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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 sub-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 2008-09 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 2009

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS
Comparative Pass Rates by Paper

Paper	2009		2008		2007		2006		2005		2004
Unit 1 CWA	(1)		(2)								
Unit 1 Case Study	June 66%	March 77%	Not applicable								
Unit 2	81%		84%		81%		84%		79%		79%
Unit 3 tasting	June 78%	Jan 76%	June 69%	Jan 63%	June 63%	Jan 55%	June 49%	Jan 55%	June 62%	Jan 48%	June 59%
Unit 3 theory	June 59%	Jan 53%	June 63%	Jan 50%	June 59%	Jan 42%	June 54%	Jan 42%	June 41%	Jan 24%	June 27%
Unit 4	64%		60%		70%		61%		69%		76%
Unit 5	74%		63%		69%		61%		58%		70%
Unit 6	67%		61%		61%		67%		45%		65%

NOTES:

- (1) Individual pass rates for each title are given within the body of this report.
- (2) 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 2008/09 EXAMINATION CYCLE

Unit 1 - the Global Business of Alcoholic Beverages

Coursework assignments that form part of 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 found in the other units. Here we aim to assess the candidates' ability to carry out structured research on a given topic and present their findings in an academic format. The 2008/09 academic year saw the introduction of the new Case Study assessment for Unit 1 and this is proving very successful with good pass rates being achieved.

Transition arrangements remain in place until **31 July 2010** at which point all candidates who have not yet obtained a pass grade for Unit 1 under the old format will transfer to the current system of one coursework assignment and one closed book case study examination. For these transitional candidates, previous pass grades will be transferred 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 of 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 a written 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 by any means.

Unit 3 – Wines of the World

Pass rates for Unit 3 in June continue to be slightly better than in January, primarily due to the larger percentage of candidates re-sitting in January. Pass rates for the theory paper have settled in the mid to high 50's which is historically the norm for this qualification. Results for the June Tasting Papers were particularly good.

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, plus 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 not reach their full potential in the examination.

Commercial awareness

Unit 1, The Global Business of Wines and Other Beverages specifically examines candidates’ commercial awareness through the means of coursework assignments and 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 commercial focus and a pass cannot be achieved simply by reiterating facts relating to production methods. Titles for the 2009/10 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 2010/11 academic year will be published at the end of May 2010.

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 through “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, here are some general comments about the grading of coursework assignments:

All assignments are graded out of 100. Of this, 20 marks are available for the candidate's handling of the assignment. This includes the diversity of the bibliography, the presentation of the work in terms of spelling, grammar and legibility and the structure and style of the assignment. The latter incorporates issues 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 cases their content is not included in the marking process. In addition, 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 are 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 sole work of the individual submitting them 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

Creating a new brand of Gin or Vodka	
Required content and suggested approach The spirits industry is brand led, competitive and ruthless, but also exciting and innovative. This is due in part to a number of successful new product launches in recent years. However, for each successful new brand, there are those that fail to make it onto the shop shelves or disappear shortly after their launch never to be seen again. The key to a successful new brand lies in a thoroughly researched and well executed brand plan and this is a skill that cannot be underestimated in today's market.	
<i>Answers: 104</i>	<i>Passes: 90 (87%)</i>

Although the pass rate was high here, most assignments fell into a very narrow band of either pass or merit grade, with only nine candidates achieving distinction. A common reason for the relatively low marks was that assignments were often too shallow. Most candidates dealt with the brand plan itself reasonably well, although very few wrote a full and extensive brand plan – in many cases the “four Ps” were all that was covered. Other sections of the assignment were often weaker. Marks were also lost where candidates failed to include a bibliography or declared word-count. A number of scripts were submitted below the minimum word-count and were graded fail as a result.

Some candidates failed to differentiate between the steps undertaken in identifying an opportunity in the market and the various stages of the brand plan itself. This meant they invariably failed to address the issues the examiner was looking for in section c) “Understanding the market”. Many candidates suggested the use of the SWOT analysis as being key here as well as the importance of “knowing your competition”, and considering what can be learnt from their success or failure. Very few referred to the importance of research at this early stage as a means of exploring the potential reaction to, and likely uptake of any new product. This should certainly be done before expending cost and manpower on any brand plan.

The brand plan itself should have covered the following key stages:

- Set the objective – what are you going to create and why? What is the target market, consumer demographics? What is the product positioning?
- Set the budget – you need to know potential costs, unit retail price and projected volume sales
- Complete full competitive analysis – which products are you competing against, how will you ensure success against these?

- Define the “wet goods” (what’s in the bottle) – what is it, why, what are the USP’s?
- Design packaging – this can be a “make or break” decision, image is important, SKU’s
- Test and trialling – what methodology should be used, quantitative vs qualitative?
- Distribution channels – which ones to use, why and how?
- Product launch – what tactics to use to tell customers about the product (eg advertising, sampling, press, sponsorship etc)
- Ongoing marketing and sales strategy and tactics – how to keep momentum following initial launch
- Define “critical success factors” – essential to measure if the launch has been successful or not
- Continued financial analysis – identify projected breakeven and payback points.

Very few candidates covered all these points, and this was the reason for the low number of distinction grades.

Assignment Title 2

Glittering Prizes or Fool's Gold? – How useful are wine competitions?	
Required content and suggested approach The number of wine competitions worldwide is considerable. An increasing number of labels now feature awards gained in these tasting competitions. Some people feel they provide a useful tool to aid consumers in making informed purchasing decisions while others view them simply as a marketing gimmick.	
<i>Answers: 213</i>	<i>Passes: 201 (94%)</i>

The high pass rate belies the fact that many of these submissions were predictable and lacking personal input. On the whole, candidates discussed the criticisms and advantages and disadvantages of competitions well, and some had undertaken personal canvassing of key members of the wine and spirit trade, which certainly gave their work an edge. It was clear from the submissions that a large number of candidates are very dubious about the real value of wine and spirit competitions and many felt very strongly about the “Parkerisation” of wines submitted in competitions. There was strong evidence that a number of candidates simply downloaded information on the various competitions from the relevant websites rather than researching these and then explaining them in their own words. This made these assignments very clinical, uninspiring and rather boring to read. This was also particularly obvious in the case of those candidates for whom English is not their mother tongue. Those who achieved higher marks made a real attempt to bring more of a sense of interest to this section of their assignment. The Sydney International Wine Competition was a very popular choice. This also tended to bring a welcome bit of variety to many scripts due to the different approach taken in this competition which focuses heavily on wine and food matching rather than the judgement of wine in isolation.

The following script achieved high marks. It is well written and covers all sections of the brief well. The bibliography has been reproduced as well, as this is a good example of extensive research, not simply because of its length, but because of its diversity.

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Introduction:

It's difficult to pinpoint exactly when wine competitions arose. However, the reason why competitions began was to award excellence to the best quality wines, giving them an exalted status in society and internationally. For centuries wine has been assessed and judged especially in countries with a strong wine industry. The most famous wine competition has to be the Judgement of Paris in 1976. International wine competitions originated before this with Ljubljana in Slovenia claiming to be the home of the first in 1955.¹ The UK followed shortly after with the International Wine and Spirit Competition (IWSC) in 1969, then the International Wine Challenge (IWC) in 1984 and more recently the Decanter World Wine Awards in 2004.

¹ Marjian Kyeder, *Medals from the International Wine Competition in Ljubljana have shone for 50 years* (April 1, 2004) www.tonyaspler.com

Competitions, how they work:

To understand how wine competitions work, it's worth looking at two different international competitions.

International Wine and Spirit Competition (IWSC)

The IWSC, founded in 1969 and given its modern title in 1978, was the first competition to judge wine not only on organoleptic assessment but also chemical analysis. International judges are invited from all aspects of the wine industry including MWs, ² educators and buyers, all highly knowledgeable in their field. Judging takes place between March and September with northern and southern hemisphere wines assessed separately. Wines can be submitted by producers, importers and retailers at a cost of £120 per entry. Four samples of each product are required and wines must be from an identifiable batch/lot and available in commercial quantities to prevent "show products" being entered.

The wines are assessed in two stages. The first is a blind tasting where wines are assessed in numbered flights categorised by region/area, variety/style/ type and vintage. Judges assess on quality, balance, and typicity and also consumer expectations. Marks are given out of 100 and the panel's average score determines the medal category with 75-79.9 receiving a bronze, 80-89.9 a silver and 90-100 a gold. Products with the highest scores in each flight are also awarded "Best in Class" and re-tasted for national and international trophies. To prevent palate fatigue the number of products is limited per session and if a sample isn't showing well another will be provided on request. Where judges are unable to reach a majority decision, flights are referred to another panel.

All award winning wines undertake a technical analysis by independent laboratory, Corkwise, testing free and total sulphur dioxide, volatile acidity, alcohol, sugar etc. Products failing to comply with EU regulations can have points deducted or in the worst case forfeit the award. The IWSC is the only competition of its kind to use technical analysis as an integral part of its judging process.

Sydney International Wine Competition

The Sydney International Wine Competition, established in 1982, is completely different in that it assesses wine for its ability to complement food. Its main objective is to highlight the best quality wines for dining occasions. It takes place annually in October, costing \$99 per entry with six samples of each wine required. Since 2004, entries have been capped at 2,000 wines, determined on 'first come' basis. Technical and “style” judges from all over the world are used with the latter assessing how well the wines complement food.

Initially wines are judged by six first phase panels in groups categorised by variety or blend and vintage. Where an agreement can't be reached, wines are reassessed by a chief judge who decides what will advance onto the next stage. No awards are granted during this stage and only about 20% of the highest quality goes through.

The finalists are grouped into 13 “style categories” of similar palate weight from light, medium to full bodied dry white and red wines. Additional categories cover sweet, aromatic and rosé styles etc. For the first time the wines are assessed against others and also alongside dishes of similar palate weight and flavour intensity. Combined scores of the two assessments determine the award given.

Out of the finalists, only the top 10% (i.e 200 wines) receive a Blue-Gold award. The highest 100 Blue-Gold awards are also categorised in the Top 100 wine awards and the next 5% receive Highly Commended awards. Therefore, only 15% of total entries receive any recognition, which enables the competition to keep its credibility.

Are criticisms of wine competitions unfair or valid?

Due to the very nature of wine competitions, inevitably they'll receive some criticism e.g. there are too many, the significance and provenance of most is relatively unknown, they're too expensive to enter and results can be inconsistent.

It is surprising how many wine competitions take place globally each year, ranging in size from the IWC to the more remote national and regional ones e.g. National Women's wine competition. Producers and retailers alike use success in these competitions as a marketing tool, resulting in a plethora of wine bottles featuring medals. As competitions expand eventually the market place will become saturated and the top accolades devalued. Owners of Guy Anderson believe that there are so many competitions now that awards are losing their significance and retailers are promoting them less.³

Jancis Robinson attributes this problem to the fact that competitions are too generous with bronze medals and commendations.⁴ In the Decanter awards this year out of 9219 wines submitted, 5684 wines (64%) won a medal from a trophy to a commendation.⁵ Wine writer, Martin Isark claims that competitions do this; "because it encourages wine houses, agents and retailers to enter their drinks and the more entries the more money for the organisers."⁶

There is a valid argument that wine competitions are a good way of generating money for the publishing houses e.g. the Decanter awards for IPC Media and IWC for William Reed Publishing. The cost of entering, varying from £75-120 per bottle, can be a heavy burden on smaller producers. For larger commercial brands this is less of a problem and they will often submit all their wines to increase their chances of winning. In 2006, in a bid to cut down on excessively speculated entered wines the IWC started exposing poor wines also.

Some criticise competitions for having little significance as they aren't representative of the wine world and consumers have little understanding of the style or quality of an awarded wine. The first point was a contentious issue highlighted recently by Decanter readers who wrote in criticising the magazine for claiming that its awards highlighted the best wines in the world in their region and type. It somewhat failed to

³ Purple pages 13 May 2006 *International Wine Challenge V Decanter World Wine Awards*

⁴ Purple pages 13 May 2006 *International Wine Challenge V Decanter World Wine Awards*

⁵ Decanter, October issue 2008

⁶ The Times online 10/11/08 *Don't be taken in by prize-winning wines*

add that this was only out of the wines entered.⁷ The latter is also true as the specifics of wine competitions including the judging process, its criteria and who the judges are, are rarely communicated to consumers.

Others argue that wine competitions are more a wine trade thing. Diageo's Nick Morgan claims that:

“Many consumers are quite skeptical about medals and awards. In research I've heard the dismissed as ‘just an industry thing – they like to hand them out to each other.’”⁸

Competitions are certainly important to the wine trade, however, the promotion of award winning wines is targeted much more at consumers. This leads onto the next section, which discusses the advantages and disadvantages of competitions as a tool for selling wine.

Advantages and disadvantages of competitions as a tool for selling wine:

A sommeliers' job in the on-trade is to use their knowledge and expertise to make recommendations. Therefore, wine awards play a less significant role on their wine lists. Contrastingly, in pubs and restaurants where advice isn't available, awards are promoted more to help customers select wines. However, customers are very influenced by price when dining out.

The off-trade is completely different as consumers are more open to external influences as choosing from hundreds of different wines can be very daunting. The biggest driver of retail sales is in-store promotions including end-of-aisle displays, discounts, point of sale materials or shelf barkers. This is where awards also play the greatest role as they offer consumers another way of selecting wine. Derek Strange, Waitrose's wine and spirits buyer, agrees that medals are a useful tool:

"Medals definitely help sales. Medal winners probably increase sales by 10% to 20% if there is no other activity on them. And if there is activity, then the increase is much more." ⁹

Awards draw attention to lesser known producers and give people confidence to try new wines from different varieties and countries. This is particularly important for a new product or brand. They also provide a reassurance to trade up and solidify brand loyalty. A gold medal in particular offers a perceived guarantee of quality even if the specifics of the competition are unknown. Nevertheless, the wine must still be seen to be good value. When Tesco won the best NV champagne ¹⁰ at the 2005 International Wine Challenge sales increased by 600%. This is because champagne is an aspirational product. ¹¹

An award can give a wine enough gravitas for a wine writer to taste it. National wine writer reviews have a significant impact on sales and this is why PR executives use awards as a hook to sell wines into the press. Majestic buyer, Chris Hardy agrees with this and also claims that if it leads to press coverage, it will almost certainly

increase sales.¹² Additionally, wine writers may write about wines they have tasted at competitions.

The Guardian recently issued a Guide to Wine which featured winning wines from the IWC. Retailers and producers also highlight award winning wines in their advertising and promotional materials. These sort of endorsements are highly effective as they are seen by thousands and can influence sales.

Winning an award can also help get a product under the radar of a buyer. Paul Dunn, European Director at Valdivieso, claims that following an IWSC win he secured a meeting with a major UK off trade buyer.¹³ Equally, Michael Florence, organiser of the IWC said in 2006 that “the event is not just about medals - 30 per cent of entrants have no representation in the UK.”¹⁴ Awards can give retailers greater confidence in producers, which may lead to further listings. Therefore, awards are a great tool for selling wine as they can catch the attention of retailers, journalists and buyers.

However, the success of wine competitions can also be their downfall. As competitions grow, awards will lose significance. Competitions can also damage a product if it receives a lesser medal such as a commendation. The fate of a product is ultimately determined by the category it's put in, e.g. in a small category a less quality wine can be more successful than a better wine in a larger category.

Judges have different levels of experience, palates and stylistic preferences which can result in huge anomalies in results. For example, Michel Lenique NV Blanc de Blancs Brut Reserve received a gold medal in the IWC but nothing in the Decanter Awards.¹⁵ This could be because the Decanter awards judges are given some indication of price whereas the IWC judges aren't.

Additionally, in the words of Jane MacQuitty; “the wine in the bottle can often disappoint.” A difference in quality can be attributed to the timing of most competitions as often both hemispheres are assessed together except for the IWSC. Therefore, by the time the awards are announced the vintage may have moved on. Supermarkets also sometimes submit wines that aren't selling well which may have sat around for a while, therefore losing quality. Ultimately, buying an award winning wine and being disappointed devalues the credibility of competitions and leaves a negative impression.

¹² Wine and Spirit online (01/10/08)

¹³ Drinks Business November issue page 29

¹⁴ Times online 10/11/06

¹⁵ Wine-pages.com Tom Stevenson *IWC V Decanter Awards* 01/08/08

Conclusion:

On the whole, there are some valid criticisms and disadvantages of wine competitions. However, equally there are some solid reasons for why they still exist as Guy Woodward, Editor of Decanter argues:

“Competitions provide a stage to showcase the diversity of smaller wine producers who are otherwise squeezed out by the huge amounts of mediocre, branded wines that are on the shelves.”¹⁶

Competitions can also encourage producers to improve their wines from judges' feedback. Nevertheless, wine writer, Anthony Rose is right when he says that wine competitions “can be useful as long as we're prepared to take medals as a rough guide and not gospel. After all, one competition's gold is another's silver.”¹⁷

As competitions expand and new ones are established, to maintain credibility and validity judging needs to be stricter and competitions could benefit from eliminating lesser categories. This would deter commercial brands from speculatively entering all their wines and would give consumers a stronger sense of what are the better quality wines.

¹⁶ Decanter online 10/11/06

¹⁷ Independent online, Anthony Rose, *Wine awards; all that glitters..* 10/11/01

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The following excerpt is also reproduced from a candidate submission as it is a good example of a well written, and interesting introduction – a section that is often either overlooked and superficial or overworked and too long in many scripts.

INTRODUCTION

Whether in a small village fair or a massive international competition, all round the world wines are being put through their paces and judged. From time immemorial, wherever wine has been produced there has been a desire to pit wine against wine in the context of contests and shows.

Traditionally, wine shows were part of much broader agricultural shows, which have their roots most deeply set in Australia. Here, the state Royal Agricultural Shows have been exhibiting champion bulls, prize potatoes and winning wines since the 19th century. Exhibitors continue to enter regional shows to have their wines judged by independent and experienced peers, thus seeing how their wines compare with their competitors' and setting a benchmark to improve their quality.

In the late 1960s, with increased global availability, competitions of a different nature evolved, pitting wines against each other in an international arena. These competitions provide a snapshot of the international wine world, giving an overview of the quality of wine available in the current market place. With focus on the consumer, international competitions aim to provide practical recommendations for those who buy and enjoy wine, as well as help producers sell more wine globally.

Assignment Title 3

Rosé: its performance and prospects in different countries	
Required content and suggested approach Some markets have seen a boom in still, light wine rosé sales over the last few years. Others have seen rosé continue as merely a small part of the wine scene. A large number of wineries and a significant number of regions have suddenly started to produce rosé wines where there was little if any local tradition. Many in the wine industry are trying to gauge whether or not the demand for rosé will grow in the years ahead.	
<i>Answers: 256</i>	<i>Passes: 222 (87%)</i>

These were largely unexciting. A number of scripts limited their assignments to markets producing rosé wine rather than the expanding markets for consumption. This made for some rather boring and unimaginative responses. Candidates were free to select markets of their own choice, but high marks were more likely where the selection provided some contrast, with marked differences in terms of the success or popularity of this style of wine.

Conclusions are often one of the weakest sections of assignments. They tend to get overlooked by candidates because they carry relatively few marks. It is not sufficient to simply repeat observations from previous sections here. In the case of this assignment, there should have been a clear global perspective in the conclusion. Good candidates considered issues such as expansion or contraction of the global market, or possible consumer preferences. It often helps to raise questions in the conclusion. For example, will the bubble burst for rosé? If so, which markets are likely to survive and why? Which countries are likely to see continued strong growth and why? Candidates who put some effort into their conclusion, tended to achieve higher marks elsewhere in their assignment.

Assignment Title 4

Selecting a vineyard management regime	
Required content and suggested approach Environmental concerns are increasingly important and regimes such as organic viticulture that were once considered as being eccentric are becoming more mainstream. For the grower who currently uses industrially synthesised chemicals in the vineyard but is considering changing to a more environmentally sustainable system of viticulture, there are a number of issues to consider. Whichever regime is adopted, there will be an inevitable impact on the annual cycle of work in the vineyard and commercial implications for the finished product.	
<i>Answers: 249</i>	<i>Passes: 219 (88%)</i>

This was an easy assignment due to the largely descriptive nature of the sections and the proliferation of information available to the candidate. Nevertheless, there were weaknesses. Those who failed to identify the four key regimes of vineyard management as traditional, sustainable, organic and biodynamic, inevitably lost marks in the key section of the assignment (the review of the options). There was also a tendency to spend too long describing them rather than highlighting their advantages and disadvantages. A large number of candidates were too keen to take things on face value. In particular, many “fell” for biodynamic propaganda and made no attempt to question the validity of their sources of information. Another problem was spending so long writing about the options that little of the assignment was devoted to the section on commercial justification, considering how the choice of regime influences the marketing and commercial appeal of the wine or the concluding section which relied on personal opinion.

The following script gained high marks. It is well researched and arguments are put across clearly and thoroughly.

Assignment 4: Selecting a Vineyard Management Regime

B. Introduction and Identification of Options

Today, winegrowers choose between numerous vineyard management regimes. The main regimes in order of increasing regulations and guidelines and less intervention by man: conventional, sustainable, organic, and biodynamic. Conventional farming, also known as “chemical” or “industrialized” viticulture, is the most popular and least regulated, using pesticides, fungicides, and other chemicals to control diseases and pests that threaten the vine. Sustainable viticulture is a “viticulural practice that aims to avoid any form of environmental degradation while maintaining the vineyard’s economic viability” (Robinson 2006). Integrated Pest Management (IPM) can be seen as part of sustainable viticulture, focusing on natural herbicides and pesticides. For example, wineries may plant pretty flowers to tempt pests away from their vines (Cran 2006). Organic viticulture includes sustainable practices, and goes a step further. “The primary concern for all organic farmers is soil health, for without a healthy, living soil in which to grow, the vine will struggle and the grower may become more reliant on chemical intervention”(Robinson 2006). Based on the theories of 1920’s Austrian philosopher Rudolf Steiner, biodynamic viticulture “is the most extremely ideological form of farming. Instead of relying on chemical intervention, vineyards are treated with holistic forms of preparations and composts designed to rebuild the stamina of the soil, and forms of energy created by the rhythms of the earth, sun, moon, and solar system that help energize the plant to grow” (Sawyer 2004). Biodynamics views the vineyard as a living organism, therefore a “biodiversity of life forms” sustain it (Smith 2008).

C. Review of the Options

The conventional method uses chemicals in a reactionary way to fight vineyard pests and diseases. When a viticulture crisis ensues, like a fungus or pest, winegrowers uses chemicals to avoid financial ruin. Some high-quality wines are produced via conventional farming. However, this method does not consider the long-term health of the vineyard and soil. Chemicals build up, resulting in soil sterility. According to Ivo Jeremex of Grgich Hills, “Fertilizer pushes the wines. It is like a football player on steroids. You push growth, but these men make bad husbands and fathers.” Fertilized vines produce poor quality grapes, and the vines often succumb to disease and live only 15 to 20 years (Davis 2006). Chemical use also affects the surrounding environment. Groundwater may absorb the chemicals; and

asthmatic neighbors could be affected by the vineyard's sulfur presence. Chemicals result in long-term and periphery problems for the vineyard and environmental health.

IPM allows a judicious approach to chemicals; and according to Joe Fattorini, it is the best system. Organic farming allows Bordeaux mixture, which poisons the liver. Rotenone, allowed in organic farming methods, has been linked to Parkinson's Disease. He also notes that "no properly conducted study has shown that organic wine...tastes better or is better for you" (Fattorini 2004). However, IPM does not have customer awareness like sustainable, organic or biodynamic viticulture.

Sustainable viticulture differs from conventional in its focus on conservation through composting and utilizing fewer chemicals (Linden 2007). Composted mulch helps decrease crop failure, reduces soil temperature to help retain moisture, reduces evaporation, increases grape yield on average by 27%, slowly releases nutrients, reduces weed growth, and increases farm capital value (Campbell and Sharma 2008). Carefully measured amounts of chemicals are applied in a viticulture crisis. Growers such as Doug Shafer of Shafer Vineyards recognize that if growers have no access to chemicals, then an entire crop could be lost (Nigro 2007). A primary disadvantage of sustainable farming is the lack of certification bodies. Wineries must find local organizations, such as Oregon State's LIVE, for sustainable support and information. And due to the varied goals and interpretations of sustainable farming, winegrowers must conform to the chosen organization's goals. For example, the "Napa Green" program formed with the goal of improving the watershed (Davis 2006).

The next viticultural option is organic. According to Organic Production Systems Guidelines, this method requires:

- low vigour sites in dry climates
- trellis and pruning styles ensure exposure to sunlight and good airflow
- nutrient management relies on compost, cover crops, and natural compounds
- disease control involves location, exposure to light, good airflow, and use of copper and sulfur
- and keeping yields low (i.e. 3 tonne/ha to 18 tonne/ha) (McCoy and Parlevliet 2001).

Organics produces terroir-reflected wines and forces growers to "pay better attention to the vineyard since [they] don't have a net to fall back on" (Warner 2006). Since sulfur is a natural substance, most accreditation bodies allow small amounts to combat a vineyard crisis like powdery mildew. A Calistoga, California wine retailer noted that organic wines are more varietally correct, more terroir expressive, and longer-aging due to healthier vines, a lower pH, and higher acidity (Zimmerman 2008). The international wine community recognizes the term "organic" for certification. The Council of the European Union recently approved new regulations for organic farming, and vineyards in the United States are certified by

agents that work with the U.S. Department of Agriculture (www.ec.europa.eu/agriculture/organic/eu-policy/legislations_en).

Unfortunately, organics requires patience, good growing conditions, no sulfites, and monetary investment. Also, the three-year process of certification requires extensive reporting (Linden 2007). Wineries located in cool, maritime climates find organic guidelines challenging since damp weather encourages varied pests and diseases (Burzynska 2007). For mass-produced organic wines--such as Fetzer's Bonterra Wines (200,000 cases per year)--a lack of sulfites makes maintaining quality difficult (Nigro 2007).

Wine producers have little business incentive to invest in organics. To convert a conventional vineyard to be certified organic, production decreases and costs increase by 10 percent. Weeds often require the purchase of a \$10 - \$15,000 mechanical tiller, and mildew and fungicide require double amounts of costly sprays (Warner 2006). In the long-run, elimination of synthetic chemicals helps recoup costs (Goodall 2007). But Marc Isnard of La Bastide Sampeyre notes that there is "no financial benefit from making efforts to protect the environment" (Gibb 2007).

Biodynamics is "the ultimate state of farming with nature, rather than relying on man-made interference" (Bird 2000). "All fertilization, herbicides, insecticides and other treatments are forbidden, except specially produced organic compost, and copper sulfate and sulfur solutions to counteract mildew and oidium." Quasi-homeopathic solutions such as valerian, nettle, yarrow, chamomile, oat and dandelion, silicon, and arsenic treat the vines (Coates 2006).

Biodynamic supporters believe their wines express true terroir. Consumer interest is improving. According to Oliver Humbrecht of Zind-Humbrecht, product turnover doubled in the last 10 years since putting "biodynamic" on their label (Furer 2007). Also, the international accreditation organization Demeter gives biodynamics exposure and branding (Hall 2008). However, three significant disadvantages of biodynamics remain. First, the conversion cost and doubling the end retail price of the wine. No money is spent on chemicals, but labor costs are tripled. By comparison, manual labor hours spent in the vineyard for conventional, organic, and biodynamic viticulture are 600, 1,200, and 2,000 hours respectively. Additionally, Oliver Humbrecht claims that his yields at 35 hl/ha are much less than the Alsace norm (Furer 2007). Another disadvantage is the "bizarre" factor. Consider the following process to make vineyard sprays: filling cow horns with silica and quartz, burying them, digging them up, diluting them in water and "stirring vigorously for an hour, first in one direction, then the other." Using oak bark and dandelion as well as focusing on the astrological calendar are not normal viticultural practices (Blanning 2006).

Finally, conditions must be perfect for biodynamic success. A maritime climate is not suited to biodynamics. Soil type is also a factor. For example, fertile California soil breeds weeds; in Germany, shunning weed-killers is already difficult on steep, slate terroir. Despite biodynamics' criticism, skeptics are converted. Noel Pinquet of Domaine Huet in Vouvray claims that his scientific background did not allow him to accept biodynamics. After a one-hectare biodynamics test, he converted his whole estate. Biodynamics has been adopted by leading producers in California, France, New Zealand, and Spain (Blanning 2006).

D. Commercial Justification

"Each management decision in the vineyard and the winery that leads to the wine product's [being] on the market will have marketing implications" (Hall and Mitchell 2007). Besides conventional viticulture, organics and biodynamics are the most recognized regimes. They possess great marketing potential, as the number of environmentally and socially responsible consumers grows. Focusing on conventional viticulture's negative environmental impact on soil erosion, compaction of soil, and chemical pollution of water is critical (Gibb 2007). Wine tourism is an advantage for organic and biodynamic growers because wineries can "tell the story" of their environmental and socially-conscious efforts (Hall and Mitchell 2007). By supporting these wines, consumers can purchase "a sense of being helpful to the environment" (Zimmerman 2008). Susan McCraith MW does not believe consumers can taste the difference between organic and conventional wines (Goodall 2007). So, to ask consumers to pay a premium for organic wines, money must be spent on marketing and external accreditation from organizations that signal quality (Hall and Mitchell 2007). For example, Fetzer utilizes bottle neckers, pamphlets, and orchestrates a "green" tour to educate their consumers about organic and sustainable viticulture (Linden 2007).

Secondly, many people believe organic and biodynamic wines taste better because they reflect terroir. Eric Narioo of Les Caves de Pyrene says, "Organically made wines aren't perfect all the time because of minimum intervention in the winery. The wines might be less polished but the winemakers are letting the terroir do the work" (Gibb 2007). Still, some top-end producers do not market themselves as organic or biodynamic due to an association with lesser quality (Ennis 2006). In the past, some premium wines hid their organic status for fear of being labeled "crunchy." A New York retailer remembers organic wines 15 years ago tasting "wild, jammy, and [having] funky character" (Zimmerman 2008).

Sustainable, organic, and biodynamic wines should highlight their nutritional benefits. Fewer chemicals means these wines are identified as "healthy." Less sulfur is appealing, since sulfur may

encourage hangovers. Also, “tests have revealed that organic foods have higher levels of antioxidants and vitamin C, and lower the incidence of conditions such as cancer, coronary heart disease, allergies, and asthma”(Linden 2007). The trend of healthier eating is an advantage of these wines.

While sustainable, organic, and biodynamic wines appeal to consumers environmentally concerned and socially responsible, packaging must be clear. Wine Intelligence 2000, a market research firm, asked 2,000 British wine drinkers about their views on “wine produced with consideration to social, ethical, and environmental issues.” Due to confusing and varied logos and accreditation-scheme seals, only 11.9 percent of the sample group bought organic wine in the last three months (www.decanter.com). In the United States, labels may state “organic wine without added sulfites” or “made with organically grown grapes” (Linden 2007). The accreditation organization Demeter gives consumers a trusted brand. Although international organic standards are similar, “there is no international legal definition, so standards...vary from country to country” (Gibb 2007). Sustainable viticulture lacks the organic and biodynamic awareness. Regardless of the viticulture method, marketing is crucial to increased sales.

E. Conclusion / Personal Commentary

In summary, one might view conventional viticulture as a defensive strategy. The grower fights vineyard pests and diseases with chemical solutions. The other vineyard regimes are offensive strategies that control against vineyard pests and diseases and seek to be more environmentally conscious.

Organic viticulture is the most prudent. It protects the earth and the vineyard by making vines more naturally resistant to disease and pests, cutting dependence on chemicals and prolonging the life of the vines. Growers save money by not having to replace vines every 15-20 years. Sulfur in limited quantities is an important natural substance that fights powdery mildew. While organic viticulture limits sulfur use, illegal use of sulfur is one of the main detractors from biodynamics (Thach and Matz 2004). Organic farming forces growers to pay more attention to the vines, yielding grapes that reflect terroir and make distinct and memorable wines.

Not only do consumers find biodynamic viticulture confusing and bizarre, but they recognize organic products more than biodynamic products. While consumers are attracted to wines with fewer chemicals, wines produced according to the astrological calendar or using a manure mixture are nearly impossible to sell. Organics requires similar discipline and respect as biodynamics. Finally, some growers question biodynamics' founder, Mr. Steiner. After asking Heymann Lowenstein, a Mosel River Riesling producer, why he did not farm biodynamically, he responded, “Why follow the methods of a fascist?” (Heymann Lowenstein 2008).

Even though organic wines account for 1 percent of today's market, organic viticulture is a smart business decision for the future. The IGD, which provides research about the food/grocery sector, reported that organic products will rise 33 percent by 2011 (Langton 2007). By investing in organic viticulture, growers focus on the “3 E's: equity, environment, and economics” (Linden 2007).

Assignment Title November

Bordeaux En Primeur – time for a change?	
Required content and suggested approach Much of the premium wine produced in Bordeaux is sold en primeur and has been for many years but there has been much recent debate concerning the validity of the practice. Some respected commentators on the wine trade have called for an end to en primeur and others defend it but ultimately the annual tastings and subsequent pronouncements are still a crucial part of the wine trade calendar.	
<i>Answers: 219</i>	<i>Passes: 179 (82%)</i>

This was the first of the two longer length coursework assignments for those candidates who signed up to the new assessment methodology of Unit 1. On the whole, submissions were good. However most candidates only considered en primeur in the context of Bordeaux wine despite the fact that it is also practiced in Burgundy and in many parts of the New World such as California and Australia (e.g. Grange), and also for allocation of vintage Port.

Most candidates gave clear explanations of the en primeur process, but the less factual sections were weaker as with other assignment titles. For example, in this case there was poor analysis of the pros and cons of this system and suggested alternatives to en primeur were often unrealistic or unimaginative.

Advantages and disadvantages largely fell into two camps – those for the producer and those for the purchaser. Examples from good scripts were as follows:

Advantages for producer

- Improved cash-flow
- Marketing and distribution savings.

Disadvantages for producer

- Missed opportunity to benefit from increased prices on the secondary market.
- Wines are too new to be accurately assessed, and may not show their true potential due to the large number tasted at fairly high speed.
- No control over distribution – supermarkets may not be the preferred outlet for prestige Chateaux

Advantages for Retailer/Consumer

- Guarantee of provenance.
- Increased likelihood of buying at preferential rate – but not guaranteed.
- Regular buyers of en primeur have improved chances of allocation of sought-after wines.

- Capital Gains Tax advantages
- Buying in formats not usually readily available

Disadvantages for retailer/consumer

- Payment required up to two years in advance of delivery.
- Wines are too new to be accurately assessed; buying decision must be made on evidence of an unfinished product.
- Wines produced for spring tastings by critics are not necessarily the same as those sold to the final consumer (little regulation).
- Works well in good years but less advantageous in mediocre years eg 1997 and 2003 in Bordeaux.
- Prices are not set until influential critics have pronounced judgement.
- Risk - may reduce in value depending on market conditions.
- Costs of storage post-delivery.
- Adverse reviews may make resale difficult.
- Business failures may leave consumers without the wine that they have paid for.
- Need to shop around – prices can vary considerably from negociant to negociant.

Assignment Title April

Waste reduction, recycling and energy conservation in the wine and spirit industry	
Required content and suggested approach Climate change and other environmental concerns have made society examine its attitude to the production of waste, recycling and energy conservation. The wine and spirit industry has not been isolated from these developments. Proactively, but also under pressure from politicians, retailers and consumers, drinks companies are considering and implementing strategies to reduce waste, increase recycling and improve energy conservation.	
<i>Answers: 146</i>	<i>Passes: 142 (97%)</i>

This was clearly a topic that candidates found interesting and relevant and this was reflected in the very high pass rate. The following script is a good example of how to do well in this section of the Diploma exam. It is clear, succinct and thorough, yet still manages to keep well within the permitted word-count.

I. Introduction

In recent years, consumers have begun to evaluate their “carbon footprint” and its effects on the environment by assessing the impact of their personal use of resources while considering the impact of global industry on products they consume. To this end, every item that is brought into a household or business should be considered for its sway on the global eco-system. The wine and spirits industry in the United States is not immune to this scrutiny.

Wine and spirits producers like to use terms such as “sustainable,” “organic” and even “biodynamic” to highlight environmentally sensitive raw material cultivation but the cultivation is just part of the equation. How these raw materials are then processed and distributed have equal impact on the environment. The issue is not just about wasting materials but also about reducing greenhouse gases which can potentially impact the temperature and climate of the world. This paper will address three principal areas of waste in wine and spirit material cultivation, processing and distribution and provide realistic solutions for reducing this waste while presenting ideas for resource conservation and recycling.

II. Environmental Negatives in the Production and Distribution of Wine and Spirits

To reduce waste from daily actions and consumption, individuals may make small changes to their lifestyle such as replacing light bulbs in their house with fluorescents, using less water or driving their car less. Wine and spirits producers should consider these issues and evaluate them on a global scale as a large distiller or winery has a much greater impact on the global environment than a person. The following section will examine the negative impact of the wine and spirits industry on three global resources: electricity, water and petroleum fuel.

The Weather Channel in the United States estimates that almost a quarter of the energy Americans create and consume comes in the form of electricity. Electricity production is one of the greatest contributors to excess carbon dioxide in our atmosphere as most electric plants burn fossil fuels to generate electric energy which releases millions of tons of greenhouse gases to the atmosphere (Airey, 2009). Even so, electricity is essential to wine and spirit production facilities for most stages of

processing, fermentation, distillation and packaging all of which require some sort of electric mechanization to complete. Examples of some necessary equipment include pumps, refrigeration, bottling lines, packaging machines, office technology, point of sale systems and just keeping the lights on. An average large production winery in California such as Fetzer uses over 1,000,000 kilowatt hours over a year to run its operation (Airey, 2009).

Water consumption and waste also affects the cultivation of raw materials and the production of wines and spirits. During the cultivation of grapes for winemaking in countries that allow irrigation, over 550,000 liters of water is used to produce one ton of grapes (Coleman/Päster, 2007). This is a great strain on local water systems especially during periods of drought which can come from low seasonal rainfall in dry areas that rely on rain water to fill reservoirs for public and private use. Droughts can lead to overly dry conditions in vineyards and may lead to stunted fruit growth, under ripe fruit, low yields and even wild fires which can destroy both vineyards and production facilities. The most striking example can currently be seen in South Eastern Australia where a three year drought in Riverina has forced wineries to produce less wine each year while paying higher prices for grapes, seriously affecting their bottom line.

During production, water is used to clean, sanitize and rinse vessels for bottling, fermentation and storage as well as to maintain production facility cleanliness. These uses can also lead to waste. For instance, bottles arrive at bottling facilities sterile but local regulations may require a second cleaning which can use up five to seven gallons of water per gallon of wine or spirit (Emert, 2004).

High pressure hoses, which are used to clean fermentation, distillation and storage tanks as well as the production facilities is another source of major water waste. The high pressure drives thousands of extra gallons of water through these hoses which can turn into waste water, if misused. For example, hoses are mistakenly used to wash down the whole floor of a production facility when a broom or a simple spot pick-up would be just as effective (Emert, 2004).

The most glaring example of waste in the beverage alcohol industry is the use of fossil fuels for both cultivation and shipping. The combustion of fossil fuels, in particular diesel fuel which is used by ships, tractors and container trucks, contributes 3 kilograms

of carbon dioxide to the atmosphere per kilogram of fuel consumed (Coleman/Päster, 2007). Also, the continued use of diesel fuel by these machines is problematic because fossil fuels are a limited resource and some researchers theorize we may fully deplete the world's reserves in less than 100 years.¹ However, each of these machines is essential in some way to cultivation and distribution.

During cultivation, tractors are a great asset to grape growers for tasks such as spraying pesticides and fungicides, pruning and harvest. Even so, a tractor in a vineyard consumes 130 liters of fuel per ton of grapes cultivated while a tractor for a bumper crop such as corn consumes only 22.7 liters of fuel per ton (Coleman/Päster, 2007). The disparity in yield is concerning given the amount of carbon dioxide emitted per liter of fuel consumed as stated previously.

Transportation of the finished products for distribution and/or consumption has an even larger impact on the emissions footprint of these products. The most recognizable form of transport is trailer trucks, used for overland shipping. These trucks average only 6 miles per gallon of diesel fuel and may transport locally, interstate or cross country (Cutler, 2007). The longer the distance traveled the more fuel is used.

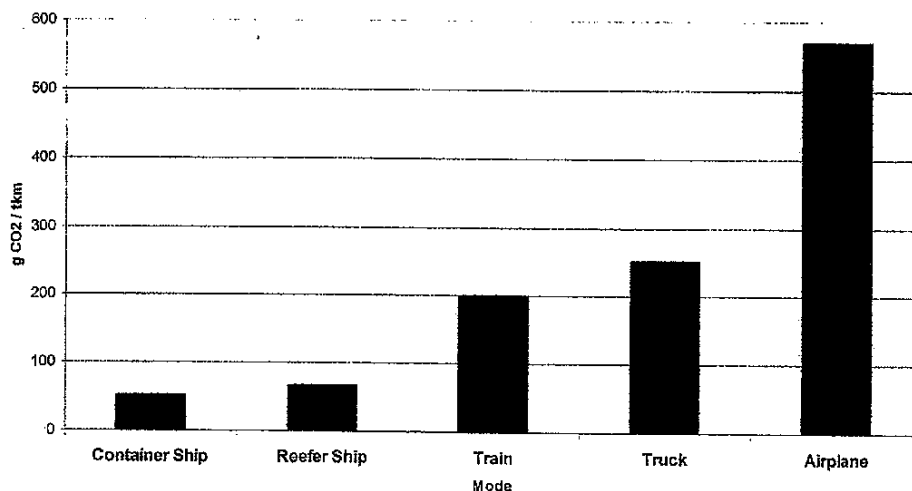
The weight of different styles of bottles can impact shipping costs and fossil fuel consumption. A current fashion for high end wines is to bottle them in large, thick bottles which can increase the weight of a standard 9L case by 15 pounds (Cutler, 2007). That extra 15 pounds on a standard 56-case shipping pallet adds an extra 840 pounds per pallet in a shipping trailer or container (Cutler, 2007). The added weight has a negative impact on fuel consumption causing the vehicle to burn more fuel to move the same physical amount of product the same distance (Cutler, 2007). The thick bottles may also interfere with cargo weight limits for trucks forcing them to carry fewer pallets, thereby requiring two trucks to ship the cargo that one could have.

Even worse than trucking is air freight which is the most inefficient mode of wine and spirit transport with a carbon dioxide emissions factor about 11 times greater than that of container transport by ship (figure 1-Coleman/Päster, 2007). So, the many artisan or exclusive wineries or beverage alcohol producers who pride themselves as eco-

¹ An additional problem with fuel is petroleum pricing instability. During the summer months of 2008 in the United States the price of diesel petroleum fuel jumped from about \$2/gallon USD (United States Dollars) to about \$5.50/gallon USD before crashing and this cycle may continue.

friendly cancel any steps they take towards environmental responsibility whenever they ship direct-to-consumer by overnight air.

Figure 1-Comparative Cargo Emissions by Mode of Transport



III. Solutions for Waste Reduction, Recycling and Resource Conservation

Assessing where waste occurs and calculating its impact is only part of the battle. How to implement strategies to reduce waste and conserve or recycle resources is the next important step. While there are no universal guidelines of where or how to begin, attacking the areas with the greatest global impact is a good place to start.

For an initial attempt to reduce waste and manage consumption of resources, electricity is a very easy target to assess and confront, but “easy” is by no means inexpensive. Harnessing the power of the sun with solar panels can be a solution to reducing electricity consumption by a wine or spirits producer. The initial investment in solar panels, which convert sunlight into electricity, can be costly² but the financial return over time can be lucrative (Honig, 2009). During summer months, when sunlight hours are at their peak, the solar generators collect solar energy from the outdoor panels and store the energy as electricity. Some wineries like Honig Winery in Napa Valley, California, have collected so much electric energy from the sun that even after a busy year that includes harvest, crush and bottling-while running offices, a tasting room and

² BP Energy sells a single solar panel which can generate 80 watts of electricity for \$445 USD. The number of panels needed for conversion depends on how much electricity a facility will use (www.altestore.com).

guesthouses-it has an excess of stored electricity which it sells back to Northern California electric company PGE (Honig, 2009). So, instead of buying electricity which contributes millions of tons of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, Honig generates clean electricity and even makes some money back.

This investment, according to Michael Honig the owner of Honig Winery, realizes in approximately eight to nine years (Honig, 2009). Add to that a twenty-five year warranty on panels and equipment that most solar electric equipment manufacturers offer (Honig, 2009), shows why more producers are moving towards solar energy. Other wineries in the United States that have implemented solar generators and rely on 100% solar power include Rodney Strong Vineyards, Fetzer, Shafer Vineyards Domaine Carneros and Honig Winery (Airey, Honig, 2009). Even Constellation Brands, one of the largest wine companies in the world, has adopted solar energy and is transitioning its portfolio wineries to solar energy as well (Airey, 2009).

For those facilities that cannot afford such an elaborate system, there are less costly avenues. For instance, electricity consumption can be reduced in a beverage alcohol processing facility by switching standard light bulbs to fluorescents which last 10 times longer while using less than one quarter the wattage. Also, buying energy efficient motors for refrigeration, bottling or packaging lines can help reduce electricity usage (Cutler, 2007).

Water conservation may be the most popular avenue for a beverage alcohol producer to highlight their environmental sensitivity as it can be fairly straightforward to assess and control at least in the wine industry.³ In countries that allow irrigation of vineyards, how the water is delivered to the vines can affect how much of it is wasted. In past years, flood or sprinkler irrigation was a popular avenue of irrigation, spreading water over a large area of vineyard space in a short period of time. But this method provides more water than is necessary for healthy vine growth (Honig, 2009). Alternatively, drip irrigation systems, which are becoming more popular, allow the vineyard manager via a computer system to control and restrict the amount of water used

³ Large multi-brand companies such as Foster's Group Ltd. and Fortune Brands post their commitment to water conservation and waste reduction in mission statements on their websites but most do not show numbers to back up the statements. However, brewer InBev does show on their site that in 2007 they reused or recycled 97.2% of their production waste and byproducts.

so every drop is utilized by the vine (Honig, Sullivan, 2009). Another way to maximize water consumption while using less is to irrigate vines at night when the vines and ground are cooler and there is less chance of evaporation (Honig, Sullivan, 2009).

In the production facility, small adjustments to equipment and effective worker training can drastically cut water waste as well using low flow hoses which provide similar water pressure while using less water (Emert, 2004). Another way to cut water waste is by changing over cleaning agents. As an example, Bob Torres of Trinchero wineries in California changed his cleaning agent to peracetic acid, eliminating the need to rinse bottles after cleaning and reducing water usage for this stage by two-thirds (Emert, 2004). Waste water from production can also be recycled into ponds, treated for irrigation or just composted (Emert, 2004).

As stated previously, combustion and consumption of fossil fuels is still, and will be for the near future, a necessary evil in both raw material cultivation and product transportation for wine and spirits producers. That is not to say that the environmental impact of petroleum combustion cannot be controlled or reduced through the management of consumption. Currently, this is a war of small victories. For example, a vineyard manager can convert their field tractors to operate on biodiesel powered engines which use natural oils and fats like soybean oil as clean-burning, combustible fuel.

Unfortunately, due to the inherent limitations of the combustion engine, reduction of fossil fuel emissions is limited. However repackaging products, reducing package weights, maximizing the amount of product transported and analyzing shipping efficiency are helpful and effective remedies.

The wine industry, more than most other beverage alcohol industries appears to have borne most of the trailblazing effort in managing petroleum waste.⁴ For example, many producers in California, including Trinchero, Sullivan Vineyards and Honig Winery, have switched to low weight glass bottles, reducing the weight of a 9 liter case of wine to approximately 35 pounds. U.S. companies like Gallo Glass and Empire Glass have created molds that make bottles thinner, reducing the weight of each bottle while using over 50% recycled glass in the process (Sullivan, Honig, 2009). Some producers

⁴ Spirits producers researched such as LVMH, Bacardi Limited and Pernod Ricard make no mention of such bottle weight packaging consolidation or any other proactive waste reduction initiatives currently on their websites.

have also chosen thinner cardboard cases to reduce space consumption and package weight (Sullivan, 2009).

Some more forward thinking wine producers put their stake in tetra-packaging or even plastic bottles as the solution to weight and space issues (Byrd, 2007). However, both vessels eventually break down and become air permeable, making them unsuitable for long term storage (Byrd, 2007). Right now, the best options for packaging and shipping is to use magnums because these bottle greater liquid to glass ratio with less weight, using less cardboard and glass (Sullivan, 2009). An even better solution comes from producers of other beverages like water which consolidate their packaging by using shrink wrap eliminating the need for and space occupied by cardboard packaging (Cutler, 2007).

Assessing the methods of transporting wine and spirits can be an avenue to proactive reduction of fuel waste. While the least popular among producers, the most effective way to transport a large quantity of wine is in bulk by tankers with the wine being bottled by the local distributor (Coleman/Päster, 2007). Producers dislike this method of transport though, because they lose control of the finished product (Coleman/Päster, 2007). Overland trains can be more effective for transporting large quantities of wine than trucks because they can haul many containers with one fuel burning engine versus the one engine per container trucking model (Coleman/Päster, 2007). However, there must be a large consolidated quantity of wine to ship. The most effective mode of transport for beverage alcohol products is the container ship, which can carry hundreds if not thousands of containers and tankers over water with one fuel burning engine. Thus, container ships demonstrate the lowest fuel to total amount of goods transported ratio of the methods presented (Coleman/Päster, 2007).

From an environmental perspective, trucks, while not as effective in product transport as ships or trains, still have less environmental impact than air freight as previously shown and can be streamlined with little changes. For instance, some large distribution companies use regional warehouses for storage, decreasing the distance trucks have to travel (Peck, 2009). This also makes the use of smaller trucks, which burn less fuel, for local transport more realistic as they will have less cargo and shorter distances to travel (Peck, 2009). Even more localized improvements can be made to

trucking by reducing idling times when loading and unloading, encouraging trucks to keep speeds at 60 miles per hour to maximize fuel usage and using alternative and hybrid energy sources (Peck, 2009).

IV. Conclusion

There are many strategies a wine or spirit producer can employ to conserve, recycle and reduce waste in their operations and each has positives and negatives. It is the responsibility of each wine and spirit producer to assess the impact that production and distribution of their product has on the global eco-system. However, with no strict national or international legislation in place to compel the producers to act, the responsibility falls on each individual company. Smaller wine producers appear more sensitive to the environmental strain of production and have led the way in reducing waste and promoting conservation. Hopefully more in the wine and spirits industry, and many other global industries, will follow their example. It is a fact of business that reducing consumption and waste while integrating recycling programs leads to less capital output and more profitability. It is a goal that more wine and spirits producers should attain not only for the environment but for their own bottom lines as well.

Closed Book Case Study

In comparison with other closed book theory papers, the pass rate for the case study in Unit 1 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 appropriate for this qualification. Providing candidates follow the guidance notes on the case study brief, success at a relatively high grade is guaranteed.

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

November 2008

Proposed changes to labelling law	
<p>Candidate Case Study Brief:</p> <p>Labelling is designed to communicate information about the product to the consumer, and there are already several mandatory requirements for wine sold into or produced in the EU. In an attempt to give the consumer more detail about the wines they drink, EU Governments have been discussing changes to labelling law. Some of the areas covered include: ingredient listing, health warnings, units of alcohol, calories, allergens and recycling. For each of these, there are benefits and drawbacks for both the consumer and the industry.</p> <p>The industry needs to be more transparent. Any changes made to labels should be informative, clear and concise rather than adding confusion. The proposed labelling requirements could be divided into what the consumer needs to know, what might be useful to know and what may not be important. In some cases the label may not be the most suitable route for informing consumers.</p> <p>Producers already struggle to adhere to the differing labelling requirements in various countries. For example, in January 2008, 3,200 bottles of Gallo's André Sparkling wine were destroyed by Belgian customs for being labelled with the protected "Champagne" name. The potential effect to the industry of further legislative change could be huge.</p>	
Answers: 115	Passes: 77 (67%)

Examination question (all three sections compulsory)

- a) Discuss the changes to labelling law that have been proposed by the EU. What are the benefits and drawbacks to both the consumer and the industry of each of these initiatives? (70% weighting)
- b) In your opinion, which of these pieces of labelling information should be compulsory? Are there any other ways this information can be clearly relayed to the consumer? (20% weighting)
- c) Looking to the future, what other labelling issues could come up and why? (10% weighting)

This was a rather disappointing result, as the case study tends to generate a higher pass rate than this. There were a number of reasons for low marks. Despite there being plenty of evidence of research having been carried out, some scripts were extremely badly structured. Not only does this make it extremely difficult for the examiner to mark scripts accurately, but also often leads to the candidate omitting sections of the question.

In section a), a number of candidates failed to cover all the proposed changes, despite these even being listed in the candidate brief. This meant they missed out on a chunk of the marks available in this section. There was also a tendency to describe the changes rather than analyse them from the point of view of the consumer and the industry. Some candidates also discussed at length the current labelling requirements rather than specifically the new proposals. However, of the various changes, those relating to the complexities attached to ingredients listing were covered well, although some confused “ingredients” and “processing agents” with the final composition of the wine.

March 2009**Wine for investment purposes**

We are all aware of the importance of providing for our own financial security in later life. Increasingly people are looking to supplement their current income or savings through medium or long term financial investment. However, with the unpredictability of the stock market and fluctuating prices in the housing market, some investors are turning to wine as a viable alternative to securing financial gain on investments made. With reported returns of between 10% and 30% in some instances, the prospects for turning “liquid gold” into the real thing are not as unrealistic as some would think. However, the investor should approach with caution - the choice of investment options on offer can be bewildering for the novice investor, and particularly so for those with limited wine expertise. With so many different options available to the wine investor, it is vital to conduct thorough research into the advantages and disadvantages of these before making any commitment. A clear understanding of the difference between, for example, buying en primeur or through auction houses and dealing with specialist wine brokers or “wine investment clubs” will help in determining which offers the best prospects in each particular case. Some offer clear cost savings or tax incentives, but at the other extreme, there may be hidden costs that need to be taken into account in calculating any potential return on investment. And this is before even considering which type of wine to invest in and for how long!

It is hardly surprising therefore that this is a topic that has generated plenty of press coverage in recent years, not only because of the potential gains that can be made but also because of the many pitfalls that must be avoided.

Answers: 203

Passes: 157 (77%)

Examination question (all three sections compulsory)

- a) By its very nature, some wine is ideally suited to provide sound investment potential. Why is this, and what in your opinion would be the best type of wine to consider when thinking about wine for investment purposes? (20% weighting)
- b) Give an account of the various options available to the individual making an investment in wine, including an evaluation of the various costs and risks that could influence any final decision. (45% weighting)
- c) Evaluate the reliability of using the en primeur market as a means of making money (35% weighting)

There were some very good responses to this question as indicated not only by the high pass rate, but also by the number of candidates achieving merit and distinction grades.

The following script was graded fail. It has obviously been written by a candidate for whom English is not their mother tongue. However, this was not the reason for the fail grade as examiners are trained to ignore stylistic weaknesses and look beyond poor spelling and grammar, and base their marking on factual content. In fact, on reading this, it is clear that this candidate has done a lot of research as they make some very valid and sound observations. Unfortunately, these are not always relevant to the question that was set. I have made specific comments after certain paragraphs to show where the problems lie:

“Investing in wine is something that has been done for a long time. With this current economical situation of fluctuating prices in the housing market, and the unpredictable stock market, investors might even more turning to wine as an alternative to gain the return on investments. But you should invest with caution as there are a lot of advantages but also many disadvantages and pitfalls. And with a lot of investment options, what is the best to do today, and is 2009 the right time to invest?”

Examiner's comment – this is largely just repeating the case study brief, which is a waste of time, particularly when time is at a premium as in a timed examination.

The fine wine market is growing every year; the value only in UK is 500 million pounds. Tim Bradshaw indicated in May 2008 that wine has a strong run over. From 2005 to May 2008 wine prices have been tripled. But in a situation like we have today, prices could fall with one third. Jamie Hutchinson of The Samples confirms this; in times of an economic recession when interest rates go up, wine prices will go down. So this could be a good time for investors who would like to start investing in wine. Wine merchants are more bullish and do not see any reason to stop the decrease in wine prices. Wine is a luxury product which can last for at least 20 to 30 years. So if prices will go through the floor, hold and prices will increase again. Head of Christie's wine department sees the advantage of wine, like fine art, that it is tangible. So in times when the stock market is risky, invest in gold, fine art and fine wine rather than paper shares and stocks.

Examiner's comment – none of this information actually answers any of the three subsections of the question. There is nothing wrong with a short introductory paragraph, but this candidate has already wasted valuable time in the previous paragraph by repeating the content of the “brief”, and really needs to get to grips with the question at this stage.

Wine is a more reliable investment following the critics. If you invest in the right wines, you will get a good profitability. But what is the right wine, and what should we do in times of banking crises; the credit crunch? One thing is for sure, and that is that the average return on investment for wine is 12% a year. Some perform better like Domaine in Romanée Conti. In Decanter of February 2009 it was headed “DRC =

RUI". DRC is one of the world's top performers in return on investments with a value increase of 133% in 4 years.

So what wines are interesting. First you have to see the advantages. Wines can mature, which makes it more desirable and thus more valuable. When the wine comes in a more drinking level it will be consumed and thus more rare and more valuable. Moreover wine has astonishing returns on investments. The Liv-ex 100, a platform that tracks prices on a daily basis, increased in value from 120 in 2005 to 260 in summer 2009. In December 2008 it fell to -12%, but the FTSE 100 had fallen with -33%. So wine investors are not that affected. It is less risky.

Examiner's comment – the candidate has not answered the question posed in section a), but merely written in generic terms about wine's investment potential. They have not suggested which type of wines make sound investments nor why.

The disadvantages are also things you should take into account. You have to deal with reputable merchants with long track records. A merchant can go bankrupt due to incompetence or fraud. The last happened with Bordeaux advisory, a Dutch company in Amsterdam moved to Luxembourg and took millions off all investors. When Robert Parker re-assesses a wine it could lower the value, when he is negative.

Furthermore you will have the different options investing in wine. First of all buy en primeur. You buy the wine before it is even bottled. It allows you to buy at the cheapest prices. When first tranche is released, prices will go up. But how will the wines evolve? This can be a risky option. If you deal with reputable merchants you can have very good deals. But those people are no investment professionals, they are wine professionals. You will get delivered 2 years after you have bought the wine, so reputable merchants are important. Then you have to look after the Parker ratings or other important ratings like Jancis Robinson; this can give more value to the wine. Invest in first growths. Mainly Lafite is one of the top performers. And invest in other blue chip Bordeaux Clarets. Keep in mind that professional investors are looking more and more for older vintages of 1982, 1990, 1996 and so on. These are more drinkable, rare and thus valuable.

Another option to invest is buy from merchants or brokers. These people are specialised in wine, but not in investments. And make sure that you deal with reputable merchants. You can also invest with auctions. Also these people are more specialised in fine wine and not in finance. You have also take into account the consigners costs of 10% at auctions. Until 2008 this was investors paradise; high prices, high returns on investment. But recently the wine department of Christies in South Kensington closed and opened in Hong Kong.

Investing in wine investment clubs is also an option. But you have to be very careful. Only a few are reputable. Watch out for PO Box companies, too high or too low prices, look for long track records. They can have high performance costs of 25%. Investing in wine investment funds is also a good option. They have knowledge of fine wine and investment knowledge. You buy shares in a fund that purchases wines, stocks it and sells it. The profit is reinvested again. They spread the risk as they buy various wines and vintages, they stock it and they are insured. But keep in mind cost

of stocking. This can be 10€ a case a year and performance and management fees. Some investment funds make really good indexes as they buy directly from the Chateaux; those prices rose and only the secondary market was affected. This was confirmed by the Wine Growth Fund in Decanter of March 2009.

Examiner's comments – the various options are listed, but costs and risks have not been identified in all cases. In addition, although the candidate makes valid points about the en primeur system, they largely “describe” the system rather than evaluate the costs and risks or its reliability in terms of making money.

So to summarise 2008; until September 2008 Livex raised, in October it fell with 12% and in November again with 5%. But is still out performs the FTSE 100. 2009 is a good start to invest but with the following wines and following tips. Buy less wines of more value. Then you will have less stocking costs. Keep those wines professional under bond, you will avoid VAT and excise duty. Buy as early as possible your wines. Never buy wines in mixed or unsealed cases, as you will not sell it at a good deal. Compare always prices. Look on Liv-ex 100 or www.winesearcher.com. Buy wines that Robert Parker likes. Buy first growths Bordeaux wines or blue chip Clarets. DRC and Tuscan other wines are also worth to invest. These wines can mature for decades and they have top scores from Parker and other well-known wine critics. And if you buy those invest in various good vintages which professional investors like. Deal only with reputable companies. More over so not invest more than you can afford to lose. If you start investing in wine, you have to start rich.”

Examiner's comments – the candidate has to an extent answered section a) in this paragraph, but in structuring their essay in such a haphazard way, they do not make it easy for the examiner to mark or extract the valid information.

As already pointed out, this essay makes a lot of valid points but was simply not focussed enough for a pass grade.

June 2009**Ethical wine**

The term “ethical wine” is generally thought to encompass organic and Fairtrade wines. The global drive to be more environmentally aware and socially responsible has led to growth in this sector as shown below:

Organic wines
Hectares certified organic

	France Source: Agencebio	California Source: Wine Report
2004	12,557	2,900
2005	13,959	3,250
2006	14,193	<3,500
2007	14,632	3,500

Fairtrade wines
Sales volumes in thousands of litres

	UK	Germany	Netherlands	Global Total
2005	1,127.44	150.00	100.99	1,399.13
2006	2,409.77	237.00	352.00	3,197.41
2007				5,740.00

Source: FLO

The EU is supporting the expansion of organic viticulture by giving subsidies for those growers who will convert, but there are many other reasons for the growth in demand for organic and Fairtrade wines.

Despite the increase in sales of ethical wine, there has been confusion and controversy surrounding their certification, labelling and promotion. To add to the confusion, a number of products are being produced with statements such as “run along organic lines” or “ethically farmed”. The problem is that these are trading on the premiums given to wines made from organically grown grapes or under the Fairtrade scheme and could devalue the whole movement.

Sceptics might say that producers are simply exploiting the consumer's conscience whilst others are adamant that this is the best way forward. It is possible that these wines could just be a “fashion” rather than a permanent shift in the way that wine is produced and marketed.

Answers: 134

Passes: 88 (66%)

Examination question (all four sections compulsory)

- Define organic and Fairtrade wines, giving an example of each. (10% weighting)
- What are the reasons for the growth in production and sales of organic and Fairtrade wines? (40% weighting)
- Discuss the confusion that exists around the certification, labelling and promotion of these so-called “ethical wines”. (30% weighting)
- In your opinion, will the production and sales of these products continue to grow? (20% weighting)

In general, responses to this question were reasonably good. Where lower marks were achieved, it was often because candidates failed to pay sufficient attention to the weighting attached to each section of the question. For example, section a) was very factual, and therefore easy marks to obtain. However, with a weighting of only 10%, this should have been a clear indication that candidates should not spend too long on this at the expense of other sections. However, many candidates wrote as much here as they did for, say section b) which carried the bulk of the marks at 40%. In addition, far too many scripts took a very narrow approach in terms of examining why there is growth in the production and sales of organic and Fairtrade wines. To answer this section competently, it was important to consider reasons from three basic “camps” – green issues, health issues and commercial implications. The best responses came from candidates who took a global perspective here, also considering how sales vary in different markets and looking at what drives these. While most candidates wrote about the growing need of consumers to benefit from the “feel good” factor of buying green and a desire to “do their bit” to benefit those less well off than themselves in the case of Fairtrade wines, there was not much evidence of what could be driving these sales from a commercial standpoint. Although some candidates referred to the EU subsidies available to those who convert, very few made the connection with the USP that “being green” gives to products in today’s market place, allowing them to retail at a premium price.

Nevertheless, in general all sections of this question were covered reasonably well by those who passed, with no one section being significantly better or worse than others.

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 will provide similar feedback and 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” (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 variety. 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 2009: Red wines from Pinot Noir	
<i>Answers: 90</i>	<i>Passes: 58 (64%)</i>

This was a good result, particularly since there was no classic Burgundy in the line up, which many candidates who had identified the variety expected to find. The three wines were a Chilean Pinot Noir from Casablanca, a German Spätburgunder and a New Zealand wine from Central Otago. Those who were looking for a Burgundy, mistook the “cooked” and faded fruit on the German wine for a mature Burgundy and allowed themselves to “talk up” the quality assessment of this as a result.

A number of candidates identified the variety as Grenache. This was not totally illogical given the pale colour and the red fruit character.

June 2009: White wines from Chenin Blanc	
<i>Answers: 426</i>	<i>Passes: 292 (69%)</i>

As with previous years, the statistics show the considerable difference between the number of candidates who sit the Unit 3 examination in June rather than in January.

For this question, the three wines were a Saumur Blanc, Chaume and a South African oaked Chenin Blanc.

The latter wine confused many, and Chardonnay and Semillon were popular choices of grape variety for many who based their judgement largely on this wine. This really shows how important it is to consider the character of all three wines when drawing any conclusion. Had they done this, they would have realised that Chardonnay was an illogical conclusion based on the sweetness and acidity of the Chaume. Semillon should have also been dismissed because of the strong varietal character and high acidity on the Saumur.

The June tasting papers did bring to light one candidate script which caused considerable discussion amongst the Diploma Examination Panel who ratified the results prior to issue of these. The consequences of this discussion and the decision reached by the panel are recounted here as a warning to other candidates.

The following script was submitted, and achieved high marks from the examiner who marked it.

WINE No. 1

Appearance: (3 marks)

Bright and clear. Pale lemon core fading to a wide watery rim, legs, petillance

Nose: (7 marks)

Clean, medium (-) intensity, youthful

Green apples, pears, gooseberry, citrus, lemon, lime, grapes, mineral, stoney/steely, iris, violets, blossom, perfume, elderflower, pineapple, honey, orange, rose, grapefruit

Palate: (10 marks)

Dry wine, medium (+) acidity, medium alcohol, medium (-) body, medium (-) intensity, medium length.

Green apples, pears, gooseberry, citrus, lemon, lime, grapes, mineral, stoney/steely, orange, herbs, grass, wet leaves, hay, peaches, apricots, melon, cream, butter, biscuit, iris, perfume, violet, rose, blossom, perfume, elderflower, pineapple, honey, orange, rose, grapefruit.

Assessment of quality: (4 marks)

This is a good quality wine, a simple fruit driven wine lacking concentration of fruit and complexity of aromas and flavours. The fruit is balanced with the acidity and body. The acidity lifts the fruit, resulting in a refreshing finish.

Approximate age of wine: (1 mark)

1 year

Readiness for drinking/potential for ageing: (2 marks)

Ready to drink now, will not improve with age, will keep for 1-2 years due to fruit and acidity structure

Country of origin: (1 mark)

France

Region of origin: (2 marks)

Loire

WINE No. 2

Appearance: (3 marks)

Bright and clear, deep golden core fading to medium gold rim, legs

Nose: (7 marks)

Clean, medium (+) intensity, developing

Orange, marmalade, citrus, lemon, lime, citrus peel, grapefruit, pear, apple, peach, apricot, melon, blossom, floral, rose, violets, perfume, grape, raisin, sultana, figs, honey, mango, pineapple, vanilla, toast, smoke, mineral, stony/steely, mushroom.

Palate: (10 marks)

A sweet wine, high acidity, medium alcohol, medium (+) body, medium (+) intensity, long length

Orange, marmalade, citrus, lemon, lime, citrus peel, grapefruit, mango, pineapple, pear, apple, peach, apricot, melon, blossom, floral, rose, violets, perfume, vanilla, grape, raisin, sultana, figs, honey, mango, pineapple, toast, smoke, mineral, stony/steely, mushroom.

Assessment of quality: (4 marks)

This is an outstanding wine, showing outstanding concentration of fruit and complexity of aroma and flavours due to maturation. The layers of fruit intensity is balanced with the acidity and body. The marked acidity lifts the wine, integrated harmoniously with the sweetness level. A long lingering finish – not cloying, instead delicate with finesse.

Approximate age of wine: (1 mark)

3 years

Readiness for drinking/potential for ageing: (2 marks)

Ready to drink now, will improve over next 2-4 years, will keep for further 5-10 years due to concentration of fruit, acidity and intensity and body. Fruit will further integrate.

Country of origin: (1 mark)

France

Region of origin: (2 marks)

Anjou Saumur, Layon

WINE No. 3

Appearance: (3 marks)

Bright and clear, medium gold core fading to a medium gold rim, legs.

Nose: (7 marks)

Clean, pronounced intensity, developing.

Orange, jam, marmalade, mushroom, truffle, forest floor, wet leaves, apple, pear, gooseberry, lime, citrus peel, lemon, orange blossom, rose, violets, iris, perfume, elderflower, mineral, stony/steely, vegetal, asparagus, tinned peas, black olives, lees, butter, bread, creamy, vanilla, toast, smoke, cedar, nutmeg, cloves, cinnamon, honey, grapes.

Palate: (10 marks)

Off-dry, medium (+) acidity, medium alcohol, medium (+) intensity, medium (+) body, medium (+) length.

Orange, jam, marmalade, mushroom, truffle, forest floor, wet leaves, apple, pear, gooseberry, lime, citrus peel, lemon, orange blossom, rose, violets, iris, perfume, elderflower, mineral, stony/steely, vegetal, asparagus, tinned peas, black olives, lees, butter, bread, creamy, vanilla, toast, smoke, cedar, nutmeg, cloves, cinnamon, honey, grapes.

Assessment of quality: (4 marks)

This is a good wine with concentration and complexity of flavour. Fruit is balanced with acidity and body. Acidity lifts fruit resulting in a refreshing with the extended length.

Approximate age of wine: (1 mark)

2 years

Readiness for drinking/potential for ageing: (2 marks)

Ready now, will improve over next 1-2 years, will keep for a further 2-4 years.

Country of origin: (1 mark)

France

Region of origin: (2 marks)

Loire

Grape Variety: (5 marks)

Chenin Blanc

Reasons for choice: (5 marks)

High acidity across all wines, versatile from dry, off-dry through to sweet sugar levels, variation in colour points to Chenin from pale to golden, botrytis character, light body to medium body.

These are very extensive tasting notes. The grape variety has been correctly identified and the reasons given for this are logical and well thought out. The assessment of quality for each of the wines is well argued and credible and the structure of the wines is largely correct in each instance. Yet these tasting notes fail to convince the examiner that this candidate has any real skill as a taster. This

candidate's response for tasting question 3 is also reproduced on page 62. Once you have read this, I will explain why these are not good tasting notes and what actions were taken against this candidate.

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.

<i>January 2009: White wines with a common link in respect of origin</i>	
<i>Answers: 90</i>	<i>Passes: 54 (60%)</i>

The aim here was to deduce that all three wines were from the Loire Valley. The wines were a Vouvray demi-sec, Sancerre and Muscadet. Many candidates failed to identify the grape variety correctly. The varietal character on the Vouvray and Sancerre should have led to the Loire with the neutrality of the Muscadet confirming this as the most likely origin of these wines.

Scripts submitted for this question were a mixed bag – some extremely good tasting notes resulting in a large number of distinction grades, but also a large number of really poor notes, with some candidates achieving marks of around 20%, which is extremely low.

<i>June 2009: Red wines with a common link in respect of origin</i>	
<i>Answers: 426</i>	<i>Passes: 323 (76%)</i>

The wines for this question were Hermitage, Tavel Rosé and Côtes du Rhône, and it was the region of production that provided the common link. The key to establishing this required sound tasting skills and a bit of logic. In many instances, candidates tried to place the Rosé first and then make the other two wines “fit” rather than looking at all three wines in combination to find the common thread. As a result, many put these wines in the Loire on the assumption that the Rosé was from Anjou. However, this was illogical – the alcohol levels in all three wines were wrong for the Loire. Another popular incorrect choice was California, identifying the Rosé in this instance as Zinfandel Blush. This was also illogical, since this wine was dry and lacked the ripeness of a California Blush.

Those who did well, recognised the elegance and class of the Hermitage, the simple structure of the Côtes du Rhône and the dry, firm structure of the Tavel. These were the clues that would then lead them to the Rhône as the region.

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 2009: Rioja	
<i>Answers: 90</i>	<i>Passes: 66 (73%)</i>

The high pass rate here is not a fair depiction of the general quality of the tasting notes submitted. Far too many candidates achieved "easy" marks by writing stock

descriptions of Rioja for each of the three wines. This prompted the examiner to comment that some candidates achieved relatively high marks without demonstrating really sound tasting skills. This has led the Diploma Examination Panel to review the wording in this question in the next academic year.

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 2009: Soave	
<i>Answers: 425</i>	<i>Passes: 281 (66%)</i>

This was quite a challenging question, although there was clear progression in quality through the three wines chosen – Pieropan Slave Classico 2007, Pieropan “la Rocca” Soave Classico 2006 and Azienda Agricola Soave Classico 2007.

The marker commented that generally candidates were adept at describing the better wines, but were less good when it came to constructive and justified criticism of those that were lacking. There is also a weakness when it comes to assessing more subtle wines such as these. This has become more and more evident in recent years, where there has been a general tendency for candidates to overestimate the quality of “big” wines and miss the subtlety of much better, but more restrained ones. Inevitably, there were those candidates who took advantage of the fact that they had been told these were Soaves and simply wrote a standard tasting note for this wine for all three wines, with very little evidence of any difference in style or quality. These were not convincing tasting notes.

The marker also commented on one candidate who had written extensive tasting notes for all three wines, yet who he felt should be reviewed by the Diploma Examination Panel. This was the same candidate whose script is reproduced above under question 1 in the June examination. Their submission for this question is also reproduced here:

WINE No. 7

Appearance: (3 marks)

Bright, clear, pale gold fading to a medium watery rim, legs, petillance

Nose: (7 marks)

Clean, medium (-) intensity, youthful

Green apple, pear, gooseberry, grape, citrus, lemon, lime, grapefruit, mineral, stony/steely, herbs, grass, hay, blossom, perfume, elderflower, orange, orange blossom, violets, rose, iris, peach, apricot, melon, honey, citrus peel, white pepper, vanilla

Palate: (10 marks)

Dry, medium (+) acidity, medium alcohol, medium (-) body, medium (-) intensity, medium length

Green apple, pear, gooseberry, peach, apricot, melon, grape, honey, citrus, lemon, lime, grapefruit, orange citrus peel, herbs, grass, hay, blossom, perfume, elderflower, violets, rose, iris, honey, citrus peel, white pepper, mineral, stony/steely, vanilla

Detailed assessment of quality: (7 marks)

This is a good quality entry level Soave. This simple fruit driven wine lacks concentration of fruit and complexity. The fruit is balanced by the acidity. The acidity lifts the fruit resulting in a refreshing crisp wine with length but not lingering. A commercial, entry level wine showing minerality and harmonious fruit character. The alcohol is integrated and balanced also. Not enough concentration, complexity to be classed as very good.

Readiness for drinking/potential for ageing: (4 marks)

Ready to drink now, will not improve, will only keep for 1-2 years due to lack of concentration and alcohol. Not enough alcohol, body, complexity to wait longer

Estimated off-premise retail price per bottle including all taxes: (2 marks)

12.99

WINE No. 8

Appearance: (3 marks)

Bright and clear, medium gold fading to a medium watery rim, legs, petillance

Nose: (7 marks)

Clean, medium intensity, developing

Green apples, pears, gooseberry, citrus, lemon, lime, orange, mineral, stony/steely, herbs, grass, hay, blossom, perfume, violet, iris, rose, peach, apricot, melon, pineapple, banana, mango, white pepper, vanilla, honey, clove, nutmeg, cinnamon, citrus peel, yellow plum

Palate: (10 marks)

Dry, medium (+) acidity, medium (+) alcohol, medium body, medium intensity, medium (+) length

Green apples, pears, gooseberry, citrus, lemon, lime, orange, citrus peel, mineral, stony/steely, herbs, grass, hay, blossom, perfume, violet, iris, rose, peach, apricot, melon, yellow plum, white pepper, vanilla, honey, clove, nutmeg, cinnamon, pineapple, banana, mango

Detailed assessment of quality: (7 marks)

This is a good quality, mid market Soave with concentration of fruit and complexity of aromas and flavours. The fruit balances the acidity and body. The acidity lifts the wine and fruit resulting in a fresh crisp wine. Extended length and also alcohol on the finish. Not enough fruit intensity to be classed as very good.

Readiness for drinking/potential for ageing: (4 marks)

Ready to drink now, will not improve, will keep for 2-3 years, due to concentration of fruit, alcohol and acidity. Fruit and alcohol will integrate further.

Estimated off-premise retail price per bottle including all taxes: (2 marks)

12.99

WINE No. 9

Appearance: (3 marks)

Bright and clear, medium gold fading to a medium watery rim, legs, petillance.

Nose: (7 marks)

Clean, medium intensity, youthful.

Grape, green apple, pear, gooseberry, grapefruit, honey, mineral, stony, steely, peach, apricot, melon, pineapple, mango, banana, orange, lime, lemon, citrus peel, raisin, clove, cinnamon, nutmeg, vanilla, toast, white pepper, blossom, perfume, rose, gooseberry, creamy, butter

Palate: (10 marks)

Dry, medium acidity, medium alcohol, medium (-) body, medium intensity, medium (+) length.

Grape, green apple, pear, gooseberry, lime, lemon, orange, grapefruit, honey, vanilla, mineral, stony, steely, peach, apricot, melon, pineapple, mango, banana, raisin, sultana, clove, cinnamon, nutmeg, toast, creamy, butter, blossom, perfume, rose

Detailed assessment of quality: (7 marks)

This is an acceptable quality, entry level Soave. The primary fruit driven wine lacks concentration of fruit and complexity of flavour and extended finish. The fruit is balanced with the acidity although acidity is lacking making the wine taste slightly "flabby" with backbone. Lacking acidity, concentration and complexity to be good. Entry level commercial wine. Alcohol lingers on the finish – out of balance with the fruit and acidity.

Readiness for drinking/potential for ageing: (4 marks)

Ready to drink now, will not improve, will keep for 1-2 years due to lack of concentration, complexity, also lack of acidity.

Estimated off-premise retail price per bottle including all taxes: (2 marks)

6.99

As with the tasting notes submitted for question 1, these are extensive, the quality assessments are good, although they have underestimated the quality of the “la Rocca” wine and have not really differentiated between this and the first wine. Nevertheless, once again these notes fail to convince the examiner that any real tasting skill has been demonstrated. This is entirely down to the extensive list of descriptors given under the nose and palate for each of these six wines (and the previous three wines). If you re-read just the descriptors for all these wines (both question 1 and 3) you will see there is no real difference between the tasting notes, yet they should be describing six very different wines. For example, all six wines are described as having aromas or flavours of “*citrus, lemon, lime, orange*”. Some of these would have been correct for some of the wines, but certainly not all. “Lime” for example is a very different aroma to lemon and the two are not always found together on the same wine. Australian Riesling is often described as having “lime” qualities, yet this is less common on German Riesling. “Orange” is a descriptor that fits very few wines, and certainly you would not find this on Soave or a pure, grassy Sauvignon Blanc like the Saumur, but you would find it on a wine with botrytis, such as the Chaume in question 1.

What this candidate has done is memorise, from the back of the “Systematic Approach to Tasting” laminated card, the group headings and aroma and flavours listed under these. They have then listed as many of these as they could remember for each of the six wines irrespective of whether they were actually evident in the wine or not. In effect, they are not “tasting” or “assessing” the wine. Taking the note for wine no. 9, (the simple, inexpensive Soave), this candidate has listed a total of 32 aromas or flavours. Of these 5 are correct and 27 incorrect. The 5 correct descriptors would be sufficient to give this candidate maximum marks both on the nose and palate, yet actually 84% of their descriptors for this wine were inappropriate. If we were to apply principles of negative marking in these scripts, then all four tasting papers would fail. The panel had no choice but to adjust the marks in all four questions to discount all the marks available for aroma and flavour characteristics. This was clearly an extreme example, which is why these scripts stood out so clearly in the marking process, but we see plenty of evidence of other candidates applying similar strategies in tasting papers. Examiners always make a judgement in such cases on whether candidates are simply “playing the system” rather than assessing the wine accurately.

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 some 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 2009: White wines – Entre Deux Mers, Yellowtail Chardonnay, Rheingau Riesling Kabinett</i>	
<i>Answers: 90</i>	<i>Passes: 59 (66%)</i>

Very few candidates identified the Bordeaux in this line up. A large number picked up some Sauvignon character and immediately assumed it to be a New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc. There was also some spectacularly poor judgement of quality on the Yellowtail Chardonnay, with many mistaking the overt, ripe fruit and heavy use of oak as signs of quality. Those who did this often proclaimed this £3.25 wine to be classic white Burgundy “of outstanding quality”.

<i>June 2009: Red wines – Rioja Reserva 2000, Barossa Shiraz, Argentinian Malbec</i>	
<i>Answers: 425</i>	<i>Passes: 331 (78%)</i>

This was a very good pass rate, and shows that candidates really should not approach this question with trepidation.

In general, candidates seemed more at ease describing the reasonably youthful, fruit driven New World wines. This is becoming more and more common on tasting

papers, and candidates really do need to ensure that they taste a wide spectrum of wines of differing ages and quality levels, as they are definitely weaker when it comes to more mature or subtle wines. In this instance, many confused the Rioja with Burgundy – presumably associating maturity with classic wines, but not thinking beyond the more obvious French “classics”.

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 2009

Group A: Compulsory Question

<p>With reference to New World wines, write a paragraph on FIVE of the following: (<i>Each paragraph carries equal marks</i>)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">a) Zinfandelb) Maipoc) Cloudy Bayd) Wine of Origin (WO)e) Phylloxeraf) Terra Rossa	
<i>Answers: 100</i>	<i>Passes: 75 (75%)</i>

75% 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 mainstream elements of the syllabus. The New World is always a popular subject matter and this, coupled with the paragraph format that always appeals to a larger proportion of candidates seemed to make this question less intimidating, resulting in a solid pass rate.

The section on “Wine of Origin” caused the most problems, with lots of responses far too vague and clearly relying on guesswork. The key facts the examiner was looking for were:

Wine authenticity legislation of South Africa implemented in 1973 and based on similar laws in Europe.

Guarantees information on label has been checked, verified and certified by the Wine & Spirit Board.

Bottles carry a numbered certification seal, usually on the capsule, awarded after strict quality control test.

- 100% of grapes must come from any stated production area.
- Delineates region, district (e.g. Paarl or Stellenbosch), ward (such as Franschhoek) and estates. (NOTE: Not all districts are part of a region and not all wards are part of a district leading to untidy production area boundaries).
- If vintage dated, 75% must come from stated vintage
- If single variety stated, it must comprise 75% of the total and 85% if it is to be sold in the EU.
- Must enrichment banned, acidification permitted, no yield restrictions.

Participation voluntary but non-certified wine subject to spot check analysis.

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

<i>Explain how the vinification and maturation of red wine varies throughout the Burgundy region.</i>	
<i>Answers: 82</i>	<i>Passes: 42 (51%)</i>

This was a very popular question chosen by 82% of candidates sitting this paper. However, for the most part, it was badly answered as the low pass rate shows.

There were the inevitable candidates who had not read the question properly and wrote about white wines as well as red, and there were far too many vague references to “traditional vinification” without explaining what this actually meant. Even where better marks were obtained, scripts tended to be short and rather superficial, in many instances covering no more than the Cote d’Or and Beaujolais Nouveau.

<i>Discuss the use of Sémillon in each of the following wines:</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) <i>Sauternes</i> b) <i>Graves</i> c) <i>South Eastern Australia blend</i> 	
<i>Answers: 89</i>	<i>Passes: 34 (38%)</i>

This was another very popular question (the choice of 89% of candidates), but was also answered extremely badly. Unfortunately far too many scripts were simplistic and lacking detail. Many candidates simply launched straight into the three sections without any discussion of Semillon as a grape variety in general. A number of candidates also lost marks because they did not read the question properly and wrote about Australian Semillon rather than its use in a South Eastern Australia blend. This wine was specifically chosen to provide a clear quality differential and those who wrote about Hunter Valley Semillon missed this and earned no marks for this section of the question.

<i>Why have Pinot Grigio wines become so fashionable? Will sales continue to grow? (An essay format is compulsory for this question)</i>	
<i>Answers: 55</i>	<i>Passes: 32 (58%)</i>

This question was chosen by just over half the candidates sitting this paper. This is unusual, as the compulsory essay format often puts candidates off. Although a 58% pass rate is reasonably good for this format of question, it does not tell the whole

story, as of the 42% who failed, 2/3 of them did so with a fail (unclassified) grade and clearly should not have attempted this question in the first place. In addition, those who passed did so largely with very basic pass grades, with only two candidates achieving distinction and only nine with merit.

Candidates were generally weak at the second half of the question, which relied more heavily on personal input.

Every year this report urges candidates to spend a few minutes before answering any question in putting together a short essay plan. This is particularly important with these compulsory essay questions, yet very few candidates actually follow this advice and in so doing run the risk of missing out key points of the question, or worse still losing sight of the focus of the question completely. I suspect there is reluctance to waste “precious” time on this, but the plan does not need to take long or be extensive, and it really does help.

<p><i>Describe how climate, soil and grape variety vary across the following regions:</i></p> <p>a) <i>Vinho Verde</i> b) <i>Bairrada</i> c) <i>Dão</i> d) <i>Alentejo</i></p>	
<i>Answers: 34</i>	<i>Passes: 18 (53%)</i>

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

In general, candidates were better on red grapes than white, but there was a tendency to ignore key words in the question such as “climate, soil, grape variety”. In addition, many candidates failed to look at how these differ in the four regions, simply stating what they were in each region with no discussion at all. This made their responses very simplistic in terms of demonstrating real understanding of the regions.

Vinho Verde was the region candidates were most knowledgeable about, but there was some confusion between Bairrada and Dão.

The following candidate wrote an excellent response to the section on Alentejo. It is not particularly long, but is packed with accurate facts.

“Alentejo

Climate

This is mostly continental, with hot summers where temperatures can reach up to 40°C. It is also arid to the south away from the coast (as it gets less than 600mm rain a year). Rainfall tends to be concentrated in the winter months so summer drought is a problem and irrigation is therefore widely used.

Soil

Alentejo has largely loam soils with granite and schist.

Grape variety

Mainly red wines are produced in this region. Trincadeira is the most important red grape, providing dark, plummy wines with notes of chocolate and coffee, suited to oak ageing. Aragonez (Tempranillo) is also used, either in a blend or as a single varietal, and wines are also produced from Moreto and Castelão. There is also some Cabernet Sauvignon and Syrah.

White wines are produced, but are less well known. They tend to be full-bodied, honeyed white wines with low acidity, made from Roupeiro and Antão Vaz. Arinto is often used to lift acidity.”

Your company sells a Grand Cru Gewurztraminer from Alsace, a Côtes de Provence Rosé and an Argentinian Malbec. For each wine, describe its style and method of production.

Answers: 84

Passes: 53 (63%)

This was a straight-forward, factual question, looking at three different production techniques for red, white and rosé wine, and yet a number of candidates simply wrote very similar responses for all three production methods.

As often happens, candidates were able to describe the three different styles of wine, but struggled to come up with the detail that differentiates the production of each wine, simply writing vague descriptions referring to “stainless steel vinification” or use of “malo-lactic fermentation”. The second part of this question was vital, as it demonstrated real understanding of the wines – for example not all of these wines will undergo malo-lactic fermentation, but the reason for blocking this is not always the same. One wine was in effect “hand crafted” and vinified to retain aromatics (the Gewurztraminer), one was made by the saignée method (the rosé) and the other used classic red wine techniques (Argentinian Malbec). This needed to form the basis of any response.

<p><i>With reference to the wines of Europe, write a paragraph on FIVE of the following: (Each paragraph carries equal marks)</i></p> <p>a) <i>Barbera</i> b) <i>Graciano</i> c) <i>Furmint</i> d) <i>Müller Thurgau</i> e) <i>Savatiano</i> f) <i>Blaifränkisch</i></p>	
<p><i>Answers: 57</i></p>	<p><i>Passes: 26 (46%)</i></p>

This was the second paragraph style question on this paper, but unlike the compulsory question, the low pass rate shows that candidates did not do as well here as they had in the compulsory question. Almost certainly, the pass rate in the compulsory question was bolstered by candidates who achieved high marks in the examination overall, whereas this question was far more likely to have been chosen by the weaker candidates who were unable to answer the more challenging, discursive questions. In addition, 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 rates for nearly all the questions.

There were a number of reasons for low marks – failing to read the question and writing about New World wines rather than those from Europe, answering all six paragraphs or conversely answering less than five. In addition, there was the usual evidence of fundamental errors, with both Muller Thürgau and Furmint described by some as black grapes, Savatiano was often confused with Santorini, and Blaifränkisch was described by one candidate as a wine region. Graciano generated some of the most varied responses, such as:

“A white grape variety from the Friuli region.”

“An Italian grape variety mostly used in blended Corsican wines.”

“An Italian grape grown in Campania and Basilicata which produces Graciano de Tuffo.”

“A red grape variety from Switzerland.”

“An Italian wine made from a white grape from the middle-eastern edge of Italy. North of Rome and south of the Po River.”

Needless the say, all of these are incorrect.

June 2009

Group A: Compulsory Question

<p><i>What are the advantages and disadvantages of Cabernet Sauvignon in the</i></p> <p>a) <i>vineyard</i> b) <i>winery</i> c) <i>marketplace</i></p>	
<p><i>Answers: 432</i></p>	<p><i>Passes: 339 (78%)</i></p>

The mainstream topic matter of this question meant that the majority of candidates were able to provide sufficient detail for a pass grade, with a good number of solid merit grades as well.

The most logical approach to this question was to take each of the three sections in turn and examine the advantages and disadvantages of the grape in this connection. This should have led to the following key points:

Advantages in the vineyard

Hard wood makes it suitable for machine picking and resistant to winter frost.
Late budding, therefore less prone to spring frost.
Thick skin gives resistance to most fungal diseases and harvest rain.
Retains recognisable varietal traits even when heavily cropped.
Expressive of individual *terroirs* and vintages.

Disadvantages in the vineyard

Can give low yields so wines can be expensive to produce.
“Green” character comes over in cool years, so it needs a warm climate for the best results.
High vigour vine, so it needs good canopy management to avoid risk of shaded fruit, higher pH, unripe tannins and insufficient sugar balance or increased susceptibility to rot.

Advantages in the winery

Great structure due to high tannins and acidity means wines tend to be ideal for long maturation.
Has great blending potential with varieties as diverse as Merlot, Cabernet Franc, Petit Verdot, Shiraz, Sangiovese and Tempranillo.
Has great affinity with oak.
Deep colour makes it easy to work with.

Disadvantages in the winery

High tannins need careful management (pumping over, cuvaion, wood ageing, racking, micro-oxygentation etc.)

It may need blending with other varieties to soften it and to fill out the “hollow” mid palate.

Advantages in the marketplace

It is well known with global recognition.

Aristocrat links through Bordeaux's top wines and cult wines of California.

Ability to age in cask and bottle, giving classic “cigar box and dried fruit” bouquet.

Good food wine.

Often lower in alcohol compared to other varieties such as Shiraz and Merlot which makes it more acceptable to many palates.

Distinct varietal character appeals to many.

Disadvantages in the marketplace

Austerity – wines can be tough when young, needing time to soften up.

Wines are often “mean and green” if tannins are unripe.

Perception – seen as more “high brow” than other mass appeal varieties such as Merlot or Shiraz) and not as “trendy” as Pinot Noir.

Regarded as a wine that needs laying down.

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

<i>Account for the success of Chile as a wine producer and exporter. (An essay format is COMPULSORY for this question)</i>	
<i>Answers: 348</i>	<i>Passes: 270 (78%)</i>

There was a surprisingly high take up for this compulsory essay question, where it is not just a case of getting the facts across - structure was also important. This was clearly a popular topic and was actually the second most popular question on the paper despite the essay format. Those who failed, did so because their response was generally too superficial in content.

Inevitably, a large number of candidates placed significant focus on the fact that Chile is “phylloxera free” rather than examining the more important reasons for the commercial success of the country. This meant that despite the high pass rate, there were very few exceptional scripts with only 2% of the candidates answering this question achieving a distinction grade.

The following script is an example from a candidate who is clearly reasonably knowledgeable about the country. Their response is better in terms of examining how production has led to success, and this is certainly a script that needs a stronger commercial focus to really explain what has led to Chile's success as an exporter. This is why this only gained a pass grade, rather than merit or distinction. It also contains some errors and is rather repetitive in places.

“In the last 20 years Chile has seen an explosion in its wine production. Following a long period of economic and political instability, falling domestic consumption forced Chile to improve the quality of its wines and instead of producing oxidised wines from its local varieties, pais, it embraced international varieties and modern winemaking techniques.

As a wine producer it is blessed with a perfect climate for growing fruit. Its vineyards run the length of this narrow country. It is sheltered from sea breezes by the coastal range of hills and to the west the Andes supply a constant supply of ice melt necessary for irrigation. Most vineyards are high altitude, 200m – 1km above sea-level and the climate has been likened to Bordeaux or Napa. Its focus on quality production is still growing and so too is the understanding of the areas and grapes best suited to each other. New areas, regions and sub regions are appearing, for example San Antonio in the Anconcagua region with its Elqui and Limari areas are producing very exciting Pinot Noir and Sauvignon Blanc. In the Central Valley, the biggest and most important for wine production this has been divided in four key areas and even within these there is still great variation. For example Rapel is now divided into two – Cochapoal and Colquahua. However Colquahua offers distinct variation within itself. It is here that a lot of foreign investment has been received.

Its success as an exporter has already been hinted at. Its climate and near perfect growing conditions have meant, firstly, recognisable international grape varieties have been planted and successfully grown. It exports a larger percentage of its wine than any other country in the world, over 65%. Its markets are importantly the USA and the UK. The recognisable names of Merlot, Chardonnay, Cabernet Sauvignon and Pinot Noir means these markets are readily receptive to these wines.

Secondly, the investment in Chile by international companies and winemakers has helped as an exporter (producer too). Italian, French and American wine producers have invested in and brought their winemaking knowledge to this country. Los Vascos for example, with their Rothschild connection, Casa Lapostolle – another French company. Spain too with Torress. The internationalisation of the winery and the wines has led to successful export sales.

Overall, Chile's success as a producer and exporter have come perhaps due to its late entry into modern winemaking, its receptiveness to modern ideas and investment, its hunger to change in order to survive. Also its near perfect growing conditions, disease free vineyards and bountiful irrigation mean that this country has been very successful and will continue to do so. It is still a young country on the world stage and the best is yet to come.”

Candidates with a stronger commercial background commented on the fact that the wines tend to be consumer friendly (fruity, soft tannins, moderate acidity, consistent quality, not too complicated) and that many over-deliver for the price. Others pointed out that Chile has a strong presence in the key mid market sector (£5-£10) and that wines tend to have smart modern packaging with plenty of back label information. Those who were clearly active in the trade explained how producers were prepared to work with the big off trade retailers and on trade wholesalers through promotions,

customer tastings etc, and are supported by a strong and pro-active generic body with an effective generic campaign.

Those who gained high marks, made a clear effort in the concluding section of their essay. Some claimed that Chile does not want to always be associated with “£5.99 Merlot”. Others questioned whether a premium Chilean niche could be created without losing the core volume market that has made them so successful in the first place. There was also mention of the very tight margins producers have accepted in order to gain the current success and some candidates queried whether Chile would be able to cope with the tougher exchange rates at present or the very competitive strategy of multiple retailers in the UK.

All of this was evidence of the kind of personal, commercial input that convinces examiners that candidates have a strong knowledge base.

<p><i>Describe the factors that have led to top quality wines being produced in Chablis. (40% weighting)</i> <i>What are the challenges of producing wine there? (30% weighting)</i> <i>What does the region offer the consumer in terms of wine style and quality level? (30% weighting)</i></p>	
Answers: 387	Passes: 249 (64%)

This was the most popular question on the exam paper. The majority of candidates focussed on the most obvious aspects such as soil and climate. This usually resulted in a basic pass grade provided they covered this in sufficient detail. However, very few candidates actually did what the question asked, addressing the three individual sections separately. Far too many candidates simply wrote everything they knew about the Chablis region without actually putting this into the context of the question as set. They described the region without explaining how what they wrote related to quality in the wines – simply stating that they do. For example pointing out that the “limestone soil results in quality wines”, but not explaining what this contributes to the wines in terms of finesse or longevity. These candidates picked up some marks for correct information by default rather than because they demonstrated real understanding of the region. Many scripts were simply too short and therefore, superficial in content or extremely simplistic. Far too many candidates seemed to think that global warming was a good thing, leading to better quality wines, rather than understanding that this could actually threaten the purity of classic Chablis. Challenges were often only limited to climatic issues such as frost and hail rather than looking beyond the study notes and considering other commercial issues such as the controversial expansion of the region and the effect this has on the reputation of the region or wine quality, or the threat posed by other Chardonnay wines produced in the Chablis style.

The debate over oaked versus unoaked Chablis largely addressed the issue of style. In terms of the quality levels available to the consumer, the examiner was not simply looking for a list of the 4 levels (Petit Chablis, Chablis AC, Chablis Premier Cru and

Chablis Grand Cru), but some discussion of the various levels. For example, candidates with a good understanding of the wines of the region pointed out that Petit Chablis tends to come from the areas of expansion (on the less good Portlandian clay soil), describing how the wines can be very austere. Higher marks were also awarded to candidates who explained **why** Premier Cru wines are better quality, referring to riper fruit (the result of better aspect in the vineyards), with elements of citrus rather than tart green apple, and a softer creamier texture and notes of minerality. Good candidates clearly differentiated between standard Chablis that has minimal evidence of mineral notes and Premier Cru and Grand Cru where this is more prevalent due to planting on sites where Kimmeridgean soil dominates. A reasonable number of candidates were able to state the number of Premier Cru sites in the region and give examples of key ones. Those with good knowledge of the region also explained how the Grand Cru wines differ from the Premier Cru, being more likely to have oak influence (either partial fermentation or ageing in oak), pointing out that these wines need bottle age, developing smoky complexity. Some candidates were also able to name all seven Grand Cru sites.

<p><i>Write a paragraph on FIVE of the following:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) <i>Pfalz</i> b) <i>Garrafeira</i> c) <i>Furmint</i> d) <i>Sicily</i> e) <i>Nemea</i> f) <i>Chateau Musar</i> 	
<i>Answers: 238</i>	<i>Passes: 90 (38%)</i>

Both this, and the other paragraph question on this paper generated poor results. It was clear that this question was the choice of a large number of candidates who were unable to answer the more specific questions, as shown by the large number of candidates achieving fail (unclassified) grades (36%) – a larger proportion than for any other grade and only 2 distinction grades out of 238 candidates. It is stressed each year in this report how 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. 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.

It was astonishing how many candidates had no idea what garrafeira was despite this being one of the questions asked at Advanced Certificate level. This was described by some as a grape variety, a wine region, a type of soil, a sweet wine, a tasting panel, a wine making vessel, a type of bottle for Vinho Verde and a 12 year old Port. Nemea also caused problems for many, and was answered on the basis of guesswork.

<p><i>Describe how the factors in the vineyard and winery determine the style and quality of:</i></p> <p>a) <i>Priorat</i> b) <i>Ribera del Duero</i> c) <i>Valdepeñas</i></p>	
<p><i>Answers: 213</i></p>	<p><i>Passes: 121 (57%)</i></p>

The breakdown of marks for this question showed that it was answered both by those who really knew the subject (with a top mark of 95%) and those who clearly did not have a clue (a bottom mark of 6%). In general candidates were weak on Valdepenas with a significant number mistakenly thinking this is in Galicia. A number of candidates only answered two of the three sections in this question and lost a third of the marks as a result, which inevitably also led to a fail grade since they were unable to make up 55% from the remaining 2/3 of the marks. As with the Chablis question, far too many candidates simply stated what the factors in the vineyard and winery are, rather than explaining why these are significant in terms of determining wine style or quality.

<p><i>Write a paragraph on FIVE of the following:</i></p> <p>a) <i>Pinotage</i> b) <i>Gimblett gravels</i> c) <i>Washington State</i> d) <i>Hunter Valley Semillon</i> e) <i>Robert Mondavi</i> f) <i>Australian Wine Research Institute (AWRI)</i></p>	
<p><i>Answers: 347</i></p>	<p><i>Passes: 161 (46%)</i></p>

This was the second paragraph style question on this paper, and also answered poorly despite being on a popular part of the syllabus (New World wines). It was certainly a popular question amongst candidates, second only to the question on Chablis. However, the paragraph format always trips up those candidates whose knowledge does not span enough of the syllabus. As with the previous paragraph question, the largest proportion of candidates (31%) achieved a fail (unclassified)

grade, showing that once again, this question was chosen as a last resort by the weaker candidates.

Rather surprisingly, the section on Hunter Valley Semillon was not answered well, with far too many candidates unaware of the actual style of this wine – likening it incorrectly to the sweet wines of Bordeaux. There was also lots of evidence of guesswork in the section on Australian Wine Research Institute. Those who used their logic, and based their response of what they knew of other research institutes such as Geisenheim or Davis, managed to scrape together enough marks for a pass in this section of the question.

The following is an example of the kind of detail on Hunter Valley Semillon that generated high marks. Unfortunately, answers like this are the exception rather than the norm:

“Hunter Valley Semillon

This is a wine produced in New South Wales, Australia. The vineyards lie approximately 160 km north and inland from Sydney. The region is divided into two key areas, the Lower and the Upper Hunter Zone. However, it is the Lower Hunter Zone that is particularly noted for producing long lived dry Semillon with the best peaking after 10-20 years in bottle. In this particular part of the Hunter Valley, the hot climate is offset by humidity, with afternoon cloud cover and substantial rainfall during the growing season. However, high rainfall at harvest can lead to grey rot problems. The soil is volcanic basalt and as they have problems with Phylloxera, vines are grafted. Hunter Valley Semillon is more acid driven and herbaceous when young, but flavours of honey, nut, butter and toast develop with age. The flavour and texture suggests a wine fermented or matured in oak, but this is not usually the case.”

<p><i>Outline the rules governing the production of Grand Cru wines in Alsace. (60% weighting)</i> <i>Why has this category not met with universal approval in the region? (40% weighting)</i></p>	
<p><i>Answers: 170</i></p>	<p><i>Passes: 92 (54%)</i></p>

This was generally an uninspiring set of responses, particularly in terms of the second half of the question, which was less factual in nature. Those who read beyond the study notes did better, as this section required sound commercial knowledge on the part of the candidate to generate good marks, but this was lacking in far too many instances.

The following are examples of some of the responses to this section given by better candidates:

- Grand Cru is not in itself a guarantee of quality - quality depends not just on site but grower's attitude.
- Of 94 sites originally proposed, only 25 were initially chosen in 1983. Yet by the mid 1990's more than 50 "provisional" Grand Cru sites existed.
- "Provisional sites" cause confusion, with some producers labelling wines as Grand Cru and others choosing not to.

- The current system is too simplistic, a true vineyard classification in Alsace would need more levels.
- There has been rapid development of large numbers of Grand Cru sites, without developing Premier Cru sites.
- Not all Grand Cru sites suit all four varieties. Sites need to be planted with the correct varieties to realise their full quality potential.
- There is poor definition of the size and exact borders of the individual Grands Crus.
- Sites are too large, so they have a wide variation of soil types and mesoclimates.
- Parcels of land have been included that were not worthy of Grand Cru designation - accusations of political interference abound.
- Too many average quality wines are produced by co-ops and some growers who are cashing in on the Grand Cru name.

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. This is something examiners comment on time and again.

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 2008/09, in November, March and June. The overall pass rate for the unit as a whole for all these dates combined was 64%.

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

November 2008

Question 1 – Vodka, Plymouth Gin, Bourbon	
Answers: 201	Passes: 157 (78%)

Results for this question were very sound with a good percentage of merit and distinction grades. Candidates were advised that all three samples were made from similar base materials and were asked in the concluding section to explain how the different styles were achieved given that the base material was the same. This meant that marks were not only gained for accurate descriptions but also for demonstrating an understanding of how production affects style. The key to the final part of this question was identifying that all three spirits were grain based. Having established this, the candidate then needed to explain how neutrality is obtained in the vodka (column still distillation, filtering, no ageing), how the aromatic quality of the gin is achieved (use of botanicals, redistilled in pot still, no ageing), and what

accounts for the distinctive character of Bourbon (use of “backset”, “doubler”, charred American white oak, ageing).

Once again, some candidates 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, and terminology does differ between these.

Question 2 – Write a short paragraph on each of the following: a) Distillation of Armagnac b) Islay Malt Whisky c) Production of Agave sugars	
<i>Answers: 198</i>	<i>Passes: 109 (55%)</i>

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 good responses here on Agave sugars, but lots of confusion over distillation of Armagnac, either confusing this with Cognac or simply not knowing enough about how these differ. Another common error was writing about Whisky production in general terms rather than Islay as a specific category.

March 2009

Question 1 – VS Cognac, White Rum, 12 year old Single Malt Whisky	
<i>Answers: 281</i>	<i>Passes: 232 (83%)</i>

This was an excellent pass rate with more candidates gaining merit than any other grade. Most candidates gained high marks for the Whisky, which they clearly found easy to describe and identify due to the very obvious peaty character. The neutral Rum in contrast caused problems for many, and was often mistaken for Vodka which was understandable. However, those who identified this as Gin showed considerable weakness in their tasting skills. Candidates who correctly deduced that this was Rum often picked up the coconut character and the slightly sweet confectioned note which is what the following candidate did.

SPIRIT No. 2

Appearance: (3 marks)

Water-white colourless spirit with slight silver-green tinge. Lots of legs.

Nose: (7 marks)

Light intensity, youthful, fresh, spirity, sugar cane, candy floss, coconut, citrus, sweet spice, herbal, grassy, waxy. Addition of water brings out confectioned, sugar syrup note.

Palate: (10 marks)

Dry, balanced alcohol, light body, with a slightly oily mouthfeel. Light intensity, lemon, herbs, grass, sweet spice, fresh coconut. Medium length with a simple but balanced finish.

Specific identity of spirit: (2 marks)

White Rum.

Assessment of quality within the category: (3 marks)

Good quality spirit with a balanced structure. Smooth textured with alcohol giving it a clean bite. Light and simple character is deliberately neutral for use as a mixer spirit.

This candidate's comments relating to the quality are particularly sensible. Having decided what this spirit was, they have then written the quality assessment in this context. For example, this is a good spirit for what it is – a simple spirit for mixed drinks rather than a complex spirit for sipping on its own, such as the Malt Whisky.

Question 2 – Write a paragraph on each of the following: a) Blended Scotch Whisky b) Marc c) Marketing of premium Vodkas	
<i>Answers: 280</i>	<i>Passes: 156 (56%)</i>

Once again, the pass rate for the theory question is considerably lower than for the tasting question. In this instance, most candidates passed with a sound pass grade rather than with anything higher – there were very few really exceptional scripts.

Too many candidates described the general principle of distillation of Whisky rather than focussing on what distinguishes a Blended Scotch Whisky from other whiskies. There were also lots of very weak responses on Marc despite this being well documented in the study materials.

The following candidate was one of the few who gained a distinction grade. Their response on “Marc” was particularly good and the section on “marketing of premium Vodka” had a sound commercial focus.

a) Blended Scotch Whisky.

The first Scotch whisky was blended in the 1830s, where a malt whisky was added to a grain whisky.

Malt whisky is ~~produced~~ made from malted barley in a pot still - so has rounder, heavier, oilier flavours than the grain whisky - which has been produced from possibly various grains such as corn, wheat etc with some malted barley, and distilled in a column still, so is of higher strength than malt whisky (grain = max 94.8%). This will make it a lighter, less weighty spirit than the malt.

Both become more accessible when married together, each mellowing the other's harsher qualities. The ~~blend~~ ^{separate components} can be aged (the Scotch Whisky Act puts this at a minimum of 3 years) and then blended - malt whisky is generally aged in old ex-Bourbon or ex-Sherry barrels, and the grain in new barrels - all max 700 litre.

The blend can then be aged further so the separate components can meld together and mellow out. The blend can be of 2 or 100(+) different spirits - the blender's aim will be to emulate a house style which is consistent year on year (for instance Bell's Whisky) or that can age for a certain amount of time, or that is eg. peatier, sweeter (Dalwhinnie, for example in the Highlands), or lighter and more accessible to the mass market.

Malt whisky alone can be blended - either spirits

b Marc

Marc is an AC controlled spirit which can be produced throughout France.

It is a pomace based spirit and many wine makers produce this as a 'side-line' to their still wine production - using the remaining grape material after they have been pressed.

If this material is from red grapes it will already have been fermented, and if from white will need fermenting usually. It is then distilled - either in a pot still using a bagnomaria ~~for~~ (outer casing containing cool water so that any solid material doesn't stick to the copper pot still, burn, and produce off aromas), or suspending the matter in a basket and pumping steam through it to evaporate the alcohols and congeners.

As any grape can be used, there is no specified style or characteristic for this. It can also be distilled in a column still - producing a spirit of higher alcoholic strength and lighter style.

The distillate can be aged if the producer so wishes, and then reduced and bottled.

This is also done in Italy - where the 'vinaccia' is ~~then~~ distilled to become grappa.

If the spirit is aged it is normally not for long as the aim is to get a fruity / grapey ^{marc} spirit which has characters that might be overpowered by oak. Some producers are experimenting ~~this~~ with the lighter oak, therefore.

2c Marketing of Premium Vodkas.

Premium vodkas only really emerged in the 1970s/1980s. Before that Smirnoff was the market leader (and still is), with a reputation for simplicity, functional, light spirit. This took off post WW2 and prohibition when the taste for cocktails and complicated/complex spirits went out of fashion.

In the 1980s Absolut spent millions of dollars, particularly in the US, on advertising campaigns to launch their new, premium vodka. Its image was modernity, style, clean and fashionable. As the average vodka consumer cannot see, taste or smell the difference (particularly when mixed) their image was paramount and therefore marketing also paramount.

Absolut were successful and managed to gain and maintain significant market share.

As others have emerged since then in their image, perhaps pertaining to be even more premium - for instance, Grey Goose, which ~~has~~ sold 200,000 cases in 2000, and then over 1.4 million cases only a couple of years later - they were then sold to Baccardi - Martini.

Their image is not only style and sophistication but now there is a marketing 'war' between simple, functional vodkas (eg. Smirnoff) and 'character' vodkas - for instance Diageo's Ciroc is made from grapes, and many claim purity of character - implying the vodka still has character.

June 2009

Question 1 – Ricard Pastis, blended Scotch Whisky, Jamaica Rum	
<i>Answers: 100</i>	<i>Passes: 72 (72%)</i>

It was no surprise that the best descriptions were those for the Pastis with its obvious aniseed, fennel, liquorice aromas, but it was obvious from many descriptions that candidates still do not always add water during tasting of spirits, as those who did not failed to comment on the louching of this spirit on the appearance.

As with some previous Unit 4 tasting papers, we changed the emphasis in the concluding section of this paper, asking candidates to describe how the method of production accounts for the style of the various spirits. However, a number of candidates failed to read the question and simply wrote the same information that appears in the concluding section of the Systematic Approach to Tasting irrespective of its relevance in this instance. Another reason for poor marks, was not using the proper terminology as defined in the Spirits SAT which differs from that used in wine tasting.

Question 2 – Write a paragraph on each of the following:	
a) Irish Whiskey b) Brandy de Jerez c) Pisco	
<i>Answers: 100</i>	<i>Passes: 47 (47%)</i>

Results for this theory question were very poor with more candidates achieving a fail (unclassified) grade than any other (29%). Nevertheless, in amongst the very poor and mediocre pass grades were some excellent responses, with 10% of candidates achieving distinction.

In general, the section on Pisco was particularly poor with many candidates confused about what it is produced from, how or where.

The usual pitfalls were there in all three sections – writing in general about Whisky rather than Irish Whiskey in particular, or simply describing the distillation of brandy rather than focussing on information that is specific to the production of Brandy de Jerez. Those who did know what Pisco was, limited their answer to production in Chile, failing to mention that it is also produced in other parts of South America. Those who had really done their homework were not only aware that it is found in Peru and Bolivia, but also knew something about how Pisco from these countries differs from that from Chile.

Unit 5, Sparkling Wines

The examination for Unit 5 was run on three separate occasions in the academic year 2008/09, in November, March and June. The overall pass rate for the unit as a whole for all these dates combined was 74%.

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

November 2008

Question 1 – Roederer Quartet NV, Champagne Deutz 2000, Asti Martini	
Answers: 196	Passes: 157 (80%)

This was a high pass rate, probably helped by having Asti Martini in the line up. Distinctly aromatic wines like this always help candidates to pick up easy marks on the nose and palate. However, it did not play to those who tend to sit on the fence and resort to the use of “medium” to assess the structure of the wine, as this wine had plenty of “highs” (intensity) and “lows” (alcohol, body). The vintage champagne also helped many to achieve good marks as it was easy to pick up the autolytic character on this.

The Roderer was often identified as Cava, even though it was not a logical conclusion based on most descriptions. It seemed that whilst they had established it was not Champagne, they failed to consider the New World as an option and therefore tried to shoehorn their description to fit Cava. The autolytic character was in keeping with a Cava but there was none of the typical rubber notes – this was a much more vibrant wine.

Question 2 – Write a paragraph on each of the following: a) Champagne Soils b) Australian sparkling wine c) Blending	
Answers: 194	Passes: 150 (77%)

This was an excellent result, not just a high pass rate, but also a large proportion of distinction grades.

Nevertheless, there were inevitable weaknesses. Responses on blending were often simplistic – only considering the blending of the different grape varieties rather than other factors such as different vintages, vineyards, villages, regions (such as in Australia) or even countries in the case of EU Sekt. Many candidates limited their response to Champagne and missed out on many aspects of blending as a result.

March 2009

Question 1 – Cava NV, Jacob's Creek, Rose Champagne NV	
Answers: 221	Passes: 151 (68%)

This was a slightly disappointing result for a tasting paper. There were a number of reasons for this. Firstly, although most candidates spotted the classic rubbery note on the Cava, those who did not honed in on the autolytic note and decided this must therefore have been Champagne. There is a tendency to assume that autolysis automatically means the sample must be Champagne rather than looking beyond this for other clues. Had this been a good quality New World sparkling wine with autolytic character, riper fruit would have been the clue that would discount Champagne. However, the New World sparkling wine on this paper did not have clear autolytic character – it was rather confected with very tropical fruit. It was clearly too one dimensional to be confused with Champagne.

Very often candidates write their tasting notes in the form of a bullet-point list, eg

- Acidity medium
- Body full

These are far less convincing than full descriptive notes written by better candidates, as it is only in this format that they can convey the more subtle nuances of the wine. However, one candidate took the list format to an even lower standard in this exam, not even bothering to write words out in full. As a result, their tasting note became a series of abbreviations which relied on the examiner interpreting these correctly. For example, it was impossible to distinguish between their observations for acidity and alcohol, since both were written as “A – medium”, “A – high”.

It is never a good idea to use abbreviations in an examination. Not only is it lazy and sloppy, but more importantly, it is often impossible for the examiner to be sure what they mean. In one theory question a candidate repeatedly referred to DRC and it was only on reading this a couple of times that it became clear that this was the candidate's abbreviation for Domaine Romanée Conti.

Question 2 – Write a paragraph on each of the following: a) Sekt b) Franciacorta c) Chardonnay	
<i>Answers: 221</i>	<i>Passes: 168 (76%)</i>

76% is a good pass rate for a compulsory theory question and there certainly were a lot of good scripts achieving merit grades, but only a few were at the top end of the scale, gaining distinction.

Of those who knew what Franciacorta was, responses were largely very good, however this was in stark contrast to those who had no idea at all and simply guessed or those who confused it with Asti. Candidates were often confused when it came to writing about Sekt, particularly in terms of the difference between Sekt and Deutscher Sekt and the detail relating to production methods, grape varieties used, percentages of these etc.

The following candidate's response is not particularly extensive, but it covers the main points and is correct.

"Sekt is not a sparkling German wine but a wine that HAS BEEN MADE SPARKLING IN GERMANY. The grapes for this wine come from Italy and France. The two main styles are Trocken and Halbtrocken. If the grapes to produce the sparkling wine are grown in Germany, the Sekt is called Deutscher Sekt. If the grapes come from one of the 13 Anbaugebiete (examiner's note – incorrect spelling, should be Anbaugebiete), the wine will take the superior appellation of Deutscher Sekt bA. This wine is entirely produced using the tank method whereby the second fermentation of the grapes happens in a pressurised tank. Some individual Einzellige produce a higher quality Sekt using the traditional method."

This was certainly adequate for a pass mark. Higher marks could have been gained by including reference to grape varieties used, an indication of what percentage of production is Sekt rather than Deutscher Sekt, some discussion of the style of these wines and examples of key producers.

June 2009

Question 1 – Sekt Extra Trocken, Jacob's Creek Chardonnay Pinot Noir, Deutz Champagne 2000	
<i>Answers: 152</i>	<i>Passes: 114 (75%)</i>

This should have been a fairly easy trio of wines, with clear Riesling character on the Sekt, ripe forward fruit and slightly confected note on the Jacob's Creek and clear

autolytic character on the vintage Champagne. Most candidates spotted the latter, but a surprising number wrongly identified the Jacob's Creek as Asti or Prosecco and the Sekt was mistaken for Cava in some cases, with too many candidates describing autolytic character that simply was not there.

Question 2 – Write a paragraph on each of the following: a) South Africa b) Lees Ageing c) Récoltant-manipulant (RM)	
<i>Answers: 152</i>	<i>Passes: 114 (75%)</i>

Despite the high pass rate for this question, a large number of candidates scraped through on a borderline pass on the basis of their response to the first two sections. Far too many candidates either had no idea what RM was or confused it with other sectors of the Champagne trade such as Negociant Manipulant (NM) or even Grand Marque (GM).

Almost every candidate got their best marks on "lees ageing". However, even here, there was a marked difference between those who had really learnt about it and those who were only able to comment on the flavours it imparted without any facts relating to why or how it imparts these flavours or what the various stipulated time-frames are for lees ageing. In addition, there were numerous references to "secondary fermentation" when the correct term should have been "second fermentation". There is a very distinct difference between these two processes and candidates at this level should know this.

The following is an example of a very knowledgeable and clear response on "Récoltant-Manipulant":

"Recoltant-Manipulant are growers in the Champagne region who produce and bottle their own champagne from their vineyards. These wines while lacking the complexity of a blend of terroirs, show the special nuances of a specific terroir. Because most growers are small production, many do not have the facility for ageing a lot of reserve wines such as Krug or Roederer (10 years in reserve) and therefore often show more specific vintage character as well. These champagnes, although not widely available in the UK market, make up about 60% of the French domestic market with many of the French holding standing orders or cellar door purchases with certain growers. These wines are also generally very good value within the declining champagne market as the Grand Marques have become super-premium in price, many growers have not raised their prices as high as they are not controlled by grape growing prices (100% for the Grands Crus which were raised considerably in 2008). Good producers include Larmandier Bernier. Many believe that these RM are also very successful at the ultra-brut level showing the terroir of the vineyard best in these wines."

Unit 6, Fortified Liqueur Wines

The examination for Unit 6 was run on three separate occasions in the academic year 2008/09, in November, March and June. The overall pass rate for the unit as a whole for all these dates combined was 67%.

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

November 2008

Question 1 – Extra dry white Port, 10 year old Tawny Port, LBV Port 2002	
Answers: 221	Passes: 148 (67%)

Identifying the white Port was a challenge for some candidates. In many cases, where candidates read the question carefully and established that all three wines were from the same country, having identified wines 2 and 3 as Port they opted for Madeira in the case of wine 1 rather than considering that it could be a white Port. Those who took this route often failed to pick up the oxidation on this wine or the slightly chemical, resinous character that would not be found on Madeira. A significant number of candidates also overestimated the quality on the LBV, mistaking it for Vintage Port. It certainly had enough concentration and tertiary character to give some complexity and distinguish it from a basic Ruby, but lacked the massive structure one would expect from a true Vintage.

Question 2 – Write a paragraph on each of the following:	
a) Estufagem b) Gonzalez Byass c) Muscat	
Answers: 219	Passes: 141 (64%)

There were two relatively easy sections to this question – estufagem and Muscat, but Gonzalez Byass caught many out, either because they did not know enough about this or did not know the best way the approach this type of question.

The key points that would have guaranteed a pass were as follows:

- Who or what this is
- Where it is
- What it produces
- Some detail about the products

Good candidates ensured that they included evidence of commercial awareness in their response beyond the basic factual content outlined above. This commercial focus is fundamental to success in the WSET Diploma in all units, not just Unit 1.

Compare the following two scripts – the first achieving high marks and the other failing:

“Gonzalez Byass is one of the biggest and most significant Sherry houses in Jerez, the capital of the sherry region in Andalucia, Southern Spain. It was founded in 1835 by Maria Manuel Gonzalez Angel at the age of 23. In 1836 he began trading with UK agent, Robert Byass. In 1849 Tio Pepe was branded, a fino sherry named after his uncle José, which remains one of the largest sherry brands worldwide today. The third largest in the UK with 5% total market share of sherry behind Harveys Bristol Cream and Croft Original. In the 1870’s Robert Byass and Manuel Maria Gonzalez’ sons formed Gonzalez Byass. They own 550 ha of vineyards and use 450 ha of growers’ vineyards. In 2001 they acquired Croft Original from Diageo. This is a pale cream sherry; a sweetened fino aged for 4 years and the second biggest selling sherry in the UK with a 20% share of the market.”

Examiner’s comment: This is a very sound response – not particularly long, but packed with facts which show good knowledge of their domestic sherry market. They could have said something about the products at the top end of the scale such as the VORS Sherries, Matusalem, Apostoles and Noë, but overall, this was a good, succinct answer in contrast to the following one which was superficial, vague or incorrect and obtained a fail (unclassified) grade:

“Gonzalez Byass is a renowned sherry producer based in Sanlucar de Barrameda. Specialise in the fino sherry. He made his reputation with the world leading Tio Pepe which is a medium fino at entry level price. It has the typical character of fino, dry, fresh, low in acidity with aromas of camomile, green olive and hazelnut. Also famous for its medium dry sherry La Ina, sweeter in style than Tio Pepe. Gonzalez Byass is still a family owned company. Gonzalez Byass also make a premium style of sherry Amontillado and Oloroso from its dry sherry.

This script is seriously below the standard required in this qualification.

March 2009

Question 1 – Dry Oloroso, Ruby Port, 10 year old Malmsey Madeira	
Answers: 178	Passes: 150 (84%)

This was a very good pass rate with a good distribution of marks at the higher end and very few fail (unclassified) grades.

As with many tasting papers, 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.

Some candidates do not use logic when making their deductions in the concluding sections of their tasting note. For example, one candidate described the Ruby Port as “*not balanced, not finesse*” yet concluded that it was Vintage Port. Another common problem in the fortified tasting paper is describing the level of alcohol as “*fortified*”. This earns no marks – in a paper where you have already been advised that all three samples are of fortified wine, you are not actually telling the examiner anything new with such a comment.

Question 2 – Write a paragraph on each of the following: a) Douro vineyard classification b) VDN c) Flor	
Answers: 178	Passes: 131 (74%)

Most of the responses here were sound pass grades with only a few candidates showing exceptional knowledge. However, there were also a significant number of fail (unclassified) grades and any candidate achieving this grade should take it as an indication that they have not yet advanced sufficiently beyond Advanced Certificate for success in this qualification.

These were three mainstream topics with none answered particularly better than the others. The key problem in all three was a general lack of detail. However, amongst the poor scripts were some surprising misconceptions regarding VDN as shown below:

“VDNs are made by adding unfermented must to the grape juice before fermentation.”

“Some VDNs are made without fortification at all.”

“VDN = the wine style classification of Madeira wines, including classification by age.”

June 2009

Question 1 – Muscat de Beaumes de Venise, 10 year old Sercial Madeira, Fino Sherry	
Answers: 253	Passes: 193 (76%)

This was a good result most 67% of candidates falling within the pass and merit grade bands. With three very different style of wines chosen for this paper, candidates should have been able to achieve high marks for the description even if they made the common error of confusing the Madeira with Amontillado Sherry.

Some candidates were thrown by the wording of the question in the concluding section of the tasting note as this differed from previous papers. Candidates really do need to be aware that we will not always ask the same questions here. In this case, rather than asking them to identify the country or region of production, we were interested in assessing their ability at evaluating the quality of the wine in the context of what it actually was, and so the wording of the question reflected this:

“State the category and style as accurately as possible and assess the quality within this category.”

The purpose of this phrasing was not simply to determine whether the candidate knew what each of these wines was, but to establish whether they were able to assess the relative quality of them in the context of what they were. The following candidate did exactly this:

“This is a vin doux naturel, I suspect a Muscat de Beaumes de Venise. It is good quality, fresh, clean and well made, relatively simple but intense with reasonable length. It has well defined Muscat character, good balance between acidity, sweetness, alcohol and fruit and a silky texture. Despite the intensity of the fruit, it is still quite delicate, giving the wine a certain elegance.”

Contrast this with the following script, where the candidate is imprecise in terms of defining the style and category, does not assess the quality - simply states what quality category they believe it to be, and includes information on development, readiness for drinking and price that has not been asked for:

“I think this may be a Muscat based wine, probably Muscat of Alexandria. It is a mid range quality wine, young, with no chance of further ageing. Moscatel de Valencia? Around £6-7.”

<p>Question 2 – Write a paragraph on each of the following:</p> <p>a) Commandaria b) Palo Cortado c) Symington's</p>	
<p><i>Answers: 249</i></p>	<p><i>Passes: 134 (54%)</i></p>

This was not a particularly good set of scripts. At least 10% of candidates only attempted two, or even only one, of the three sections, often very badly. There was inevitable confusion over how to categorise Palo Cortado, with many candidates simply describing the evolution of an Amontillado Sherry, and not making the

differential between this and Palo Cortado. There were also a number of instances of total confusion over what Commandaria is, with some candidates describing it as Greek Sherry.

The section on Symington's certainly showed those who had sound commercial knowledge and had not restricted their revision to the course notes.

The following script is a good example of what candidates need to aim for to achieve a high grade. The section on Commandaria was excellent (despite misspelling the Xynisteri grape), Palo Cortado was good, and the section on Symington's was sound even though it was the weakest of the three. Stylistically, it is not particularly well written, but the factual content is good and this is what generated the marks.

“Commandaria is a fortified wine from Cyprus, which has a warm Mediteranean climate. It originates from a demarcated area of the Troodos Mountains based in the foothills and plains of the Southern Range. The vines are traditionally trained as bush vines and the grapes for this blended wine are the red grape Mavro and the white grape Xysterni. When harvested the red grapes must have a minimum must weight that yields 259 g/l residual sugar. The Xysterni must have 219 g/l residual sugar. Once harvested, the grapes are dried in the sun on grass mats for 10 – 15 days. The grapes when dried and raisined must have around 390 g/l residual sugar and is usually anywhere up to 450 g/l rs. The grapes are crushed and the must fermented in vats. The fermented must must have attained at least 10% abv at which point it is fortified to a medium level of 16 – 18% abv using either 95% strength grape spirit or 70% wine distillate. Once fortified it is usually transported down to Limasol to mature in underground cellars in oak casks of 600 ltrs for a minimum of 2 – 3 years. It is usually put into a solera of 3 criaderas. The resulting wine is intensely sweet, honeyed and raisined showing deliberate oxidised qualities. To drink upon release.

Palo Cortado originates from the DO of Jerez in Spain (Andalucia). The climate has hot summers and wet winters and is akin to subtropical. Palo Cortado is very rare and is essentially a Fino whose flor failed to sustain itself and thus oxidised. It is made from the Palomino grape that in all likelihood will have been grown on the finest alberiza soils in Jerez Superior. The finest press juice, from these optimum grapes of low acidity and low sugar content is fermented in stainless steel to dryness. The must will have then been fortified to around 15% strength as in principle it has been selected to be a fino. Around the time of the first classification the wine should show very special distinct characteristics and the Capitaz may have already designated it as a Palo Cortado. At some point around this time the flor will probably show signs of unsustainability. It will eventually die off, thus the wine oxidises in the solera. The finished wine will show elegance on the nose of a fino due to its early flor influence alongside the deliberately oxidised characteristics of caramel, coffee, dried fruit and on the palate it will be full bodied and dry with a high glycerine concentration as the flor had not had chance to use up much of this. High intensity and concentration. It will be a blended wine, occasionally of indicated age.

Symington family has its principal interest in Portugal and the Douro Valley. It is run by the 12th and 13th generation. They hold the highest number of grade A quintas – 20, and they also have a huge direct involvement and ownership of many of these quintas. The own the port brands Graham's, Dow's, Warre's, Smith Woodhouse,

Quinta do Vesuvio. Around 9% of their sales is premium. They were influential for introducing and developing temperature control in Port winemaking in the early 1900's. They pioneered the high technology (and very expensive) robotic lagares, which is only used for their premium ports. They pioneered the 10 year old Tawny Port due to market demands in the 1940's which opened up a whole new market. They introduced Crusted Ports for the vintage enthusiast – blended Port of mixed vintages to be consumed earlier or released and left to develop in bottle. They own a controlling interest in the Madeira Wine Company – doubled their sales since 1990 and raised the profile of brands and distribution through their global import companies. They enhanced the reputation of vintage ports through Quinta do Vesuvio."