concepts of terroir and provenance continue.

7. **Improving labelling laws.** Labelling will be simplified and more in line with consumer needs. French wines without geographical indications will be able to display variety and vintage on the label just as New World wines do. This will at least put French wines in an equal position on a shop shelf or wine list. The CEEV wine trade association has welcomed this reform saying "if we wish to remain world leader, we need a market-orientated approach allowing French wines to be more competitive both in the internal and external markets".
8. A **national financial envelope** in the form of a budget for vineyard restructuring/conversion, support for green harvests to reduce yields and financial support for growers in the case of natural disasters. This extra financial support would encourage people to improve their vineyards and reduce yields to produce better quality wines.
9. **Rural development measures** to give vocational training not only in production techniques but also marketing, and to provide support for producer organisations. Since marketing and advertising of wines is now crucial for their success, French wine growers need to learn to do this effectively.
10. A **budget for the responsible promotion of wines** (in moderate consumption) to support advertising campaigns which would remind and inform consumers of the French offering and promote French wines abroad.

Conclusion

The EU reforms look good on paper, but the reality of implementing them in such a fragmented industry is complicated. In an industry dominated by independent growers, the end of subsidies for surplus production seems logical but will not doubt lead to outcry in rural areas who rely on wine production as they know nothing else. Grubbing up schemes provide an alternative but do not guarantee long term income for those who carry it out and are consequently not so alluring. Updating labelling laws and oenological practices will certainly be embraced by dynamic producers but many are set in their ways and change will take a long time.

It seems that France does not just need legislative reforms and funding, a cultural change needs to be made. Winegrowers need to adopt new technologies and marketing strategies. Producers need to use the AOC system to their advantage as it guarantees the exclusivity of their product under the AOC brand name, for example, Chablis. However, the INAO need to ensure that only quality wines are given AOC status and generic bodies need to support small winegrowers, providing them with information on how to be cost effective and market their wines.

Over the next decade, the global market will become even more saturated, with the rise of new global players such as China, intensifying competition. Overproduction is a global phenomenon and if France wants to stay afloat the nation needs to change its attitude now.

Closed Book Case Study

Pilot Case Study March 2008

Supermarkets – friend or foe?

Candidate Case Study Brief:

The business profile of the UK's major supermarkets has changed enormously over the past 10 years. There is now no doubt that they are becoming increasingly powerful in terms of their position compared with other sectors of the wine and spirit trade. Approximately 70-75% of all wine consumed in the UK is currently sold through the off-trade, with around 73% of this sold by the supermarkets. This has led many to question how this position of dominance has come about.

The impact of this dominance is being felt in all sectors of the wine and spirit trade and by consumers themselves. Whilst some would argue that UK supermarkets have been instrumental in increasing wine sales in general, others would add that this has been at the expense of a potential threat to the wine and spirit industry as a whole, and is not necessarily always to the benefit of the consumer. The effects of this market dominance are felt through all stages of the supply chain, from production itself up to point of sale.

There are clearly advantages for the consumer in purchasing wine from the supermarkets with pricing a key driving force. However, the fierce discounting that is currently so prevalent has also been the subject of considerable controversy, with claims of "misleading" half price discounts in some supermarkets and allegations of "below cost" selling. The implications of such practices are widespread and are not limited to the consumer. To attribute the success of the supermarkets' dominance in wine and spirits sales solely on discounting is perhaps an oversimplification, as there are clearly other advantages for the consumer but also inevitable drawbacks that need to be considered.

The concept of supermarkets as "friend or foe" is clearly one that generates plenty of debate and many will be keen to see how this plays out in the next few years.

Answers: 88

Passes: 60 (68%)

Examination question (all three sections compulsory)

Give an account of the evolution of wine and spirit retailing in the UK supermarket sector over the past 10 years. How have supermarkets achieved their current dominant position? Statistical evidence should be used to provide an overview of UK off trade sales. (25% weighting)

What effects has this domination had on the drinks industry, from production to point of sale? (45% weighting)

Discuss the benefits and drawbacks of the current position for the consumer. In your view, can the supermarkets maintain their dominance or is there evidence of a shift in public opinion? (30% weighting)

A total of 88 candidates sat the Unit 1 closed book assessment in March 2008. Of these, 60 were successful, giving a pass rate of 68%. In comparison with other closed book theory papers, this is high and reflects the fact that candidates went into the examination having already carried out the research required to answer the question. They therefore simply had to collect their thoughts and structure their response to address the sub-sections of the question on the examination paper. This is very similar to what is required for the open book coursework assignments, but with the added constraint of working in a timed environment and without access to study materials.

Only a very small number of candidates performed so badly that they were graded fail unclassified, although the number of really exceptional scripts was also relatively low. However, more candidates achieved merit than any other grade. The results of the pilot study support the premise that this is a robust form of assessment and yet also examines candidates to the level we require. Providing candidates follow the guidance notes on the case study brief, success at a relatively high level is guaranteed.

Those who failed generally did not address the question as set or were simply too brief in their response.

The following scripts were submitted by candidates in the March 2008 examination. Scripts have been selected from three grade bands, fail (between 45% and 54%), pass (between 55% and 64%) and distinction (in excess of 75%). They have been selected to give prospective candidates an indication of the level required to succeed, or indeed, excel in this examination. They are reproduced as submitted, including errors and/or inaccuracies but with spelling errors corrected, and in line with examination regulations are presented anonymously.

Fail Grade Candidate

“The last decade has seen supermarkets in the UK rise to a position of enviable and to some observers, distressing, dominance. Through a combination of fierce and often below-cost discounting, tactical marketing and supplier manipulation, the multiple retailers now command over 70% of the UK off-trade wine and spirit sector, with Tesco, Sainsbury and Waitrose making the bulk of this figure.

By utilising buying power to coerce suppliers into ever-tighter margins in exchange for gondola-end displays and increased profile in marketing material, supermarkets have arguably harried supplier relations in an effort to boost footfall. This is the dichotomy of the multiples: on the one hand squeezing suppliers to produce wine in volume at a certain price point, in order to service consumer demand; yet at the same time, dictating that demand by introducing customers to new brands, new grape varieties and new countries.

Supermarkets have the potential to be an immense force for good. With the buying power they command, and the margins and resources at their disposal, they have a unique opportunity to expose consumers to the breadth and depth of the wine world. Whilst at the same time ensuring that all price points are serviced and all customer palates and budgets are catered for.

There is evidence that the market is changing. Consumers tire of a lack of quality, a dearth of options, and increasingly the trend is towards trading-up, both in terms of a desire to explore, and with regard to value for money. For too long customers have been content to quaff wine of indifferent quality, simply because it has been discounted to the hallowed £3.99 price point and available in bulk. With the threat of recession looming, and the anticipation of a swinging rise in alcohol duty in today's budget announcement, the average consumer is conscious that quality, whilst it may not come cheaply, increasingly represents a better use of their money than overpriced dross.

In part, this trend was anticipated in 2006 by Tesco when it announced it would be reducing and streamlining its finest range to two categories – sub £4.99 and plus £5.99, whilst also increasing their fine wine range to over 270 items. By offering clearly delineated price structures, Tesco provided a best of both worlds buying experience: magnums of Concha y Toro Merlot at £3.99 for indiscriminating customers at one extreme; 2000 Marques de Murieta at £14.99 at another.

Similarly, by ostensibly charging more for better wines, Waitrose has cleverly side-stepped the issue of discounting. By associating in the mind of its customers, quality with cost and offering selective price-reductions as opposed to perpetual buy-one-get-one-free offers, Waitrose has encouraged its customers to trade up and experiment.

Strange as it may seem, the domination of the supermarkets is not necessarily a bad thing. By providing customers with a range of quality at a range of price points, the multiples cater for the majority of the wine buying populace. Arguably, it is supermarket discounts and volume that has encouraged an increasing number to experiment with wine when they might not otherwise have done so. Furthermore, in

a recent survey (May 2007) of supermarket wine suppliers, Wine & Spirit magazine found that 80% felt that supermarkets had had a positive role in creating the range and quality of wines available in the UK, and it should also be borne in mind that the Competition Commission enquiry of 2000 found that, on average, supplier margins in the wine and spirit category were 17% compared to 4.5% in other categories.

In conclusion, supermarkets should not be regarded as the great threat they are in some quarters. They provide a service, and undertake that service well. As long as wine is available cheaply, there will be certain customers who buy it irrespective of quality. If, however, far-sighted retailers such as Waitrose and Tesco can undertake to raise consumer expectations, and provide products at a range of price points, then that can only be in the interests of the industry."

Examiner's comments:

There is no clear structure to this piece of work making it difficult to determine how and where the content relates to the three specific sections of the examination question. It is rather simplistic in style and lightweight, lacking in good examples, with little indication of where research has been conducted. This candidate did not make use of any of the statistical data provided on the examination paper other than a brief reference to the "£3.99 price point". It is short at only 663 words for the time available. In fact, this would even be considered on the short side for a Unit 3 theory question where the candidate has 30 minutes for each question. All in all, there is far too much missing for this to be awarded a pass grade.

Pass Grade Candidate

"Love them or hate them, supermarkets now dominate wine sales in the UK. The wine retail scene in the UK has altered drastically over the past decade and the biggest change has been the shift towards the multiple grocers. Most consumers are now choosing to buy their wine from supermarkets, with 60% of all wine in Britain being bought from this channel. Put another way, the "big four" retailers of Tesco, Asda, Sainsbury and Morrison have the lion's share of wine sales. TNS data shows that 33p of every £1 spent on wine goes to the country's biggest retailer – Tesco.

Over the past decade the increasing dominance of the supermarkets has resulted in a reduction in the number of routes to market. The traditional structure of producer / agent / wholesaler / retailer has evolved, with the multiple retailers going down a more direct route wherever possible in order to cut costs. As the multiple grocers have increased in importance, traditional outlets such as the multiple off-licence chains such as Thresher have seen decreasing sales. However, there is also an argument that the "halo" effect of supermarkets and the way they have created a mass market for wine has boosted specialist outlets such as Majestic Wine and independents.

Around 70-75% of all wine consumed in the UK is sold through the off-trade, with around 73% of this sold by the supermarkets. Looking at Nielsen data for the past

few years, it becomes apparent that this trend is increasing year on year. This has raised questions about how supermarkets have achieved this dominant position.

The multiple grocers have used their buying power and the fact that many suppliers are willing to discount in order to have a presence in the UK market, to consolidate their dominant position through very keen pricing. Most consumers will choose to buy wine where they feel they are getting the best deals and supermarkets have certainly been providing these. Also, through having a consolidated supplier base, supermarkets have been able to offer the lowest prices. Having a big marketing spend, being able to offer a wide range of wine products and investing in large out-of-town stores as well as smaller outlets in town and city centres to challenge convenience stores has also helped the supermarkets tighten their grip on the UK wine retail scene.

This dominance has had a dramatic impact on the drinks industry, from decisions made in the vineyard to on the shelf. Supermarkets have helped create a mass market for wine, helped to democratise it some might say. This in turn has helped mass-market, big volume brands grow. Big brands now have a natural home on the shelves of supermarkets, as they can provide the necessary volume and discounts required.

Another major impact has been on how many suppliers operate. Many now produce a wine with a specific market and price point in mind, as this is demanded by the keenly consumer-orientated supermarkets. Suppliers have been forced to become more aware of marketing, as this is a key tool used by the supermarkets. Rather than produce the best wine they can and then search for a market, they must produce a wine with a market already defined.

Another result of the dominance of supermarkets has been to create a wine retail scene that is defined mainly by promotions and discounts. For example, 80% of the world's biggest wine company's sales – Constellation – are sold at half price. The BOGOF (buy one get one free) mechanism is a common sight, and many of the big brands are on permanent discount. This culture is created by the supermarkets' dominance and their requirement that suppliers discount as a "crowd-pulling" mechanism.

A Grant Thornton survey shows 64% of food and drink suppliers to the supermarkets operate without a formal contract. While this means instability for producers, it also means flexibility in terms of what supermarkets have on their shelves. It could be argued, however, that this disproportionate power has been at the expense of the smaller winemakers who cannot afford to compete with the big brands on price.

Wine prices have barely risen above inflation over the past few years, if one looks at average prices in supermarkets. They are unwilling to go beyond the magic threshold of £3.99 (60% of New World wine in Britain is sold at this price point or less) in many cases and this has forced suppliers to consider how they may cut costs.

The drawbacks to consumers of this dominance include less choice in terms of outlets, as supermarkets push out many operators. There is little personalised service among the "wall of wine" in supermarkets, so it means less education for

consumers. *It could be argued that the dominance of multiple grocers has helped create a discount-obsessed consumer who is reluctant to try anything new. An Off Licence News survey of 200 independent wine shops showed they suffered a 10% drop in sales in 2007, so this sector is declining perhaps at the expense of choice.*

However, keen pricing has helped create a mass market for wine. Consumers in the UK have among the widest choice and best deals on wine. And the supermarkets are responding to the increasing interest in provenance and authenticity. For example, last year Tesco increased its Finest and Fine Wine sections, which focus on smaller producers in the £10 - £100 price bracket.

With a recent investigation by the Competition Commission into the alleged abuse of power by supermarkets, there is evidence of a shift in opinion. However, as long as consumers continue to get good prices and variety of choice, it is unlikely they will change their buying patterns, despite the growing unease about the dominance of supermarkets."

Examiner's comments:

This candidate uses phrases from the question stem to introduce the relevant sections making it clear how and where they have addressed the various sections even though no formal formatting or section headings have been used. They have also used most of the statistical data provided on the examination paper and within the briefing document although this is largely just inserted in appropriate sections rather than questioned or analysed to any extent. This means this piece of work fails to demonstrate the higher level analytical skills Unit 1 seeks to assess. Reference is also made to some of the sources used to research this topic such as Nielson reports and Grant Thornton surveys. This piece of work comes in at 952 words, which is about the right length for the time available, however, there were a great number of spelling errors which have been corrected in this rendition.

Distinction Grade Candidate

"Today, 70-75% of all wines are sold through the off trade, with around 73% sold by supermarkets. Of this, 70% is sold by the "big 4" supermarkets – Tesco, Asda, Sainsbury's and Morrisons.

Supermarkets have used their powerful economies of scale and heavy discounting to target the UK wine and spirits sector. The Competition Commission (CC) is currently undertaking a review of the major UK grocers and are due to report their findings and recommendations in April 2008. the CC's Working Paper on Pricing Policy highlighted that alcohol is one of 2 products used by supermarkets as "loss leaders" to attract customers into their stores, and that 10 major UK grocers had sold below cost. Although the CC in it provisional findings in October 2007 said that below cost selling "is not having significant unintended consequences on smaller retailers", the Federation of Small Businesses strongly disputes this. Many in the trade feel that the power of the supermarkets to discount heavily is driving smaller retailers out of

business. Orbital went into administration in January 2008 when Waitrose and Sainsbury's delisted its flagship Stormhoek brand after they discovered Tesco was selling it £1 cheaper.

Over the last 10 years, the supermarkets have consolidated dramatically leading to the "big 4" situation we have today with Tesco the clear leader with over 30% of the market and Sainsbury's and Asda around 16% each. This consolidation allows the supermarkets to increase their buying power and drive economies of scale in their distribution cycle. The second tier supermarket Somerfield is owned by a private equity group and some fear that this will eventually be snapped up by one of the Big 4 leading to reduced competition. However, any sale would be subject to a CC review.

The supermarkets have gained their share of the alcohol sectors primarily via heavy discounting and consumers have enjoyed the benefits of this. In the late 1990's, Sainsbury's decided to move away from price as a focus and thought customers would warm to better stores and an improved supply chain. This proved to be an expensive, strategic mistake as it lost 3.6% market share between 1998 and 2003. Asda's focus on price meant it gained 3% over the same period.

Producers and suppliers have felt the most impact from the dominance of the UK supermarkets. In 2007, Grant Thornton surveyed 50 suppliers who said the main four negative effects of the supermarkets were price pressure, excessive power, delisting and refusal to renegotiate prices in light of increased costs. The same survey highlighted 64% of suppliers had no formal contract, 60% had no notice period, 80% had felt price pressure and in fact average prices had fallen by 8% over the previous 3 years. The heavy discounting culture of UK supermarkets favours high volume brands but means smaller suppliers are operating at very low margins. The risk is that these suppliers look to other markets. Peter Darbishire of Thierry's is quoted as saying "a healthy category needs good returns for all stake holders otherwise they will move to other more balanced markets."

Smaller retailers and high street chains have also felt the pressure with Unwins now out of business and Oddbins struggling. Thresher has introduced its "3 or 2" offer in a bid to compete. The risk is that the consumer is ultimately left with reduced choice.

Larger suppliers like the top Champagne houses have also expressed dislike of UK supermarkets. Several houses including Bollinger threatened to sue after Christmas 2007, when their wines were heavily discounted. The Champagne houses felt their brand was being damaged in order that the UK supermarkets improved theirs. With current supply problems in Champagne, these houses could move easily to more lucrative markets.

The on trade is also suffering with the average price of Foster's 66p versus £2.25 in a pub. There is evidence that more people are drinking at home (particularly post the smoking ban) or "loading up" on cheap supermarket alcohol before heading out to bars and clubs.

However, the supermarkets have the resources and ability to drive innovation and education into the wine category. Wine competes in store with other categories with

much higher margins. Of around 800 lines, 250 will provide 80% of the profits and sales and there is a move by supermarkets to focus on brands and strong generic categories according to Decanter.

The UK consumer loves a bargain and price promotions can increase sales by over 25% according to Harpers. In a keynote survey recently 41% of consumers said they are swayed by price promotions. These have been boom times for customers, however a lot of this discounting has been driven by an approximately 40 million hectolitre over supply of wine globally. With recent poor harvests in Australia, France and Italy, prices may rise.

Supermarkets have also invested heavily in education and innovation with Tesco's Wine Club magazine circulated to over 500,000 people. Angela Mount of Wine Intelligence was quoted as saying that 70% of people found buying wine "an ordeal" or "difficult". Asda have come up with a unique way of addressing this with their two glass sampler range launched late in 2007.

However, people are becoming increasingly aware of the health and crime and disorder costs associated with cheap and available alcohol. The recent Garry Newlove murder has again highlighted the issue and the Guardian said last week that the government was reviewing the link between wine and disorder and alcohol promotions. According to the Royal College of Physicians, chronic liver disease in the UK has increased by 466% in the last 30 years at a time when it is falling in Europe. Alcohol related deaths have doubled since 1991 to 8,700 p.a.

Whilst the Competition Commission is due to report its findings in April 2008 there is little indication that there will be any significant restrictions placed on supermarkets with the government preferring to encourage the industry to voluntarily take action against irresponsible promotions. As supermarkets continue to focus on high volume brands this could lead to opportunities for other retailers to provide more interesting and unusual wine. However, the holy grail of everyone in the wine trade is encouraging the consumer to trade up. Tesco has launched its Fine Wine range with an average price of £15 a bottle and claims it puts more premium wine in front of customers than any other retailer. They have also launched a range with unusual varieties such as Durif and Fiano hoping that the confidence customers have in their brand will encourage them to experiment. It is this innovation plus the superior buying power of supermarkets combined with a government reluctant to regulate that will mean the supermarkets will continue their dominance into the foreseeable future."

Examiner's comments:

This candidate uses lots of very relevant examples to illustrate all the arguments put forward. There is evidence of very sound knowledge of all sectors of the trade and comments and examples are not simply limited to wine – the candidate being one of the very few who also mentioned spirits and sparkling wine (in this case with very valid comments relating to Champagne producers). Where statistical evidence from the exam paper is used, it is used for a reason, as in the case of the 66p Foster's beer impacting on the on-trade. This is the difference between this script and the previous one, where the statistics were simply quoted but not actually "used" to any

real purpose. This is well written, well argued and extensive in terms of its scope and evidence of the research undertaken – a very well deserved distinction grade. A total of 1117 words which were enjoyable and interesting to read.

Pilot Case Study June 2008

The virtual wine shop.

Candidate Case Study Brief:

The internet has generated an abundance of “virtual shops”. Some have become household names like Amazon, while others have yet to achieve market penetration and real success.

At present, less than 1 in 5 wine drinkers in the UK make their purchases via the internet whereas more than 90% buy their wine as part of the weekly shop at their local supermarket. There are clearly benefits in using the internet for both the consumer and the retailer, but there is some way to go before retailers will see this as their primary vehicle for selling wine despite the obvious advantages this offers from their point of view.

It appears that the consumer is not yet totally convinced about the benefits of the internet as a means of purchasing wine and this may be stifling further growth. The challenge facing the retailer is not simply that of getting the customer to accept the internet as a viable route for purchasing wine, but of also maintaining long term customer loyalty. The demographic of internet wine customers is different to those who purchase via supermarkets or off licences. Internet purchasers tend to be more knowledgeable about wine and have a higher “per bottle spend”. They therefore respond to very different sales or marketing incentives. Retailers need to use imagination and innovation to keep their internet customers coming back.

We have seen considerable change in the last five years, with the disappearance of many established retailers from the high street. It is debatable whether internet retailing has contributed to this, but it will inevitably continue to influence the way wine is sold in future and its potential effect on conventional wine retailing should not be ignored.

Answers: 121

Passes: 94 (78%)

Examination question (all three sections compulsory)

Evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of selling wine via the internet from the point of view of the wine retailer and the customer. (50% weighting)

What can the internet based retailer do to encourage traffic through their “virtual wine shop” and promote customer loyalty and long term business? (30% weighting)

Analyse what effect, if any, the internet is having on conventional wine retailing. (20% weighting)

Suggestions for the kind of points that candidates should have considered for each of these sections are as follows:

Evaluation of the advantages and disadvantages of selling wine via the internet from the point of view of the wine retailer and the customer

Wine retailer

Advantages

If this is the only means of selling - no need for retail premises and associated costs

Cheap to run once set up

No need for extensive telesales or sales team

Can provide more information on web than in printed wine list – cost saving

Easy and quick to update stock list and react to market demand – no need for expensive glossy brochures that can become out of date

Access to large potential customer base, even global market

Easy way to gather information for market research etc

Cheap and easy to reach customers eg via email/newsletter

Disadvantages

Need IT expertise to set up

Initial set up can be expensive

Need some IT expertise to maintain website

Maintenance and updating vital to keep customers interested

Difficult to “hand sell” to potential customers

Need to adopt a different strategy to market and sell wines

Increasingly competitive market

Some customer reluctance – not everyone has internet access

Less opportunity for “impulse sales”

Customer

Advantages

Greater choice – the internet has everything if you look for it

Convenience – shop from your armchair

Most internet wine retailers offer more than just wine sales
Prices can be more competitive – able to search for cheapest option on
www.wine-searcher.com

Disadvantages

Can't taste before you buy
Can't "see" the goods before you buy
Returns may be more difficult
No personal contact (or may be limited), so may not be ideal for those with limited wine knowledge
Some customers still concerned about internet security issues
Home delivery not always convenient if out at work
Minimum purchase limits

What the internet based retailer can do to encourage traffic through their "virtual wine shop" and promote customer loyalty and long term business

It was important here that candidates demonstrated awareness of the fact that internet wine customers are generally more sophisticated than traditional "off-trade" customers and therefore different approaches are required – BOGOF's will not necessarily work.

This section worked best where candidates gave examples of what other internet wine businesses are currently doing AND provided ideas of their own. There were many good suggestions here such as:

- Tesco's and Berry Bros wine clubs
- Berry Bros "podcasts"
- Wine blogs
- Regular newsletters
- On-line wine schools
- Help desks
- "ask the experts" with topics ranging from investing in wine, buying en primeur, food and wine matching recommendations, wine storage, guidance on building up a fine wine cellar
- "Guest review spots" where customers can leave their own review of wines they have purchased from the site – a form of self-promotion for the retailer but from an unbiased, trusted source from the point of view of the customer.
- Offering the option of a one-off, up-front payment of £20 for unlimited delivery rather than paying for each individual delivery
- Virgin Wines' bidding auction
- Virgin Wines' "wine bank" where customers save money on a regular basis and accrue interest which they can spend on wine
- Direct Wines' "blind cases" at bin end prices

These are simply a flavour of the many examples given by candidates who achieved good marks in this section of the question.

Analysis of what effect, if any, the internet is having on conventional wine retailing

In this section of the question, candidates should have provided evidence to support the fact that internet retail is booming (if not specifically wine retailing). However, internet wine retailing still only accounts for a small percentage of wine sales at present (although it is most often used for bulk purchase). Many candidates acknowledged the fact that most wine retailers now also offer internet retailing as an alternative to conventional retailing. Many also pointed out that if internet wine retailing follows the current trend of other commodities (books, clothing, electricals), the conventional wine retailer may find sales declining in favour of on-line shopping. The wine market is increasingly competitive and consolidation is rife along with the disappearance of familiar high street wine chains. Many candidates made the point that whilst this is not directly the result of internet retailing, it is certainly one of many contributing factors.

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 Diploma Course Notes thoroughly and read around the subject.

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 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 secure 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 case 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 in 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

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 with superior skills to demonstrate these by identifying the origin of the wine precisely. 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)

It is clear that candidates find the format of the questions in Paper 1 more challenging than those in Paper 2. 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 five marks, and you should therefore aim to give at least five valid reasons for your choice.

January 2008: White wines from Chardonnay	
<i>Answers: 83</i>	<i>Passes: 43 (52%)</i>

This was a disappointing result. If we look at the breakdown of marks in increments of 5%, there were more candidates achieving marks of between 45% and 49% than any other band. The Examination Panel expected better results than this considering this was a mainstream variety and included a “benchmark” white Burgundy, Chassagne Montrachet Les Charrières, 2004. The remaining two wines were Szölöskert Nagyrede Hungarian Chardonnay 2006 and Deakin Estate Australian Chardonnay 2006.

Of these, it was the classic Burgundy that provided the least challenge and most easily enabled candidates to identify the grape variety. In general, many candidates appeared to either be oblivious to, or chose to ignore the use of oak (or lack of it) on these three wines. In addition, the “assessment of quality” was poorly answered in a number of cases, with candidates neglecting to consider the balance, length, integration and complexity of each wine.

June 2008: White wines from Riesling	
<i>Answers: 327</i>	<i>Passes: 206 (63%)</i>

The statistics show the considerable difference between the number of candidates who sit the Unit 3 examination in June rather than in January. There is also a marked difference in the pass rate, with a particularly good result here and a balanced spread of marks across the various grade bandings.

The three wines were an Australian Riesling from the 2005 vintage, Jim Barry's The Lodge Hill Riesling, Leon Beyer's Cuvée des Comtes d'Eguisheim 2002 and a classic Mosel Riesling from Dr. H. Thanisch, Bernkasteler Badstube Riesling Spatlese 2004. Rather surprisingly, it was the Australian Riesling that was particularly well described, whilst the Bernkasteler Badstube was sometimes poorly represented with some candidates demonstrating a poor grasp of acidity and sugar levels – in many instances, this delicate, light-bodied wine was described as full-bodied or as originating from a hot climate. It was this wine that should have set "the benchmark". This was the one that generated all the right clues to enable candidates to identify the grape variety. It was classic Riesling in its purest form and with the exception of those mentioned above, most candidates did recognise it as such.

In terms of identifying the variety, quite a few candidates mistook this for Chenin Blanc. This was not totally illogical, based on the style of the three wines. The clues that should have guided candidates to Riesling, included the light lemon colour, the varying levels of sweetness, the minerality and honeyed, floral character found on all three wines, along with the petrol notes and the hint of botrytis on the Alsace Riesling, the lack of oak influence and the classic low alcohol/high acidity/sweet style of the German Spätlese.

Compare the following note on the nose of the German Riesling which achieved very low marks, with one that achieved all seven marks available:

"Clean, medium intensity, still youthful and fresh but showing some slight development."

This is short, inaccurate, contradictory and, most damagingly, had no aroma descriptors at all in a section where these account for five of the seven marks available. Compare this to the following description from a candidate who gained all seven marks:

"Developing but still fresh and aromatic despite some prickle of SO₂. Medium + intensity of floral aromas, particularly honeysuckle, but also quince and lemon. There are slight petrol aromas along with honey, peach and apricot and a soft mineral note."

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.

January 2008: Red wines with a common link in respect of grape variety	
Answers: 83	Passes: 50 (60%)

The aim here was to deduce that these three wines were all made from the Grenache grape variety. The wines were a Rioja, Esencia Valdemar Rosé 2006, Chapoutier's Châteauneuf-du-Pape 'La Bernadine' 2005, and an Australian wine from Pertaringa, 'Two Gentlemen' Grenache 2006. Despite the relatively high pass rate, many candidates failed to identify the grape variety correctly. In fact, some clearly do not know where certain varieties are actually grown as there were some glaring errors from candidates achieving very low marks, which simply should not be seen at this level, for example Cabernet Sauvignon from the Mosel or Nebbiolo from Spain and France. Clearly some candidates achieving the lowest grade, fail (unclassified) are not yet ready for this qualification.

The following note for the Two Gentleman's Grenache was from a candidate achieving an overall merit grade.

“Appearance: clear and bright, medium ruby core fading to pale ruby rim. Legs noted.

Nose: clean, medium (+) intensity, youthful aromas of black cherry, red cherry, licorice, spice, toast.

Palate: dry, medium (+) acidity, medium (–) tannins which are ripe and smooth, medium (+) alcohol, medium (+) body, medium (+) flavour intensity of black cherry, red cherry, plum, red fruits, black fruits, strawberry, raspberry, pepper, toast, licorice. Other observations are good balance of fruit, alcohol and acidity and smooth texture. Length medium (+).

Assessment of quality: outstanding quality. Concentration is outstanding with rich ripe fruit, high extract and intensity. Finish is medium (+) and fruity, complex array of flavours.

Readiness for drinking/potential for ageing: ready to drink, will improve for 3-5 years.

Estimated off-premise retail price per bottle including all taxes: \$25

Country and region of origin: Australia, Barossa”

This was by no means perfect. There is a lot of repetition or generalisation in terms of aroma and flavour characteristics (“black cherry, red cherry”, “black fruits, red fruits”), but these are supplemented with other, more precise observations. The assessment of quality is also weak as this candidate has overestimated the quality,

confusing “intensity” and “ripeness” with quality. These do not always go hand in hand.

June 2008: Red wines with a common link in respect of origin	
<i>Answers: 328</i>	<i>Passes: 199 (61%)</i>

This question included three very different styles of wine, Cuvaision Pinot Noir 2006, Delicato Family Vineyards White Zinfandel 2006 and J Lohr Seven Oaks Cabernet Sauvignon 2005. In this case, it was the region of production that provided the common link rather than grape variety. The key to establishing this lay in being able to identify the three grape varieties. Once this has been done, it was simply a case of working out where these three varieties are most likely to be grown producing wines of this style. Obviously the region we were looking for was California. Once again, it was the second part of this question that was answered less well. Many candidates based their decision on the rosé, and this inevitably led to regions like Provence, Languedoc, Southern Rhône. There was some logic to this (they all produce rosé wines), but these candidates did not think the process through fully, or else their tasting notes were not accurate enough for them to draw the right conclusion. This rosé was not dry, and the Rhône is known for producing some of the driest rosés wines.

The marker for this paper identified a number of examples of the kind of comments that do not generate marks, either because they are vague, open to interpretation, irrelevant or, contradictory:

On the appearance - “*sunset pink*”, “*plum colour*”, “*strawberry colour*”

On the nose - “*summer breeze aroma*”, “*weak to medium pronounced nose*”, “*youthful nose showing some development*”, “*fresh acidity on the nose*”, “*aroma characteristic of fruit*”

On the palate - “*mild tannins*”, “*very good length*”, “*balanced acidity*”, “*nice firm tannins*”, “*lovely finish*”, “*noticeable alcohol*”

On the assessment of quality - “*Everyday glugger*”, “*to be drunk on the balcony, chilled on a hot summer day*”, “*concentrated but subdued*”

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 so this paper is not as easy as it appears.

January 2008: Beaujolais	
<i>Answers: 82</i>	<i>Passes: 56 (68%)</i>

Most candidates were able to identify the top wine because of its very obvious maturity (Jadot's Château des Jacques, Clos de Rocheigrès 2003), but a significant number mistook this maturity for a fault in the wine. Some also found it difficult to differentiate between the entry level wine, Domaine les Tours de Montmelas 2006 retailing at around £7, and the mid-priced wine, Domaine du Vissoux, Cuvée Traditionnelle Vieilles Vignes 2006 at around £9. Far too many seemed to think inexpensive Beaujolais is readily available for less than £5.

Some candidates try to be too clever in their tasting notes, claiming they can detect the wine has been made by a co-operative, negociant or a Domaine. Such comments are pointless because many domaines use co-operative facilities for vinification. Many candidates also mis-use the term "commercial", particularly in the assessment of quality. This is neither a quality level or a market segment. Something that is described as "commercial" is simply a wine that has a market. Both Mateus Rosé and Château le Pin could claim to be "commercial" – they both sell very well, yet are worlds apart in terms of style, target market and quality.

June 2008: Nebbiolo wines from Piedmont	
Answers: 331	Passes: 236 (71%)

These wines were chosen to represent three distinct quality levels, a mature, top quality Barolo from the 2000 vintage produced by Ceretto, a basic Nebbiolo d'Alba from Cantine San Silvestro and a reliable good quality Barolo from Fontanafredda with less development than the first wine.

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. Some candidates are inconsistent in their tasting notes in terms of the observations they make under the appearance, nose and palate, and those under the assessment of quality and price estimate. In these final sections, they often lose sight of observations made in the tasting note itself, which means they do not follow through in the thought process.

The following candidate achieved a distinction grade. The extract from their script is limited to the assessment of quality of the three wines as this was particularly well done, placing the wines in the correct order in terms of quality level and explaining the reasoning behind this:

Wine no 7 – Barolo Ceretto 2000

"An outstanding wine packed with concentrated, developed fruit and masses of complexity from grape, climate, soil and maturation in oak and bottle. The rich fruit in intense layers of flavours is balanced beautifully with ripe, silky tannins and good acidity. The length is tremendous, lasting a long time in the mouth."

Wine no 8 - Nebbiolo d'Alba

"This is an acceptable wine, difficult to assess as it is still in early development. However, it is lacking in concentration, intensity and ripeness. The hallmarks of Nebbiolo are there; black fruit, high tannins and spice, but I doubt if this wine will improve significantly."

Wine no 9 – Fontanafredda Barolo

"This is good quality Nebbiolo with good concentration of fruit and complexity resulting from maturation. The tannins are riper and silkier than the previous wine and therefore better balanced with fruit and acidity. This is either a good Barbaresco or Barolo from a good source"

Better candidates pointed out that the alcohol was a little too dominant on the final wine and it was this along with the lack of elegance that was found on the first wine that differentiated these two in terms of quality.

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 and grape variety). 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.

<i>January 2008: Red wines –South African Chenin Blanc, Alsace Muscat, Tokaji Aszu 5 Puttonyos</i>	
<i>Answers: 82</i>	<i>Passes: 43 (52%)</i>

The Tokaji 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. This was certainly the wine that “saved” a number of candidates, enabling them to score higher marks by identifying aroma and flavour characteristics. There is usually one wine that requires a little application of logic to get to the correct information. In this case, the Muscat, which was confused with Gewurztraminer or Viognier in a number of cases. The Chenin Blanc was more of a challenge due to its fairly neutral character.

<i>June 2008: White wines – Argentinian Torrontés 2006, Pouilly-Fumé 2006, Murrieta's White Rioja Reserva 'Capellania' 2003</i>	
<i>Answers: 331</i>	<i>Passes: 197 (60%)</i>

Many candidates struggled with the Torrontes and the White Rioja. The latter was often mistaken for white Burgundy and the aromatic nature of the Torrontes led many to think it could have been Pinot Gris for Gewurztraminer. There is a tendency for candidates to make their judgement based solely on aroma and flavour characteristics without taking all aspects of the wine into consideration. Varietal character will help a great deal in identifying a wine, but is only half the equation. Things like alcohol or ripeness will give vital clues such as possible climate and therefore region of production. The oxidative style of the white Rioja should have led candidates away from Burgundy. The oak was far too pronounced and resinous.

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 that are skimpy or rushed (or in some cases only one more). 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.

January 2008

Group A: Compulsory Question

Describe the contribution that the grape varieties grown in Bordeaux make to the character of the Appellation Contrôlée wines in which they are used. Illustrate your answer with examples of wines from the region.

Answers: 88

Passes: 55 (63%)

63% was a good result for the compulsory question as this was answered by all candidates, both good and bad alike. The compulsory question always focuses on a mainstream topic and the Bordeaux grape varieties clearly fits the bill as this is covered on WSET courses at all levels.

Fourteen grape varieties are permitted under AC regulations, but usually no more than five black and three white grapes are used. Most candidates were able to name these key varieties as Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Cabernet Franc, Malbec, Petit Verdot, Semillon, Sauvignon Blanc and Muscadelle, although knowledge of the red varieties was generally better than the white and some candidates failed to comment on white varieties at all. This meant they missed out on a significant portion of the marks available which led to fail grades in many cases. Good candidates discussed the significance of blending in the region and were able to describe the characteristics of the varieties and explain how these influence the style of wine. Poor candidates either wrote too little (examiners expect around two sides of A4/foolscap paper), or not knowing enough about the varieties themselves, wrote generally about the region. This was a waste of their time as there were no marks available for this information.

The following script was a basic pass. There are some errors, misspellings and the style is rather simplistic, but the main varieties are covered and examples of wines are given.

“The major grape varieties grown in Bordeaux are as follows:

Red – Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Petit Verdot, Cabernet Franc.

White – Sauvignon Blanc, Semillon, Muscadelle.

Cabernet Sauvignon’s natural home in Bordeaux is on the left bank of the river Gironde. It ripens later than Merlot and needs warmer soils. The thick skinned, small grape variety gives wines with high tannins, good blackcurrant flavours and an elegant style. It is naturally blended with Merlot but is the dominant grape in the blend. The purpose of the Cabernet Sauvignon grape is to give body and structure to the blend. For example, as in Leoville Barton from St Julien. These wines are elegant in style and age well, softening and integrating with time. The small berries give high extraction and rich dark wines and thrive well on the well drained gravel soils.

Merlot is predominantly grown on the limestone rich soils of the right bank of the Gironde in St Emilion. It ripens earlier than the Cabernet Sauvignon grape and is easier to grow. The grapes are larger, the wines produced are less tannic than the Cabernet Sauvignon and their purpose in the blend is to soften the nature of the wine. Characteristics of the grape include a plummy softness which rounds out the wine and takes away the austerity of the Cabernet Sauvignon. An example of a fine Merlot based Bordeaux is Le Pin in Pomerol. These grapes are low yielding and lend themselves well to new barrel ageing.

Petit Verdot is a dark skinned grape grown predominantly in the Medoc. It is quite an austere grape and has in the past been used to give backbone and added structure to the wine. Chateaux Margaux uses a small proportion in its wines, however its use is in decline as it is difficult to grow and is subject to coulure. Its purpose was to add extra body to the wine and to give it further backbone.

Cabernet Franc is a less austere grape variety than Cabernet Sauvignon. Its characteristics include less tannin and acidity and is lighter in body. Its purpose in Bordeaux blends was to lighten the character of the finished wine as in Chateaux Ausone in St Emilion. Again the use of Cabernet Franc is declining.

With regard to white wines in Bordeaux again these are generally used in blends and they each add their own individual character to the finished wines. For example in Sauternes and Ch Barsac these grapes are used to make sweet botrytised wines of great note. The Sauvignon Blanc grape has a thin skin which facilitates noble rot. In addition its high acidity gives the wine great longevity. Semillon is a neutral canvass adding structure to the blend and is a great foil for the Sauvignon Blanc's acidity. The Muscadelle grape adds a perfumed grapey character and gives added richness to the blend.

Other grapes grown in Bordeaux include Rousillon, Marsanne and Carmenere. The Carmenere is no longer grown extensively, in the past it was thought to be Merlot and used in blends with Cabernet Sauvignon but is now no longer used. Rousillon and Marsanne and varietal Sauvignon Blancs are to be found in Bourge AC and Blaye AC where they produce light, easy drinking wines with good acidity."

This candidate is confusing the issues surrounding Carmenère grown in Chile not in Bordeaux where it was originally grown for its own merits rather than being confused with Merlot. There is also no mention of Malbec which contributes deep colour but tends to be rustic. It is little used outside of Bourg (correct spelling rather than above), Blaye and the Entre Deux Mers where it is important for early drinking red wines. This candidate is also wrong about the use of Marsanne and Rousillon (confusing the latter with the wine producing region in the south rather than the grape variety "Rousanne"). Nevertheless, there is enough correct information here for a pass grade.

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

What are the strengths and weaknesses of Australia as a wine producing country? (An essay format is COMPULSORY for this question.)	
Answers: 68	Passes: 56 (82%)

This was a very high pass rate for the compulsory essay question and the examiner commented that scripts were generally very well structured with clear introductions, a core that was easy to follow leading to conclusions that rounded the subject off as it should.

However, there were still some candidates who chose to ignore the request to adopt an essay structure, submitting either disjointed paragraphs or even a list of bullet points. They were penalised in the marking process as a result.

A good introduction, should have defined Australia's market position giving an indication of the size of the area under vine and the range of wine styles produced.

Strengths could have been discussed under the following headings: Climate and Weather/Vintage, Soils and Topography, Grape Varieties, Viticulture/Vinification/Maturation, Packaging, Historical/Cultural/Social/Financial issues. However, all of these also encompass aspects of weakness too, so a balanced discussion was vital.

The conclusion should have established that although Australia is a strong wine producing country, it is currently a victim of its own success and perhaps needs to turn its expertise in marketing to encouraging regionality and higher price points. Some candidates pointed out that it is envied by many wine producing countries, and felt that its market position is strong enough to secure its place in the wine world's future. Some also warned that global warming and environmental issues could have a detrimental effect on its future success.

The following script is a good example of a basic pass. It covers the key points, but is rather short and lacking in terms of the detail that is expected of higher grades.

"Australia has numerous advantages/disadvantages as a wine producing country. It has a number of different mesoclimates, where almost any variety can be grown and probably is, from the cool climate areas of Victoria growing Pinot Noir, and areas such as Coonawarra growing Cabernet Sauvignon. There are also cool climate areas for white wines such as the Eden and Clare Valleys growing world class Riesling, to hot irrigated areas such as Riverina and Riverland producing high volume commercial wines.

The country has a number of very old vines, up to 100 years old, namely Shiraz from the Barossa Valley and Grenache. It has warm, reliable climate for grape growing, which allows it to grow a wealth of varieties, cool and warm climate, so produce a large number of styles of wine. The country has no official geographical wine laws,

so wines or musts are free to be made from one part of the country to another and blended cross state or border.

Australia appeals to most wine markets as it grows vines for cheaper commercial brands such as Jacobs Creek to world class wine such as Penfolds Grange. Australia is planting at an incredible rate so this means there are still plantings coming to fruition in the next 5-10 years. Australia's weakness could be its climate, with more droughts and floods recorded recently. It could find viticulture in already marginal areas of the country, more tough than expected. It also faces competition from other major wine producing countries such as France and Spain who, in the case of France, are looking to simplify their wine laws to enable them to compete better with countries like Australia.

Australian labelling is also consumer friendly, clear and precise, it contains none of the so called "jargon" that appears on the labels of wine from Germany or to a certain degree, France. Australia is generally able to market its wines better than perhaps the Europeans, using quirky names. The country has a natural landscape that has everything a wine making country could wish for. Deep valley floors for planting varieties such as Shiraz and Cabernet Sauvignon. Fertile alluvial plains for high volume branded wines.

Australia's continued expansion could be its undoing, with wine that could be left unsold due to competition worldwide, to a fall in grape pricing, to therefore a surplus. The fact that Australia is an English speaking country makes it easier to sell to consumers."

This is certainly not a stylish or accomplished submission, but putting this aside, in terms of factual content, it covers enough of the key points to justify a pass grade.

<p>Select FOUR of the following wines and describe the production process for each.</p> <p>a) Amarone della Valpolicella DOC b) Beaujolais Nouveau AC c) Monbazillac AC d) Niagara Peninsula ice wine e) Rioja Tinto Gran Reserva DOCa</p>	
Answers: 83	Passes: 44 (53%)

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. In this case, it was very clear what was required – a clear and detailed description of how the various wines are produced. This was a purely factual question, and to do well you needed to get down as many facts as possible in a short space of time, making sure that you provided sufficient content for all four options selected. There was no point therefore padding out responses with a tasting note for each wine. Questions do often ask candidates to indicate how certain factors influence the style of a wine (for example with the question that follows this

one), but this information was not required here and no marks were allocated for it. The paragraph on ice wine generated the best responses, but rather surprisingly at this level, there was far too much misunderstanding over the difference between carbonic maceration and semi carbonic maceration and production of Amarone was often confused with that for Repasso. Ageing requirements for Rioja Tinto Gran Reserva were also often incorrect.

Describe the soils in FIVE of the following regions and discuss their importance in determining the styles of wine produced.

- a) *Alsace*
- b) *Marlborough*
- c) *The Douro*
- d) *Mosel-Saar-Ruwer*
- e) *Santorini*
- f) *Touraine (Vouvray)*

Answers: 37

Passes: 13 (35%)

This question clearly divided those who knew about the soils of these regions and those who knew a few basic facts about soil and tried to pad this out with other information about the region which clearly had not been asked for. This was not a popular question, neither was it a question where you could get away with generalisations. There was nowhere to hide with this question and it should have been avoided by all except those with a particular interest in knowledge in the subject. There were some candidates who clearly fell into this category, with two candidates achieving distinction grades and six with merit, this meant of those attempting this question and passing, more did so with higher grades (eight candidates) than with straight passes (five candidates). However, the fact remains that 51% of those answering this question failed to reach the pass mark and should have chosen another topic. Those failing appeared to allocate soils randomly to each region, or opted for slate or limestone on the basis that it was likely to be correct in some cases. Even where they hit upon the right soil by a lucky guess, it was clear that they had little idea of how this soil type might influence the style of wine produced. Far too many candidates wrote very little indeed, naively assuming a couple of lines of text would be enough. Examiners were looking for around one third to half a page of text on each region. However, there is no point writing half a page if the content does not answer the question as set. Many candidates knowing little or nothing about soils, simply described the wines. This did not answer the question. Another problem was not knowing enough about five regions. Candidates often assume that they 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 section on Alsace generated the best responses – there was a great deal of detail on this in the Diploma study notes and some candidates had clearly learnt this. Santorini was the weakest section and many chose to omit this in preference for one

of the other five options. However, of those who did select this paragraph, there was plenty of evidence of guesswork.

The following candidate was an example of someone falling into this category as apart from the observation relating to “*volcanic soils*”, the rest of the response is vague and lacking in facts.

“The soil type of Santorini is a volcanic soil rich in minerals. The vines that grow on this soil attain a high level of nutrients. In the mountainous terrain, the soil helps retain moisture in the dry environment. The reds that are produced are medium-bodied. The rich soil helps the grapes develop into well balanced wine.”

In contrast, the following candidate includes the kind of detail that convinces the examiner they genuinely know something about the region and the style of wine produced.

“Santorini is an island belonging to Greece famous for its wines made from Assyrtiko. It has volcanic soil which is also good at retaining moisture due to it subsoil layer of chalk. The chalk element enables the vines to have enough water to survive without regular rainfall. Volcanic soils are also good at retaining heat.

Santorini is windy, so the vines have dug their roots deep to ensure they can survive. This further aids the ability of the vine to obtain nutrients/minerals. The volcanic layer gives the white wines made from Assyrtiko a stony, mineral/steely and acidic note. Combined with the water stress factor, whereby the vines dig deep to obtain moisture, the flavour intensity on these wines is immense. In addition, the vines are old, which further increases concentration of flavours”.

The Rhine Riesling grape produces very different styles of wine in the Eden Valley, the Rheingau and in the Wachau. Describe the factors in the vineyard and in the winery that account for these differences in style.

Answers: 39

Passes: 15 (38%)

This was another question chosen by a small number of candidates, and on the whole answered very poorly.

The majority of papers simply lacked facts, from forgetting to consider the basic things like climate or failing to actually describe how these wines differ in terms of style to the more detailed information relating to what goes on in the winery, not simply in terms of **how** the wine is produced, but also **by whom**, for example the importance of FWW co-operative in the Wachau compared to the Rheingau where co-operatives are responsible for only around 10% of wines produced.

For each of the three regions, there were three clear requirements in this question. Firstly, a clear description of the styles of wines produced in each. In some cases, this was largely limited to one style of wine only such as in the Eden Valley, in others, there was considerably more to say such as in the Rheingau, where candidates

needed to consider all styles from simple Trocken wines to top quality botrytised wines of Auslese and Trockenbeerenauslese quality and the rare Eisweins. The main points to consider in the vineyard, are the usual ones – climate, topography (location, aspect, altitude, gradient), soil and general vineyard management including things like yields, training systems, irrigation etc. In the winery, it is simply a case of describing how the wines are produced and by whom.

There are still some candidates who made elementary errors such as the following:

“the Rhein Riesling (also known as the Welschriesling)”

“the Wachau area of Germany is close to the Danube”

“Süssreserve may be added before fermentation or after fermentation to increase the level of alcohol of the wine”.

Finally, every year this report urges candidates to spend a few minutes before answering any question in putting together a short essay plan. Very few actually follow this advice and in so doing run the risk of missing out key points of the question, or worse still losing sight completely of the question. I suspect there is reluctance to waste “precious” time on this, but the plan does not need to take long or be extensive. The following candidate made short notes which clearly helped them to focus on the key points for each region:

“Eden Valley – styles – warmer, full bodied, stone fruit, tropical, dry – mechanisation

Rheingau – south facing, mineral, schist soils, complex, aromatic, Kabinett to TBA, RS levels, Eiswein

Wachau – Danube, loess 20cm on granite?, knoll, slopes

Vineyard and Winery”

This would not have taken more than five minutes, but it gives the candidate a framework to hang their submission on – looking at wine style, soils, aspect, vineyard and winery practices.

With reference to the Americas, write a paragraph on FIVE of the following: (each paragraph carries equal marks)

- a) Mendoza***
- b) Gallo***
- c) Fog***
- d) Carmenère***
- e) Oregon***
- f) Brazil***

Answers: 73

Passes: 33 (45%)

The results for this are a good illustration of the dangers of answering a paragraph question when you do not know enough about all five topics. Paragraphs were either too short, or candidates answered only three or four paragraphs instead of all five. A small number of candidates forgot that the stem of the question read “with reference to the Americas ...” and included irrelevant information about regions in countries such as Piemonte in the paragraph about “fog”. There were also a number of candidates who confused Oregon with Washington State. Taking Mendoza as an example, the key points to be made could be summarised as follows:

Mendoza

Largest and most important wine growing province in Argentina.

Accounts for about 70% of Argentine wine.

High altitude – average of 600 – 1100 metres.

Continental climate with very low rainfall (average 200mm p.a. mostly falling in the summer).

Main hazard is summer hail and netting is widely used as protection (also providing protection from intense summer heat).

Dry climate means few problems with rot or mildew (important producer of organic wine).

Vineyards lie close to foothills of Andes, in series of irrigated oases (dessert landscape elsewhere).

Main soil type - sandy alluvial with clay substructure.

Irrigation widespread, drip or flood, from reservoirs fed by snow melt. Vines grafted where drip irrigation used (nematodes are a problem).

Divided into departments which are further sub-divided. (Appellation system introduced 1993).

Wide range of grapes planted. Mainly black varieties, particularly Malbec but also other international varieties with Chardonnay in high altitude vineyards and increasingly Viognier.

With reference to the maps enclosed, answer the following:

For EACH of the wines listed below, state the number which correctly locates the area of production, briefly describe the wine using the format of a tasting note and comment on the factors in the vineyard and in the winery that determine the style of the wine.

- a) Chianti Classico DOCG**
- b) Frascati DOC**
- c) Tavel AC**
- d) Hermitage Rouge AC**

Answers: 64

Passes: 23 (36%)

This style of question used to be a common feature of the Diploma examination prior to 2003 when it was always used as the compulsory question on the “wines of the world” theory paper. Like the current compulsory question, it was the means by

which we ensured that candidates studied the whole syllabus rather than “cherry picked” those topics of particular interest or in which they had special expertise.

Under the new syllabus, we took the decision to widen the scope for the compulsory question as the map question was not a popular format with all candidates. However, we felt there was some value to be gained in using it on occasion as one of the optional questions in Group B.

As the low pass rate shows, candidates did not do well here. However, we should remember that a large number of candidates sitting Unit 3 in January are re-sit candidates, and this tends to have a detrimental effect on the January pass rate (something that can be seen across most questions with a few exceptions).

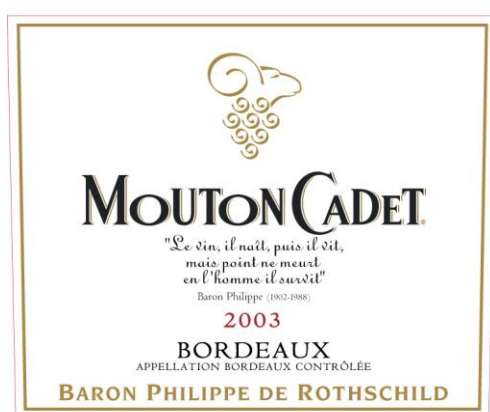
In general, candidates placed too much emphasis on the tasting note (they were asked to “**briefly** describe the wine”), at the expense of the far more challenging content relating to the factors in the vineyard and winery that determine this style. Common pitfalls were confusion between Chianti Classico and Chianti Classico Riserva in terms of ageing requirements and ignorance of the difference between Continental and Mediterranean climates and the influences they bring about. One candidate even described Frascati as a “*full red wine*”.

June 2008

Group A: Compulsory Question

Describe the two RED wines below under the following headings:

- Climate*
- Grape variety(ies)*
- Harvesting*
- Maturation*
- Scale of production and resulting quality of wine.*



Answers: 349

Passes: 238 (68%)

This was a very good result, particularly as this was a compulsory question. It is this question that 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.

This format of question appears to have been popular with candidates sitting the Unit 3 exam since its introduction four 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 wines 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. For example, in terms of "scale of production and resulting quality of wine", there was a clear difference between those candidates who knew these actual wines and those who wrote about red wines from Hermitage and Bordeaux in general. In this question "scale of production" refers to the size of the producer and output for each particular wine. The examiner wanted to see whether candidates knew which of these was a large or small scale producer. These two wines were chosen because they differ so much in this respect, with

Mouton Cadet generating around 15 million bottles a year to Chave's much smaller output of around 35,000 to 40,000 bottles. It was not vital that candidates were able to give actual figures in their response, but they should have been able to convince the examiner that they had some knowledge of the size of these two producers and were aware of the enormity of the difference between them. Many failed to do this.

Just about all candidates were aware that Hermitage is an AC producing high quality wines at premium prices, but in most instances comments were not specific to the actual wine shown in the label. Candidates who achieved higher marks were able to explain **why** this wine is high quality, by making reference to the fact that Chave blends his wine from several "plots" with differing soils which results in wines with strong "terroir". Others mentioned that he has a strict selection process and will not use grapes from all his plots if the quality is not considered high enough for this wine. Some candidates described the wine, explaining how its concentration contributed to the quality and how the structure required significant bottle age for the wine to reach its peak (usually in 10-20 years), although it could age for up to 50 years. In contrast, the Mouton Cadet is reliable, well-made and meant to be drunk when young and fruity. The Médoc provides the grapes that give backbone to the wine, but an increasing proportion of the blend is from the right bank giving softness and suppleness, making this wine so approachable rather than a serious wine for laying down.

The following script is a good example of a script that is correct, but too short and lacking in detail for a sound pass grade. This was graded as a borderline fail.

"a) Climate

Hermitage in the northern Rhone has a continental climate with rain in autumn and spring and long warm summers. Bordeaux has a maritime climate with influence from the Garonne and Dordogne rivers. Although Bordeaux is close to the Atlantic ocean it is sheltered from it by the Landes forest.

b) Grape variety(ies)

Hermitage is made from the black Syrah grape which yields wines of immense power and concentration. Syrah has tannin and anthocyanins that respond well to oak ageing. Syrah is a fleshy grape with attractive pepper qualities. Mouton Cadet is made from varying proportions of Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc and Merlot and is a brand of wine rather than an AC. The AC of this wine is Bordeaux. Merlot is used to soften the leafiness of Cabernet.

c) In Hermitage all harvesting is done by hand as some sites on the hill are extremely steep, vines are not planted to enable tractors access between rows. Grapes are usually whole bunch pressed after a careful sorting process. For AC Bordeaux mechanical harvesting is allowed. In both cases harvest will only begin once the INAO has approved the dates.

d) Maturation

Hermitage receives at least 12 months maturation in French oak casks with a high proportion of new oak used. For Mouton Cadet there is little maturation as it is released relatively early to the market and is an entry level branded generic Bordeaux.

e) Scale of production and resulting quality of wine

In the case of this Hermitage, it is domaine bottled so this is from a small producer rather than a negociant. Although the Rhone is a large wine producer, Hermitage is only produced in comparatively small amounts. The resulting quality is excellent and fetches high prices. Mouton Cadet is made on an extremely large scale and of acceptable quality, although meets AC regulations."

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

Discuss the role of brands for the South African wine industry. (An essay format is COMPULSORY for this question)	
Answers: 94	Passes: 41 (44%)

This was a low pass rate compared to other questions in the June examination. With the compulsory essay question, it is not just a case of getting the facts across - structure is also important. A number of candidates simply did not answer the question, instead they wrote an essay on South African wine – in some cases not even mentioning a single South African wine brand. Very few candidates actually bothered to define exactly what a brand is – fairly important if you are to discuss its role. In some cases, there was no introduction and more importantly, no clear conclusion. In determining what constitutes a brand, most of those who took the trouble to do this, defined it as any large-volume, inexpensive wine such as Kumala, Namaqua or Arniston Bay. They could also have included any non-generic name including prestigious estates such as Rustenberg, Meerlust or Thelema. Arguable, you could suggest that "Pinotage" or "Stellenbosch" might also count, but candidates who did take this approach, had a hard time writing a credible essay on this basis.

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

Introduction

This should aim to set the context (eg outline what brands do, perhaps by including some historical context, or noting that many of the most prominent brands in the major export markets such as the UK, Holland, US, are almost unknown on the domestic market). It was also important to clarify what, for the purpose of the essay, the candidate counted as a brand.

The Role Of Brands

The examiner had to be flexible here. There were many approaches that could have been taken, but candidates needed to cover a good spectrum of roles (around four at least to give any depth to their essay) and discuss their significance to the South African industry. The use of examples in this question was key to success, but simply describing brand activity in isolation was not enough – it needed to be evaluated in the context of the question.

Roles were largely defined as:

- Building awareness of the category
- Building confidence
- Building a sense of identity
- Creating value
- Creating a route to market
- Ethical issues (not necessarily something brands help, but something to consider nevertheless).

As already mentioned, these needed to be discussed in detail with good examples to illustrate the points being made.

Conclusion

The conclusion should aim to draw everything together and highlight the most significant areas of success or failure in South Africa's brand activity.

The following script started well with a very good introduction which shows that they really do know the market. It makes some good points throughout but is perhaps rather short, finishing up as a very high merit, just short of distinction.

"The South African wine industry is the oldest "New World" wine industry, stemming from, in some cases, the 17th century. And yet it is arguably the most under-developed wine exporting country in the world. Why? Primarily because, while demand for wine was increasing in the 70's, 80's and 90's, apartheid meant that South Africa was unable to export her wines to the majority of wine-drinking countries. Chile, Australia and California had all stolen a march on her. When she came back into the fold, her wines needed to get known, and fast. Winemakers had been left behind and needed to learn fast. Wine drinkers had to be able to discover South Africa. So wine brands, very well used by other New World countries, were needed to enable an identity to be created, especially since the grapes traditionally grown, such as Chenin Blanc, or Steen, and Pinotage did not have a huge following worldwide. KWV, the largest state-run co-operative, although now a shadow of its former self, was for years the one wine brand that people knew was South African. While the quality was not always high, they managed to make wines of an acceptable standard with grape varieties that drinkers were familiar with. This steered other producers in that direction, wine became more efficiently produced, sourced from different growers, more vineyards were planted and more household names began to become known.

By far the biggest brand from South Africa is Kumala, now owned by the world's largest wine company, Constellation. While consumers now recognise South Africa as a major player in the New World, Kumala, along with others like Namaqua, Arniston Bay and Two Oceans, are stifling the development of the South African wine industry by attaching their name to everything they make, hence making quality differentiation difficult for consumers.

The boutique wineries have benefited from the rise of South African brands, as their country is now a recognised producer, however the quality of the big brands, and the ensuing very low price-point, is not doing their countrymen any favours.

Initiatives such as the employment of Bruce Jack, a top quality and individualistic winemaker at the helm of Kumala, may make a difference. For South Africa, it could be the saving grace, making recognisable brands into higher quality stepping stones to the next level.

If it has the reverse effect however of watering down the skills of the winemaker in order to drive efficiency for the accountants, then it will be in vain. South Africa needs strong brands to lead it into the promised land of full recognition of its amazing breadth of regions, terroirs, grape varieties and winemaking expertise. However, do the brands need South Africa? Do consumers need to know where a wine comes from? Brands have been successful in driving the wine of Chile, New Zealand, California and Australia to the forefront of the consumer's mind. This was prior to the globalisation of the wine industry though, and the role of South African brands is likely to improve the lot of the brand owners, rather than the country itself."

Select one still AC wine from the Loire Valley made wholly or predominantly from each of the grape varieties listed below. Describe its style and the factors contributing to that style. (Each paragraph carries equal marks)

- a) **Muscadet**
- b) **Chenin Blanc**
- c) **Sauvignon Blanc**
- d) **Cabernet Franc**

Answers: 320

Passes: 214 (67%)

This was a very straightforward question as the high pass rate suggests. However, a small number of candidates misread the question and only selected one region rather than one wine from each of the FOUR regions. On the whole, responses on Chenin Blanc and Sauvignon Blanc were better with Cabernet Franc often rather flimsy. Although descriptions of the four wines were usually good, candidates were less adept at explaining what factors accounted for this style. With this kind of question the best approach is once again to consider the "six factors" taught at the lower level WSET qualifications – climate, annual weather, soil, grape variety, viticulture, vinification. This will usually provide the information that examiners are looking for.

Describe the factors in the vineyard and winery that determine the style and quality of red Rioja.

What innovations have been made over the last thirty years?

Answers: 277

Passes: 163 (59%)

This was a reasonably good pass rate, but in terms of those who achieved a pass grade, this question clearly split those who did so with a basic pass from those who really knew the region and achieved merit or distinction. The examiner commented that many scripts were simply too shallow or concentrated too much on the second part of the question without much groundwork being done to set the scene in the first half of the question.

In terms of factors in the vineyard, the two big influences here are the characteristics of the three sub-regions in terms of climate and soil, and the use of different grape varieties. It is not sufficient to simply state which grape varieties are used, you need to explain in what way they contribute to the style of wine. Good candidates not only named the varieties (Tempranillo, Garnacha, Mazuela and Graciano) and described their characteristics and what they contribute to the wine, but also discussed the importance of other issues such as clones and choice of rootstocks. Other things to consider are possibly characteristics resulting from individual vintages (weather rather than climatic influence), canopy management, yield, age of vines, vineyard practices such as green harvesting, grape selection, use of sorting tables to remove poor quality fruit etc.

In the section on factors in the winery, the examiner was looking for discussion of practices like de-stemming versus whole bunch fermentation, use of indigenous yeast or cultivated yeast, tannin extraction such as through pre-fermentation cold soak, pumping over regimes, length of post fermentation maceration, temperature and rate of fermentation, proportion of press wine used, blending (could be cross regional, proportion of permitted grape varieties or blending of individual "lots") and finally ageing in terms of age, size and origin of casks, time spent in cask and duration of bottle age prior to release.

The second half of this question was important as it differentiated between those candidates who simply learnt the facts by rote and those who were commercially aware and followed developments in the region. Those who were really aware of changes taking place raised issues such as:

- The introduction of DOCa in 1991.
- The granting of permission to use experimental grapes (Cabernet Sauvignon, Syrah and Merlot) and research to reintroduce old indigenous varieties such as Maturana.
- Advances in canopy management such as leaf plucking and green harvesting.
- More accurate timing of the harvest for phenolic ripeness and introduction of ad hoc harvesting according to ripeness rather than harvesting the entire vineyard at the same time.
- The introduction of sorting tables.
- The reintroduction of carbonic maceration for some Joven wines to retain freshness.
- The introduction of stainless steel for improved temperature control during fermentation.
- The launch of single vineyard wines such as Contino.
- The change in balance of cask versus bottle maturation producing less oxidative, deeper coloured, fruitier wines.

- The emergence of “super-premium” wines, usually at Reserva level rather than Gran Reserva, made using techniques such as later harvesting, barrel fermentation, extended maceration and micro oxygenation for super-concentration.
- The massive recent investment in state-of-the-art wineries.

**With reference to the wines of Germany, write a paragraph on FIVE of the following:
(Each paragraph carries equal marks)**

- a) Spätburgunder
- b) Rheinhessen
- c) Geisenheim Institute
- d) Wehlener Sonnenuhr
- e) Silvaner
- f) Trockenbeerenauslese (TBA)

Answers: 164

Passes: 92 (56%)

Many candidates come unstuck when answering paragraph style questions. They mistakenly think this is an easier option than one 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 on all six paragraphs rather than five. Fourteen candidates did this. This inevitably means that each section is too brief to achieve high marks, and the candidate's efforts in answering the sixth paragraph are wasted as this is discounted when calculating the overall mark.

The breakdown of marks into grade bandings tells the whole story here. There were as many merit grades as pass grades (34 against 35) and a good number of distinction grades (23), so clearly some very good all-round candidates answered this question. However, the highest number of candidates (49) achieved a fail (unclassified) grade. These were the ones whose knowledge was simply too limited and presumably answered this question in the hope of picking up a few marks for the one or two sections they knew something about because they were unable to do justice to other questions where the scope was more focussed.

Not surprisingly, the paragraph on Trockenbeerenauslese provided the best opportunity for solid answers with candidates able to write knowledgeably about the style of wine and the conditions required to produce it. Silvaner and Geisenheim were the weakest sections as illustrated by the following submission:

“Silvaner – a white grape from Germany that produces dry white wines. It thrives in Frankenshock's climate, making medium + bodied wines, with medium alcohol, notes

of stone fruit while retaining good acidity. This grape is a crossing of Riesling with Pinot Gris."

This is short, superficial and contains errors. This candidate has confused the regions of Franken in Germany and Franschoek in South Africa. Good candidates commented on the characteristics of the grape describing it as vigorous, budding earlier than Riesling, susceptible to spring frost and not known for its disease resistance. However, they commented that it is reliable and high yielding. Some were aware that it is a parent variety in a number of modern vine crossings such as Bacchus, Optima, Rieslander, Scheurebe, Morio-Muscat and Ehrenfelser. Quite a few were aware that the best Silvaners come from Franken, where it is also referred to as "Franken Riesling", producing concentrated wines and also some late harvest, sweet wines despite its tendency towards rather mediocre wines in other parts of Germany.

Explain why the Pinot Noir wines from Nuits-Saint-Georges, Chile and Central Otago are so different.	
<i>Answers: 313</i>	<i>Passes: 175 (56%)</i>

This was clearly a popular question, probably because even those who were less confident about the sections on Central Otago and Chile felt they could do reasonably well on Burgundy. This was not necessarily the case. Those who failed generally did so because they relied on guesswork for Central Otago and Chile, or because their script was too short and therefore lacked detail in all sections.

Candidates were not specifically asked HOW these wines differ, but did need to show a basic understanding of this in order to explain WHY they differ. Key differences should have been identified as relating to quality and style and were attributable to factors such as soil, climate, viticulture and vinification. Candidates needed to show an understanding of this to answer this question competently.

<i>"What is the future for New World Chardonnay?" Discuss with reference to the wines of California and Australia giving examples of specific styles and price points to illustrate your observations.</i>	
<i>Answers: 226</i>	<i>Passes: 152 (67%)</i>

This was also a popular question – largely due to the mainstream subject matter and the rather open style of the question which gave good candidates plenty of scope to offer their own thoughts on this. However, this question did also need to be backed up by sound fact rather than pure speculation. The high pass rate was mostly made up of sound pass grades with very few really exciting scripts. Of the 226 who attempted this question, only four of these achieved a distinction grade.

A good starting point here would have been a short section, setting the scene, perhaps by looking briefly at the historical development of Chardonnay's popularity or discussing its current dominance within certain markets. Candidates certainly needed to outline the current position.

There were a number of trends that candidates could have considered in terms of looking to the future for New World Chardonnay. Ideally, the examiner was looking for a number of these to be addressed, but not necessarily all.

Production

The possible loss of important sources of fruit with climate change and the need to adapt to this. Future developments in winemaking techniques and technology. Cool climate viticulture and fruit expression. Reverse osmosis, alcohol reduction and/or removal.

Wine Style

Will the current trend for less oak continue? What about trends in alcohol levels? (Both of these are showing opposite trends in the two countries which formed the focus of this question.) What about market segmentation and identifying consumer tastes, especially for big-volume wines?

Position In The Market

Consumer demand. Commoditisation and discount pricing. Pitching of wines against other super-premium whites (eg single vineyard, cult winemakers). "Premiumisation" and how to achieve it (regionality, brand building, leaving entry level wines to other regions). Potential competitors (possibly Pinot Grigio, Rosé). At the premium level will the Riesling/Gruner Veltliner surge have an impact?)

Marketing

Brand building and maintaining markets with pressure on supply. Route to market, particularly when mainstream wine retail routes are consolidating. Packaging and all that this entails.

There was a lot of scope within the context of this question and the examiner was prepared to be flexible in the approach to marking. However, on the whole scripts were rather predictable. Far too many simply described the styles of wine produced in California and Australia with little discussion of trends. Where trends were identified, there was a tendency for oversimplification with many claiming that "customers have turned away from Chardonnay to Pinot Grigio and Sauvignon Blanc" when in volume terms there is no evidence yet to suggest that Pinot Grigio is killing off sales of Chardonnay.

Unit 4, Spirits of the World

The examination for Units 4, 5 and 6 require good all round knowledge for the candidate to do really well, as the tasting and theory paper carries equal weighting. However, the paragraph format of the theory question still allows those who give good responses in two sections (but may be weak in a third) 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. Nevertheless, it is still important to make sure that what is written relates specifically to the question as set. For example, if asked about the production of a particular style of spirit, there is no point describing at length the basic principles of distillation that apply to any style of spirit. See below for a specific example of this.

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 2007/08, in November, March and June. The overall pass rate for the unit as a whole for all these dates combined was 60%.

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

November 2007

Question 1 - Calvados, Poire Williams, Courvoisier VSOP	
Answers: 196	Passes: 126 (64%)

Results for this question were very sound with a large percentage of merit grades, but very few distinctions. Candidates were advised that all three samples were fruit spirits that relate to Unit 4. However some clearly did not read this, such as the candidate who identified the Courvoisier as Whisky. This is a foolish way to lose marks. The question often contains information that will help in identifying the samples accurately, so should be read carefully, underlining key words if necessary. Some candidates also lost marks because they did not use the correct version of the Systematic Approach to Tasting. There are three different versions of this which can be downloaded from the WSET website (www.wsetglobal.com), one for spirits, one for still wines and one for sparkling wines.

Question 2 – In relation to spirits, write a short paragraph on each of the following: a) Genever Gin b) Molasses c) Speyside	
Answers: 196	Passes: 79 (40%)

The low pass rate for this question shows clearly that a number of candidates who pass this unit with a borderline grade do so solely on the strength of their tasting notes. There were some dreadful responses here and the biggest problem was a lack of focus with many not answering the question as set. There were plenty of candidates who wrote at length about Gin in general rather than Genever, or rum production from start to finish rather than concentrating only on the production of molasses. Speyside, caused the most problems with many candidates clutching at straws and describing the entire production process for malt whiskies when a specific focus on Speyside was called for. There was uncertainty in terms of exactly where Speyside is with answers ranging from “east of Aberdeen”, “an island”, “south-west of Glasgow”, “east of Edinburgh”. It was also described as a city. Examples of Speyside distilleries were just as fanciful – “McMuffin in Dufftown”, “Glen Gran”, “Macallum”.

Some responses on Genever were just as poor with one candidate claiming “*Genever is not a great place to grow grapes, which is why it makes a spirit from molasses*”. There was a lot of confusion about the various styles of Genever, which were described as “auld”, “jaune”, “jovejn”, and perhaps most ludicrous of all “*a combination of mountwijn and ouj is known as koreanwijn*”.

In terms of molasses, one candidate claimed this is “*picked between January and October*”.

In amongst these poor scripts were some very good ones such as the extract below on Speyside:

“Speyside is one of the most important Whisky producing areas in the Highlands of Scotland.

Roughly located between Inverness in the north-west, south of Nairn on the north-east coast and going as far south as Dalwhinnie, the region centres around the river Spey and has the highest concentration of Whisky producers in Scotland, in a fairly small geographical region.

Whiskies produced as single malts in Speyside have a real softness and elegance about them with a lovely citric lift as demonstrated in one of the best known Whiskies, the Glenlivet.

As the majority of Whisky produced is single malt they have to be made from 100% malted barley. The malting process involves giving the barley 3 extended 48-hour periods soaking in water after which cool humid air is blown over the grain. This tricks the barley into germinating after which it is kiln dried. Normally in Speyside an

unpeated malted barley would be used. The aforementioned process would not take place in Speyside itself, but in one of the big maltings, made to specific instructions.

The process of double distilling for Speyside Whisky is the same as for other scotch single malts. The ageing process is also similar to the other malts where a combination of ex-bourbon and ex-sherry casks may be used.

In terms of sales, Speyside ranks highest of the malt Whiskies with brands such as Glenlivet, Glenfiddich and Macallan all falling into that category.

Many of the Speyside malts are important constituents of Whisky blends from Scotland, adding a soft elegance."

This candidate has indicated where Speyside is, explained what it produces and described the style with reference to specific examples. Although the candidate has strayed into a discussion of the malting process which is common to all Whisky, there is also plenty of information specific to Speyside to counterbalance this and guarantee a good allocation of marks.

March 2008

Question 1 – Havana Club Añejo Blanco, Mount Gay Eclipse Rum, Myers Original Dark Rum	
Answers: 189	Passes: 149 (79%)

This was an excellent pass rate with a good number of candidates gaining merit and distinction grades.

As with the November paper, candidates were given guidance in the question, in this case that all three samples were Rum. There was a feeling that this tended to lead to rather stock descriptions with some candidates describing what they expected of the samples rather than what was actually there. This led to some good marks in what were actually not very convincing descriptions in some cases – possibly one explanation for the higher pass rate.

The concluding section of this question was slightly different to past questions, asking candidates to describe how production of each Rum differed from the other two in terms of determining the style. On the whole this was answered well, with most candidates adapting to the new style question with ease. However, a number simply churned out the usual concluding information relating to “assessment of quality” and “price” even though this has not been asked for. They were wasting their time as no marks were available for this.

The following candidate approached this final section in exactly the right way:

“Spirit no 1: Havana Club Anejo Blanco

Describe how production of this Rum differs from the other two in terms of determining the style: This was made using a column still with probably no barrel ageing at all (or very little). Any colour would have been removed using charcoal filtration.

Spirit no 2: Mount Gay Eclipse Rum

Describe how production of this Rum differs from the other two in terms of determining the style: This could have been made using a column still or a pot still (or could be a blend of both methods). It has spent some time in oak which has added complexity. Colour is likely to have come from this oak ageing rather than addition of caramel.

Spirit no 3: Myers Original Dark Rum

Describe how production of this Rum differs from the other two in terms of determining the style: This Rum has a lot more weight and complexity to it. This implies it is more likely to have been produced in a pot still and may also have had “dunder” added to it. There is evidence of ageing in oak and the deep colour will be the result of the addition of caramel.”

The trick here was not to describe how the three Rums are made, but to explain how the process **differs** in each case.

Question 2 – In relation to spirits, write a paragraph on each of the following: a) Anis flavoured spirits b) Districts of Armagnac c) Peat	
Answers: 189	Passes: 95 (50%)

Once again, the pass rate for the theory question is considerably lower than for the tasting question with only three candidates from a total of 189 achieving a distinction grade.

Most candidates were able to write convincingly about “peat”, explaining how it is used and the resulting effect, but other sections were weak. In terms of Armagnac districts there were countless versions of the spelling of Ténarèze, with the biggest howler being “Tenerife”. Other districts were also misspelt with “Bas-relief” instead of Bas-Armagnac and, in one instance, bizarrely, “Derrière”. When it came to “anise flavoured spirits”, very often the basics were there in the form of a list of the various products and styles, but the detail relating to how these are made or with what they are flavoured was usually missing.

The following is a good example of this:

“A number of anis flavoured spirits exist like Sambuca (Italy), Ouzo (Greece), Pastis (France). The basis for the spirits in the above mentioned examples is wine coming from the wine lake in the EU and is distilled.

In order to obtain the optimal flavour of anis, it is necessary that the anis seeds are extracted by the distillates, which is done with the highly concentrated (>60% alcohol) spirit.

After extraction, the anis flavoured spirit is adjusted to approx 40% alcohol.”

This is seriously inadequate in terms of length and contains very little of any value whereas the following script provides plenty of good detail, although there are some minor errors as well:

“Anis flavoured spirits have been flavoured with either/or both, star anis, green anis. Also with the addition of fennel. Examples of these are Absinthe (probably the most well known) which is typically green in colour and has been distilled using star anis/green anis and fennel. It used to be made with wormwood but this has since been stopped. It is made using a column still and the botanicals are distilled with the neutral spirit. Anis flavoured spirits can either have the anis macerated with neutral spirit then blended, anis distilled with the spirit, redistilled or added afterwards. Ouzo is anis based and is made in Greece (that is part of its regulation). Pastis and Pernod are from France and these anise spirits are made as follows. One type of Pastis is made with 48 botanicals. Of these, the dry ones are macerated with neutral spirit and left for 3 months. At this point they are redistilled with the anise based distillate and left to marry for one month. Pernod is distilled with liquorice to make the distinctly rich flavour of aniseed, liquorice and toffee.

Besides France and the Mediterranean, anise based spirits can also be found in Scandinavia. This uses cumin as its other main botanical.

One characteristic of these spirits is that with the addition of water they louch. Louching is where the spirit goes cloudy. It is in fact the anise botanical releasing its essential oils.”

June 2008

Question 1 – Stolichnaya Vodka, Gran Control de Guarda Pisco, Dalwhinnie 15 year old Malt Whisky	
Answers: 150	Passes: 87 (58%)

It was no surprise that the best descriptions were those for the Dalwhinnie with its obvious peaty, iodine, medicinal aromas. The Pisco threw some but although we were not expecting many to identify this accurately, it was actually fairly easy to describe because of the distinctive and complex aromas and flavours. This was often mistaken for Tequila, but there was no vegetal characteristic on the nose or

palate to support this conclusion. Most of these candidates missed the key grapey character of this spirit.

As with the March examination, we changed the emphasis in the concluding section of this paper, asking candidates to comment on the method of production for each of the three spirits. Obviously those who failed to identify the spirits correctly invariably lost marks in this section, but as this carried only two marks, the damage was minimal provided they gained solid marks for the description.

The following candidate wrote an excellent tasting note for the Pisco and achieved high marks in this paper:

“SPIRIT No.2 Gran Control de Guarda Pisco

Appearance: *Pale lemon/gold with green lights and a narrow water-white rim. Thick tears.*

Nose: *Medium (+) intensity, showing some development. Initially, grapey like Muscat and floral with fruit aromas of apple, citrus, yellow plum, peach, pineapple and tropical fruit. Also hints of honey, vanilla and cedar. Water brings out a waxy, apple skin aroma and rubber notes. Slightly sharp spicity aroma.*

Palate: *Dry with sharp, peppery alcohol and a medium body. Medium (+) intensity grapey and floral (elderflower) aromas with lemon, grapefruit, sherbet, liquorice and peach. Smoky, spicy and slightly vanilla notes with creamy, oily texture - possibly some oak. Medium (+) length, some complexity. Balanced finish.*

Specific style of spirit: *Pisco*

Distilled from (raw material): *Grapes*

Method of production: *Grape juice is fermented then distilled in a pot still before aging in oak casks.”*

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

- a) Dark Rum**
- b) Tennessee Whiskey**
- c) Mezcal**

Answers: 150

Passes: 101 (67%)

Results for this theory question were considerably better than in either November or March. However, even here, there were relatively few really exceptional scripts with only six achieving distinction. Nevertheless, there was plenty of evidence that candidates had studied the syllabus for Unit 4 well. This made the exceptions to the rule (where students were clearly “blagging” their way through the question) particularly obvious. However, these were largely in the minority.

Most candidates were comfortable with the section on Mezcal, although there was a lot of detailed discussion of Tequila production. Unless candidates clearly outlined the difference in terms of legal structure between Mezcal and Tequila, it was difficult to justify the awarding of a pass grade. They also needed to clearly describe the differences in stylistic and quality terms to convince the examiner.

The usual pitfalls were there – placing too much emphasis on describing how Rum is produced rather than limiting this specifically to production of Dark Rum. Likewise, no pass was awarded where candidates simply described the distillation process of a grain whiskey with no specific reference to the particular characteristics of Tennessee Whiskey such as type of grain used, mention of “backset”, “sour mashing”, “the doubler” or the “Lincoln County Process”.

Unit 5, Sparkling Wines

The examination for Unit 5 was run on three separate occasions in the academic year 2007/08, in November, March and June. The overall pass rate for the unit as a whole for all these dates combined was 63%.

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

November 2007

Question 1 - Yalumba Dunes Pinot Noir/Chardonnay NV, Freixenet Cordon Negro, Waitrose Blanc de Noirs Brut NV	
<i>Answers: 181</i>	<i>Passes: 101 (56%)</i>

This was not a particularly high pass rate and may have been due to the fact that there was no distinctly aromatic wine in this line up such as Asti or Riesling Sekt. Of the three samples, it was the Champagne, with its more defined character, that gave candidates more to comment on and therefore more opportunity to gain marks.

The examiner commented that candidates often threw marks away by making no attempt to identify the country and region of production, or wasted time and effort with unnecessary explanations of reasoning for this or choice of grape variety when this had not been asked for. Quality was also often poorly assessed with too many focussing on maturity and price rather than analysing the wine's character and relating this to the various quality levels identified in the Systematic Approach to Tasting Technique.

Compare the following sets of quality assessment for each of the wines, one poor and the other very good.

WINE No 1: Yalumba Dunes

Poor assessment - *"The quality is good. There is balance between the fruity character and acidity"*

Good assessment - *"Acceptable quality. Although well made, it is too simplistic and lacking in concentration for good quality. Lowish acidity level and warm alcohol makes this rather clumsy in style and lacking in elegance."*

WINE No. 2: Freixenet

Poor assessment - *"The quality is good. Good acidity and nice fruit character"*

Good assessment - *“Good quality showing balance between acidity and fruit. Simple but well made style. Some evidence of autolysis gives a limited degree of complexity. The length (medium) points to the wine’s commercial style.”*

WINE No. 3: Waitrose Champagne

Poor assessment - *“Acceptable. Acidity could be more but some complexity.”*

Good assessment - *“Good quality wine with strong autolytic character indicative of traditional method. The mushroom note and clear balance of acidity and autolytic character point to Champagne but it lacks the richness, elegance and ripeness of a vintage although there is a degree of finesse and complexity.”*

The difference between these is that the first is short and vague, whilst the second identifies characteristics in the wine that support the quality assessment given to the wine, in some cases also explaining why it is not better than the level suggested.

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

- a) Cremant
- b) Asti DOCG
- c) Champagne pruning systems

Answers: 181

Passes: 79 (44%)

As with the Unit 4 results, in comparison with the tasting paper, submissions for the theory question were poor. This high failure rate was almost certainly due to lack of detail on the Champagne pruning systems. The examiner was expecting candidates to firstly name the four permitted systems (Cordon du Royat, Taille Chablis, Guyot and Vallée de la Marne), and then describe these, mentioning any particular advantages or disadvantages. Clearly, this was going to challenge all but the very best candidates, but the Examination Panel did expect candidates who had studied the syllabus and course notes to have a rudimentary knowledge of these.

Unfortunately many did not, as the following script shows:

“In the Champagne region there are four pruning methods used but the Taille and the Gordon Royal methods are most used and widely adapted. That means that in the period of January until early March the canes are pruned and on each cane 2 buds are left. During the period of growing there will also be a pruning time (more green) to let the other shoots grow more.”

March 2008

Question 1 - Vouvray Demi-sec NV, Penley Estate Pinot Noir/Chardonnay 2001, Asti Martini NV	
<i>Answers: 237</i>	<i>Passes: 171 (72%)</i>

Clearly the inclusion of the Asti was a lifeline for many candidates with a large number of borderline passes scraping through on marks achieved for this wine. Nevertheless, despite the very aromatic nature of this wine, a number still failed to describe this well, using general terms such as “muscaty” which does not really tell the examiner what the wine smells of or tastes like. Only more descriptive terms such as grapey, perfumed etc can do this.

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. In some cases, sugar and acid levels were poorly interpreted or were wildly wrong, particularly in the case of the Vouvray.

Equally disappointing are the candidates who obviously recognise what the wine is, yet fail to describe it well or accurately. The following candidate did exactly this with the Asti.

“Nose: Clean, pronounced intensity with fully developed aromas. Aromatics of citrus fruits, green apples, pears, steely, stoney.

Palate: Sweet, low acid with delicate mousse, medium (-) alcohol with a medium (-) body. Flavour of fully ripe fruit (caramelised apples and pears), banana, melons, kiwi and white peaches.”

This candidate identified the wine as “Moscato d’Asti” from Italy, yet no-one reading this description is likely to make this connection. This candidate may know what the wine is but the examiner reading this note has no way of knowing whether this is just a lucky guess – no real tasting skill has been demonstrated.

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.

<p>Question 2 – In relation to sparkling wine, write a paragraph on each of the following:</p> <p>a) Montagne de Reims b) California c) Lambrusco</p>	
Answers: 236	Passes: 148 (63%)

63% is a good pass rate for a compulsory theory question and there were certainly some very good scripts here with one candidate achieving 97%. However, at the other end of the scale, there were some truly awful responses with the lowest mark at 8%.

In general, finding enough to write about the Montagne de Reims was a problem for a large number of candidates, many of whom resorted to a description of the traditional method on the basis that it was relevant to Champagne. This was pointless as no marks were available for this. Responses on California were very sound on the whole, but there were some very elementary mistakes when it came to Lambrusco as the following extracts show:

“It is one of the only wines that is not made from Vitis Vinifera, but from Vitis Lambrusco”

“Lambrusco is sparkling red from France.”

The following submission is very good showing strong commercial awareness:

“Lambrusco is a grape variety which has many sub-species and is grown to make the sparkling Italian wine of the same name, mostly in Emilia Romana. The provinces of Modena, Reggio nell’Emilia and Parma are the most important zones. The wine is made using mostly tank method, but there are some small scale traditional method winemakers left. The wine will have low alcohol, indeed some wine is made too low to be called wine by EU regulations. The wines are usually off-dry to sweet, rosé in colour with a creamy mousse. They do not age well (typical of tank method) and are best drunk young and fresh. The wine was very popular in the 1970’s and 1980’s in America and high volumes of wine were produced and mostly exported. The popularity has waned in recent years, and the wine is not well regarded but the traditional wines go very well with the local food when available. There have even been white wines introduced which have all the colour filtered out (along with a lot of the flavour).”

June 2008

Question 1 – Sainsbury's Blanc de Noirs Brut, Billecart-Salmon Brut Rosé, Champagne Henriot Souverain Brut	
<i>Answers: 146</i>	<i>Passes: 90 (62%)</i>

A good pass rate with a solid number of merit grades but very few distinctions. With three Champagnes in this tasting, the emphasis was clearly on looking at these from the point of view of quality. Once again, a number of candidates failed to read the question, which told them that all three wines were from the Champagne region and although they were not asked to identify the region of production, the assessment of quality was often devoted to explaining why the wine was a Cava or an Australian transfer method sparkling wine. Others spent time deliberating over tank method versus traditional method and identifying wines as from the New World, Prosecco, the Loire, Burgundy etc.

Price estimation was another weak area. Even some of those who had acknowledged that these were Champagnes put prices as low as £5 or \$10 US. Champagne is never that cheap. The supermarket own label Champagne was often mistaken for Vintage Champagne. The use of black grapes did give it a certain weight, but although it had clear autolytic character, it lacked the richness, elegance and ripeness of a vintage Champagne. It also had a certain confectioned note and a slight bitterness on the finish together with relatively high dosage. This wine was only half the price of the Henriot Souverain despite both being non vintage Brut Champagne. The latter had a tautness and elegance that was missing in the supermarket Champagne along with longer length.

Question 2 – In relation to sparkling wine, write a paragraph on each of the following:	
a) Liqueur d'Expedition b) Chenin Blanc c) Freixenet	
<i>Answers: 146</i>	<i>Passes: 88 (60%)</i>

There was the inevitable confusion here between liqueur d'expedition and liqueur de tirage. Thirty four candidates made this error. Another common problem was writing about Cava in general rather than "Freixenet" the Cava producer. Putting these problems to one side however, there were some very good responses, particularly from those who appeared to have learnt the various levels of dosage used in Champagne production and were able to quote these almost spot on. A significant number also had a good understanding of "reaction maillard". Some good responses referred to the role of liqueur d'expedition in transfer and tank method wines as opposed to those who only considered it in respect of traditional method. This is an example of the difference between a candidate who achieves a basic pass grade and those achieving higher grades.

Many candidates struggled with the paragraph on Freixenet. A good place to start was to explain what it is, (eg the largest exporter of Cava in the world, producing 20% of Spanish sparkling wine), where it is (San Sadurni de Noya in Penedes), what it produces (ie what products and what these products are like), where it produces these (ie, the key production centres of Freixenet SA, Segura Viudas SA, Castellblanch SA and Torelavit SA including international subsidiaries of Champagne Henri Abelé, Gloria Ferrer in Carneros and Doña Dolores in Mexico) and finally, how it produces these products (not a full-blown description of the traditional method, but issues that are relevant to Freixenet such as their preference for indigenous varieties rather than Chardonnay or its pioneering work in the development of gyropalettes).

Unit 6, Fortified Liqueur Wines

The examination for Unit 6 was run on three separate occasions in the academic year 2007/08, 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 2007

Question 1 - Maury Hors d'Age Domaine Poudroux NV, Smith Woodhouse Ruby Port, La Gitana Manzanilla	
<i>Answers: 142</i>	<i>Passes: 93 (65%)</i>

Identifying the Maury was a bit of a challenge in this tasting, but the other two samples were certainly easy to spot which balanced out the overall result. There were three very significant characteristics that were the key to identifying these samples, the rancio character on the VDN, the spirity note on the Port and the flor on the Sherry. Picking these up made a big difference to the overall result.

Question 2 – In relation to fortified wine, write a short paragraph on each of the following: a) Montilla Moriles b) Port Grape Varieties c) Oxidation	
<i>Answers: 142</i>	<i>Passes: 71 (50%)</i>

This was not an impressive result, particularly bearing in mind that there were two very mainstream topics in this question in terms of “Port grape varieties” and “oxidation”.

The key points for these three sections were as follows:

Montilla Moriles

Location: In the province of Córdoba (Andalucia) in Spain.

Climate: Hot, sunny, semi-arid and continental. Summer temperatures can reach 45°C. Short cold winters and no coastal influence.

Soils: Chalky albariza (alberos) in the centre of the region but most is reddish, sandy loam (ruedos)

Grape varieties: Pedro Ximenez accounts for 70% of production with Lairén and Muscat of Alexandria making up the rest. Palomino is not successful here.

Viticulture: Bush vines (en vaso) with low yields of 40-50hl/ha.

Vinification: Produces both fortified and unfortified wines in the style of sherry.

Around half of these wines are not fortified. Fino styles are not fortified as they achieve 15% abv naturally. Fino and Amontillado styles are made from free-run juice and mature under a film of flor in cement or earthenware tinajas before being moved to a solera. Due to the heat and the distance from cooling Atlantic winds, the flor is less thick, so wines lack the finesse of those of Jerez. Oxidative styles can be aged at a natural abv of 13-15% or fortified to 16%+ abv. Oloroso styles are made from pressed juice, aged in solera and become dark and pungent. Minimum ageing is 2 years, but most are older.

Styles: Can be labelled as Fino, Amontillado, Oloroso etc, if sold within Spain. For other EU countries, they must be labelled Pale Dry, Medium Dry, Medium Sweet, Pale Cream, Cream. Excellent PX wines are produced from sun-dried grapes. Wines are generally richer than those from Jerez and regarded as a cheaper alternative to Sherry.

Port Grapes

Touriga Nacional: Low yields, high colour and tannin, intensely aromatic and a very pronounced fruit character. Considered the finest variety.

Touriga Franca (Francesa): Good heat resistance (suited to the hotter, south-facing slopes and therefore good in dry years). Gives perfume, softness and roundness to the blend.

Tinta Roriz (Tempranillo, Aragones): Medium colour, tannin and concentration. Gives finesse and length to the final wine. Reasonable yields. Performs well in cooler years.

Tinta Barroca: High colour, tannin, alcohol and acid. Good structure and body. Good on less hot, north-facing slopes. First of the top five to be harvested, so good in years with wet autumns.

Tinta Cão: High in extract so gives good flavour and structure, particularly for wines destined for long ageing, but has low yields.

Oxidation

What the examiner was looking for here was an understanding of how oxidation occurs, acknowledgement of the fact that in the case of some fortified wines it is deliberately encouraged, a description of how it is achieved and controlled, evidence of the effect it has on the style of wine in terms of aroma and flavour compounds and colour, and finally some examples of classic oxidised fortified wines.

March 2008

Question 1 – Noval 20 year old Port, Mavrodaphne of Patras, Valdespino Pedro Ximénex El Candado	
<i>Answers: 217</i>	<i>Passes: 157 (72%)</i>

This was a very good pass rate but very few distinction grades and mirrors almost exactly the result in the March examination in 2007.

Candidates sitting this paper were told that all three wines were from different countries. Despite this, there were still those who insisted on identifying both wines 1 and 2 as styles of Port.

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. Many candidates described wines of acceptable quality as “commercial wines” or wines of commercial quality. This is not correct. Ch Petrus is a commercial wine as is Yellowtail, yet neither of these have any similarity in terms of quality assessment.

The PX proved to be the “saviour” of many candidates as they were able to not only identify this wine correctly but also write accurate tasting notes. However, most struggled with the Mavrodaphne, with the inevitable confusion with Ruby Port. The majority of those who realised it was not Port (not enough alcohol) thought it was therefore a VDN from the Rhône or Languedoc-Roussillon. This was not an illogical error to make.

Question 2 – In relation to fortified wine, write a paragraph on each of the following: a) Beneficio b) Muscat c) Amontillado	
<i>Answers: 217</i>	<i>Passes: 124 (57%)</i>

This question certainly sorted out the good from the bad with an equal number of candidates achieving pass and fail (unclassified) grades and a similar split between merit and fail. The section on Beneficio was certainly the reason for this with 87 candidates making no attempt to answer this at all. At the very least, they should have known that it was the annual authorisation by the IVDP which determines how much Port can be produced in any given year, even if they were unable to expand on the detail.

In contrast, the section on Muscat allowed candidates to cover a fairly wide spectrum in terms of relevant information. The key points were to identify the characteristics of the grape and discuss the various fortified wines in which it is used.

June 2008

Question 1 – Henriques & Henriques 10 year old Verdelho, Lustau Old East India Solera Sherry, Yalumba Museum Muscat	
<i>Answers: 206</i>	<i>Passes: 134 (65%)</i>

A number of candidates simply did not read this question, which stated that all three wines were from different countries. Nevertheless, this was a good result most notably because only a small percentage of candidates did so badly that they achieved fail (unclassified) grades. The Liqueur Muscat was assessed well in nearly all cases with most placing this in Australia. A few candidates identified it as a Muscat based VDN but placed it in France rather than Australia. It was too dark in colour and too heavy for a Southern French Muscat VDN or one from the Rhône. The Madeira was often mistaken for Sherry. The high acidity is always the clue with Madeira along with the burnt caramel, rancio aromas resulting from the estufagem process.

Question 2 – In relation to fortified wine, write a paragraph on each of the following:	
a) Grenache b) Terracing in the Douro c) Pale Cream Sherry	
<i>Answers: 205</i>	<i>Passes: 157 (77%)</i>

This was an excellent result with 40% of candidates achieving pass with merit. However, at the other extreme, more candidates were awarded fail (unclassified) than fail, so there was a clear split here between those candidates who were very comfortable with this question and those who were not.

Pale Cream Sherry was the section where candidates struggled as the following example illustrates:

"Pale Cream Sherry is a sweetened Fino. Fino is sweetened with concentrated grape juice. It is a sweet wine showing grapey, nutty character. It was invented by Croft which is a Port and Sherry shipper."

There is some correct information here but it is far too short and simplistic, and quite frankly barely good enough for Advanced Certificate level. This candidate is clearly underperforming in this qualification. The key points here were as follows:

- Style of Sherry pioneered by Croft in the 1970's with 'Croft Original'.
- Designed to combine the perceived sophisticated appearance of a dry sherry with a more palatable sweetness.

- Its commercial success led most major Sherry Bodegas to introduce a pale cream.
- Essentially it is a sweetened Fino.
- It is typically a blend of fino and sweet wine, normally adjusted with rectified concentrated grape must (RCGM) and fresh Palomino must which has been vacuum concentrated.
- The colour is removed with activated charcoal.
- It has between 45 – 115 g/l residual sugar

This basically takes what the candidate above has written and puts more flesh on the bones. This together with an extensive tasting note, describing the pale colour, medium intensity, slightly fruity aroma with notes of almonds, citrus, apple peel and a savoury, yeasty note from the flor, the medium-sweet palate with low acidity but a pronounced tangy character, medium alcohol and a dry finish, would have been enough to secure a pass here.