

DIPLOMA EXAMINERS REPORT – 2010/2011

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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 specific type 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 2010-11 examination cycle and as such are anonymous and are reproduced as submitted to the examiner. In some instances, they will contain information that is incorrect.

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 also 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 2011

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS
Comparative Pass Rates by Paper

Paper	2011			2010			2009			2008		2007		2006				
Unit 1 CWA	April 88%		Nov 91%		April 75%		Nov 90%		April 99%		Nov 82%		(1)					
Unit 1 Case Study	Nov 83%	Mar 67%	June 84%	Nov 76%	Mar 71%	June 68%	Nov 68%	Mar 77%	June 66%	Not applicable								
Unit 2	90%			88%			81%			84%		81%		84%				
Unit 3 Tasting	June 85%		Jan 72%		June 62%		Jan 62%		June 78%		Jan 76%		June 69%	Jan 63%	June 63%	Jan 55%	June 49%	Jan 55%
Unit 3 Theory	June 54%		Jan 34%		June 66%		Jan 49%		June 59%		Jan 53%		June 63%	Jan 50%	June 59%	Jan 42%	June 54%	Jan 42%
Unit 4	63%			61%			64%			60%		70%		61%				
Unit 5	70%			64%			74%			63%		69%		61%				
Unit 6	60%			66%			67%			61%		61%		67%				

NOTES:

(1) Direct pass rates for Unit 1 are not given as this Unit was awarded on completion of four coursework titles.

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, both here but also under the sections on individual question types.

This section of the report offers 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 2011/12 coursework assignments are on the WSET website under www.wsetglobal.com/qualifications/diploma. Titles for the 2012/13 academic year will be published at the end of May 2012.

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 (Levels 1, 2 and 3) 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?
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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. Instead, 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.
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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 Levels 1 and 2 to Level 3, they move from learning 'what wines are like' to understanding 'why they are like that'. An understanding of the six factors taught at level 3 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 observations on the grading of coursework assignments:

All assignments are graded out of 100. Of this, 20 marks are awarded 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, 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 topical issues. 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 very 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 but 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

November 2010

The “premiumisation” of white spirits

1. Context

Premium priced spirits are not a new concept. XO Cognac and Deluxe Scotch Whisky, for example, have long been the choice of those fortunate enough to afford them. Whilst these are not white spirits, in recent times, we have seen the emergence of several premium white spirits such as Tanqueray 10 and Patron Tequila. Despite their high price, many of these premium white spirits are showing sound growth, while other classic, longstanding spirits are in decline.

2. Strategy and required sections

- a) Presentation and structure: Assignments should include a declared word count and a bibliography correctly referenced throughout the body of the text. (20% weighting)
- b) Introduction: Give an overview of the global market for white spirits. (10% weighting)
- c) “Premiumisation”: Examine what it is that makes some white spirits “premium”. (20% weighting)
- d) Case study of a premium spirit: Select one premium white spirit brand that has come to the market within the last twenty years and present a case study detailing the emergence of this product from conception to its current position in the global market. (40% weighting)
- e) Conclusion and personal commentary: In your opinion, is there room for further growth in this category or has saturation point been reached? (10% weighting)

Answers: 284

Passes: 259 (91%)

The open book coursework assignments always generate high marks, and this was no exception. Where lower marks were awarded, this was invariably because candidates strayed from the candidate brief, for example by writing about the “theory” of marketing spirits in general terms rather than specifically focussing on the instructions given in the brief. A number of candidates also wrote about brown spirits in addition to white spirits, and this was clearly pointless given the scope of the assignment.

In the introduction to their assignment, candidates were required to give a brief overview of the global market for white spirits. Good candidates explained that this is very polarized with domestic spirits accounting for large segments of the market in places like China and Russia, but that when these are taken out of the equation, white spirits are performing better than brown in general, with Vodka leading the way. Many candidates were aware that Gin is the exception, largely still regarded as “old fashioned” despite the introduction of “premium” styles such as Hendricks and Tanqueray. Some candidates took a very simplistic approach when it came to

identifying what it is that makes some white spirits “premium”, and applied a very loose interpretation of the term “premium”.

The first two sections of the assignment were “weighted” quite lightly with the bulk of the marks being allocated for the detailed case study of a premium white spirit brand that has come to the market within the last twenty years. Many of the case studies submitted were uninspired, relying heavily on the duplication of large chunks of information from marketing materials issued by the brand owner. Candidates who took a more objective approach tended to be rewarded with higher marks as did those who supported their submission with statistical evidence to substantiate the position of their chosen product within the market sector. Good case studies explained the thinking behind the brand plan for their chosen product and documented how it was created, brought to market and “sold” to the consumer, in effect explaining how the “elitism” surrounding the product was created.

The following script achieved high marks. It is clear and well written with excellent use of statistics and examples to support the points made throughout.

The premiumisation of white spirits

"Premiumisation is not cyclical... it's effectively based on human nature – we want to do better in life and we chose certain categories to demonstrate to ourselves and others that we're doing better in life" (1). The words of Andy Fennell (Chief Marketing Officer at Diageo) point towards premiumisation being not a fad, but a trend, driven by what it means to be human. I will argue that although this is part of the story, it is not the entire story. In addition to this driving force, I will argue that the increasing importance of provenance (and its associations with authenticity and integrity) in the minds of consumers will also be a major part of the sustainability of this process.

The global white spirits market

The words on everyone's lips when talking about market trends in any sector at the moment are "the global economic downturn". And whilst this has indeed been a huge macro-level influencer of the spirits market over the last two years, its effect has been mainly a slowing of growth rather than a shrinking of the market (2) (3). After a period of sustained growth of the global spirits market between 2004 and 2008 (10.7%) (3), the category's growth is set to slow to 2.9% between 2009 and 2013. Within this broader context, the white spirits market, which grew by 1.6% (CAGR) between 2003 and 2008, is predicted to remain at present levels between 08 and 2013 (2). And whilst vodka was predicted to remain the biggest success story within the category, ISWR's latest research reveals the first decline for over a decade in global vodka consumption (4).

However this overall deceleration of growth actually masks some interesting trends both geographically and at a category level. The IWSR's recent snapshot report notes that some countries such as China are in fact bucking the recession-induced trend (4). It is therefore not surprising to find Pernod Ricard citing China as one of its key engines for growth in its most recent financial report (5)¹. Diageo is also exploiting the opportunity presented by the Chinese market. In February this year, the company became the controlling shareholder in ShuiJingFang, a leading producer of premium and super-premium white spirits, "the largest, most profitable and fastest growing spirits segment in China" (6)². Enthusiasm for China's increasing thirst for high-end white spirits is seen not just in terms of acquisitions, but also in the form of increased marketing spend on international brands (7), which, although currently only account for around 1% of total alcohol consumption in China, are seen as holding enormous potential among the middle class and generation-Y³ consumers in China (7).

And it's not just China developing a taste for premium white spirits: the premium segment of the market is flourishing globally. This is not happening by chance: both Pernod Ricard and Diageo, have

¹ To see the extent of the importance of the Asian market see section one of the appendices

² Locally-produced spirits are by far the biggest segment in terms of volume; see section two of the appendices for an illustration of this.

³ Generation-Y is the generation of people born between ~1980 and ~2000; for information on the characteristics and attitudes of these individuals, please refer to http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Generation_Y

declared premiumisation to be an area of continued focus encouraged by, rather than in spite of, the recession: “to reduce the Group’s exposure to fluctuations in the world economy: premium brands have proven less vulnerable” (8)⁴.

What is it that makes some white spirits premium?

To talk of some white spirits as being premium and others not is an over-simplification: premiumisation doesn’t just mean buying more luxury products, it means “moving consumers up the ladder within a price segment or moving consumers from one segment to the next level above” (9). In a developing market such as India, this could mean moving from locally produced spirits to international brands. Arguably therefore, “premium” just means (from a price point of view) more expensive than what is considered to be a “standard” price within a given market. Regardless of this consideration, the issue of whether a white spirit is “premium” or not is based on two things: what is *inside* the bottle – the product, and what *surrounds* the bottle – the brand, and the inevitable impact that these two factors have on price. For premium products the combination of these two elements necessitates a higher price than what is “standard” within the market; and for the purposes of this report, we are focusing here on examples primarily from the developed world where the term “premium” is defined by a price of £15-£24.99 for 70cl and the term “super-premium” is defined by a price of £25 or more for 70cl (10).

A premium “product”

What attributes make a white spirit premium? To answer this question adequately it is worth reflecting on premium products within the dark spirit market such as Cognac and single malt whisky. A premium product in these categories is one whose price is, at least in part, determined by the constraints of its production: the ageing process and geographical limitations. With white spirits however, these practicalities don’t apply. Their intrinsic premium attributes therefore fall into two categories: the quality of the raw ingredients and the methods used to produce the product. Oxley’s gin provides a good example of this; it highlights its use of cold distillation as a method of preserving the freshness of the botanicals and also its “small-batch” production method and the fact that it took eight years to develop its formula. This has to be because of the recognition of the importance of implying rarity in premium products; something which tends to be inherent in the dark spirits segment. Additionally, these points draw attention in the consumer’s mind to the dedication and passion of the people making the gin; points that the Coburg Bar’s manager Mark Jenner feels are becoming increasingly important at the premium end of the spirits market. “There is a huge demand for small brands; people want to connect emotionally with brands... they want something which comes out of passion, rather than a meeting room”⁵ (11). Whilst gin serves as a good example of how the intrinsic qualities of a spirit can contribute to its premium status, it is actually vodka that has led the premiumisation march over the last 10 years. In this case it is perhaps more due to what is *around* the bottle – the brand, which has contributed to its ability to qualify for premium status.

⁴ For evidence of the robustness of the premium segment after recessions, see section three of the appendices

⁵ The quotes from Mark Jenner in this report come from my interview with him on 27/8/10.

A premium “brand”

A brand is a name which stands for something in a customer's mind⁶. When people perceive the emotional values of a brand, they are able to connect with it, and remain loyal to it in a much more meaningful and committed way than if it were to rely on its intrinsic characteristics alone.

Since creating premium white spirits is a much quicker job than creating premium dark spirits, the “brand first, product next” paradigm is possible with white spirits. The Grey Goose story epitomises this approach. In 1996, when the dominating vodka brand was Absolut, Sydney Frank identified an opportunity to oust Absolut from its top spot, not by undercutting its premium price but by charging almost double and creating the first super-premium vodka brand (12).

Perhaps unsurprisingly, this marketing- rather than product-driven approach does not sit well with those in the industry whose role it is to choose and champion great spirits. Mark Jenner again: “between seven and ten years ago there were a lot of big players.... very small players, for example microdistillers of gin or vodka were non-existent. It's only in the last six years that the profession of bartending has become not just cocktails and trying to show off, but championing home-grown techniques.”

Sipsmith – a recipe for success in premium gin

In October 2009, a market report highlighted that “the premiumisation trend, so apparent in other white spirits categories... has been far less evident in gin” (13). But over the last two years, there has been a change in dynamic: 18 months ago, Shivaun Lucey, global gin brand director for Diageo, highlighted that in North America, while the lower-priced tiers of gin were in decline, “the premium sector is in growth” (14). Even in the 2009 market report, it was noted that “a number of new premium and super-premium gin brands.... are showing signs of gaining consumer traction” (13). Since 2008 we have seen a flurry of launches, both by major drinks companies (such as Beefeater 24) and also by smaller microdistillers. In the UK, premium gins now have a 17.5% share of the market; globally, the market for premium gin is set to grow at about 5% a year (15).

Getting to the heart of Sipsmith

On a slightly cold and wet autumn evening, I make my way to an obscure address in Hammersmith, to the tiny garage from which Sipsmith operates. Despite its compact home, it is packing a pretty mighty punch in the market. And when you hear Sam Galsworthy, one of its two founders, talking about how the idea came about and the passion with which he describes “Prudence”, their unique copper still, and the award-winning gin she produces, it is no surprise at all that they have, just 15 months after launch, secured a deal with Waitrose and Majestic, having previously launched into every top-end retailer you'd care to think of (first of all into Harvey Nichols, followed by Selfridges,

⁶ The WSET provides a number of different possible definitions for the term “brand”, but as a marketing professional of 10 years (albeit not within the drinks business) I feel this to be the most simple and accurate definition I have come across.

Fortnum and Mason and Harrods). "We want to create a superlative product without cutting corners; by investing in incredible kit and reflecting artisanal methods – to create the best tasting product we can," says Galsworthy⁷.

Sipsmith – a premium product and a premium brand

At £26 a bottle, Sipsmith gin sits comfortably in the premium/super-premium segment. "To premiumise you have to find something other than price to create a point of difference [...] we use a high-quality base spirit made from barley". Their bespoke copper still, Prudence, is the first copper still in London for 189 years. "Copper is important because it draws out fatty acids and sulphurs from the ethanol [...] When you distil using copper you get good mouthfeel, and it gives taste and character." Nothing is automatic at Sipsmith: it is a tiny batch process, with everything done by hand. "It's all about old school. The recipe is a tweak on an old style recipe: the botanicals are not dissimilar to others; it's all about the method of production."

In terms of the brand, the focus is on authenticity and integrity. The artisanal way in which the gin is made follows through to the packaging, which includes copper metal on the label as well as an artistic representation of Prudence, depicted as real swan's head and neck.

How it started

Sam Galsworthy and Fairfax Hall had both been in the drinks industry prior to setting up Sipsmith, and they had both worked in the US. "We saw how much then and now even more, discerning consumers care about provenance. People share anecdotally; they share the bits of the product they like. 'Locally sourced' has become very important. We saw, in the US – with microbrewing and [small-scale] winemaking – the resonance that local communities had towards what [products] they had on their doorstep." And with this in mind, they have steadfastly stuck to the principle that provenance is a core value for Sipsmith; their choice of location is based on the notion that to be at the heart of the community, not on an anonymous industrial estate, is something that consumers increasingly seek out and value. "Hopefully by creating a home for the brand creates longevity," continues Galsworthy.

Sipsmith Gin – facts and figures

Launched: June 2009

Sales so far: 2500 9l cases

Production capacity: 200-300 bottles per day

Awards: 5 including, most recently, the Observer Food Monthly Award for Best Newcomer

Current markets: UK, Holland, Germany, France

⁷ The quotations here from Sam Galsworthy are taken from my interview with him on 28/09/10.

The target market

"We believe there are two different consumers: the status consumer – the peacock – they buy Grey Goose, but know very little about how it is made and little understanding about the process [...] it's about price: 'look how much I've spent; it makes me look good'; then there is the discerning consumer – the enthusiast. They care far more about what is in the bottle than what it costs. It's about the process... it's about the intrinsic fibres of the brand [...] We see premiumisation differently: it's the democratisation of luxury." The enthusiast is the core target market for Sipsmith. This is reflected in their overarching objective for their gin: "We want to be the 'go-to' brand in the category"; when consumers start to explore beyond the "house pour", they want Sipsmith to be the brand of choice. It is also reflected in their distribution strategy. "We have no intention of entering the Tesco/Sainsbury's market.... we want to own London's on-premise, but with great quality [product] supporting accounts."

Marketing strategy

Sipsmith has never advertised. Their promotion has been almost exclusively through PR. "We've been on the BBC, ITV, page four of the Times, page ten of the Economist [...] we have enviable press." Galsworthy believes this is down to the authenticity of the product. Their strategy has been all about the provenance of the product, so it is unsurprising that an alternative promotional tool they have exploited is what might be termed "experiential" marketing. "We bring people to the site – because they care." Back in February of this year they teamed up with the acclaimed London tapas restaurant, Providores, cleverly linking themselves to the concept of the pop-up restaurant (another growing trend in gastronomic "enthusiast" circles) and also a very authentic culinary outfit, again securing substantial PR, particularly online.

The story so far, and plans for the future

So how successful have they been? Fourteen months after launch, Sipsmith is running at 70% capacity (16). "We will have to move eventually.... in about 18 months," says Galsworthy. They are currently in four European markets, with eventual plans to launch in the US (but they are in no hurry). They currently have 300 accounts buying Sipsmith on a regular basis. Their early success in securing accounts with London's most prestigious department stores and its availability in top-end bars such as the Dorchester ensured that it was the spirit on the lips (both metaphorically and literally) of journalists and "enthusiasts" alike almost immediately after its launch. They admit that for a while they couldn't keep up with demand, but now they have caught up and are bracing themselves for the Christmas build-up. The fact that they are not yet what could be considered a global brand does not bother them. "Our idea of export is selling a bottle outside the M25," quips Hall (15). Whilst there is a jovial element to the comment, it is underpinned by a nub of truth, in that they are wholeheartedly committed to achieving success in the UK before attempting to penetrate the export market. For the moment they are passionately and single-mindedly concerned about Prudence, the values – authenticity, provenance, integrity and quality – she represents, and the consumer desire for a small-scale spirit with a story behind it (15). My sense is that unless and until a

major multinational sweeps Sipsmith into its portfolio, the brand will remain utterly true to their commitment to the UK market, with export being a slower and steadier strategy.

Premiumisation of white spirits – a trend in its infancy

To think of premiumisation in white spirits as a trend happening in a consistent way and in parallel across the category would be misguided. The heady days of double digit growth in the premium vodka segment seem to have dwindled; now it is the turn of gin – the spirit once marred by its association with stuffy Englishness and your ageing aunt. Premiumisation is based on a natural human instinct to want to trade-up; however, as the Sipsmith example shows us, there is another trend at work: that of the increasing importance of provenance and authenticity. We have seen it in the culinary world, with almost every top-end restaurant declaring the origins and seasonality of its produce. There is a sense that this trend really is in its infancy in the white spirits category. The vodka market will surely see some brands fall from grace, and likewise with the recent explosion in gin launches, we can be sure that not all of them will stand the test of time. The survivors will be those whose values are an intrinsic part of the product, rather than a figment of a marketer's imagination. So what does this mean for the industry as a whole? I believe that with "proof of concept" being demonstrated by vodka, and with the nature of gin premiumisation now becoming evident, the multinationals are now in a good position to start thinking further about their premiumisation strategy. They would do well to observe and understand the success of the likes of Sipsmith and consider how consumer desire for provenance and authenticity fits with their business model. Arguably acquisitions are a potential strategy, but any potential buyers would need to be acutely aware of what had driven success for the brand so far and develop a strategy which would allow that success factor to flourish rather than diminish as a result of becoming part of a drinks giant. We have reached a stage where premiumisation has proved its potential (in vodka), and the various different categories within white spirits now need to find a way of exploiting it.

Word count: 2967

April 2011

Agents, importers and distributors

1. Context

Many intermediaries (agents, importers, distributors etc) exist in the industry, getting wine from producers to retailers. From the producer's point of view, these can make it possible to access certain markets more effectively. They can also be of benefit to retailers. In some markets, of course, there is nothing to stop producers from exporting direct to the retailer.

2. Strategy and required sections

- a) Presentation and structure: Assignments should include a declared word count and a bibliography correctly referenced throughout the body of the text. (20% weighting)
- b) Introduction: Describe the tasks that intermediaries can undertake on behalf of the producers they represent. (25% weighting)
- c) Case study: You are the Export Director of a newly established winery in Ribera del Duero, with production of around 50,000 c/s per annum. You plan to export your wine to the US, the UK and one other market of your choice. Which types of intermediary organisations, if any, would you employ to access these three different markets? Give reasons for your choice. (45% weighting)
- d) Conclusion and personal commentary: In your opinion, does the consumer gain any benefit from the activities of these intermediaries? (10% weighting)

Answers: 182

Passes: 160 (88%)

The first part of the assignment was answered well, but this was not surprising as this was simply a case of reporting on the facts that candidates had uncovered whilst researching the tasks that intermediaries can undertake on behalf of the producers they represent. The best answers came from candidates who had clearly identified the different types of intermediaries engaged in the wine trade, (eg brand owners - not necessarily owners of land or wineries, brokers/negociants, shippers/importers, agents/distributors, wholesalers/cash and carry outlets) and then examined the roles that these perform and the services they provide.

As with the previous assignment, weaker candidates became more obvious when it came to putting together the case study. A number of them took an approach that was too general, rather than thinking specifically in terms of the wording in the candidate brief, i.e. a newly established winery in Ribera del Duero, with production of around 50,000 c/s per annum. For example, some candidates opted for bulk shipment of the wine, oblivious to the fact that this would not be permitted under DO regulations for this particular wine. There was also a clear divide between those who had put some thought into their choice of third market rather than taking the "easy option" of writing about their domestic market irrespective of the relevance of this for this particular wine. Some candidates were also oblivious to the fact that the type of intermediary organization needed to access the three different markets could differ in each instance due to legal structures. Responses needed to demonstrate clear

awareness of this, and this was not always forthcoming. Candidates also needed to take account of the annual production level of the wine and the implications this would have for the proposed route to market put forward by the candidate. It was the candidates who failed to bring this level of awareness to their work who achieved low marks.

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 go into the examination having already carried out the research required to answer the question. This means when they get to the examination hall and open the paper, they simply need 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 research sources.

Those who fail, generally do so because they do not address the question as set or are too brief in their response.

November 2010

The crisis in Australia

Candidate Case Study Brief:

The twenty years from the mid 1980s until the mid 2000s were a Golden Age for Australian wine. The wine trade, the press and ultimately the consumer became aware of the quality, the consistency and the winning styles of Australian wine. The Australian wine industry evolved rapidly: the vineyard area expanded enormously, winemaking skills were honed and wine styles were perfected to meet perceived consumer needs. The whole process of marketing and selling Australian wine became very slick and professional.

The boom decades now seem a long time ago. The last few years have seen the Australian wine industry in troubled times. Large volumes of surplus wine are reported to be sloshing around unable to find a home. Attempts to increase prices are struggling in the face of the world economic slowdown. There have been winery closures, vineyard sales and job redundancies. Those of a more reflective disposition are analysing how the boom turned to bust.

Subsequently, people are working hard to find ways forward for the viable parts of the industry.

Answers: 275

Passes: 228 (83%)

Examination question (all sections compulsory)

- a) Assess the current state of the Australian wine industry. (30% weighting)
- b) What were the causes of the current difficulties? Were any of these foreseen during the boom years? (40% weighting)
- c) What will the industry look like in 10 years time? (30% weighting)

83% was an excellent pass rate for this question. The examiner felt that candidates had researched the topic thoroughly and, more importantly, had digested what they had learned. This is where the assessment for the case study differs from the coursework assignment, and is one of the reasons pass rates for this assessment tend to be slightly lower than that for the coursework, where many candidates simply "lift" information from their research sources without retaining the knowledge that is the primary aim of the research. It is invariably these candidates who do less well in the case study examination.

The examiner commented that candidates performed better in the first part of the question, the "factual" report on the current state of the industry, rather than the more analytical and speculative nature of sections b) and c). However, even in this relatively easy section, some candidates failed to provide the information asked for, and instead described at length how the Australian wine industry achieved its earlier position of strength rather than concentrating on the more topical recent difficulties it is facing now. In fact, the current woes of the Australian wine industry have been well documented and good candidates made reference to "Strategy 2025" which mapped out where the industry was going, and also pointed out that a document called "The Wine Restructuring Action Agenda" has been sent to all producers spelling out the extent of the crisis. They explained how individual regions and wineries would need to assess the long term viability of their operations and those with a close eye on the trade press pointed out that some companies such as Constellation and Fosters have already initiated programmes of winery closures, vineyard sales and job redundancies. They also reported that there is talk of government money being made available to help with restructuring of the industry.

Sections b) and c) tended to be weaker than section a) and the speculative nature of section c) in particular allowed better candidates to shine. The following candidate answered both of these sections very well. They discussed the various possible causes of the current difficulties eloquently and gave a realistic prognosis of what they believed the industry would look like in 10 years time.

Section B

When Australian wine was in its boom in the 1990s, it was producing ~~economical~~ fruit-driven wines at a reasonably economical price, against main competition in traditional old world countries. This led to high demand, much higher than the industry could then supply. This in turn encouraged the planting of more and more new vineyard areas as producers were keen to get their share of the emerging market.

However, as the demand has slowed in recent years the increase in supply hasn't matched this and continued to grow at a much higher rate, partially due to the lead times involved in setting up vineyards.

This growth also far outstripped the predicted figures upon which Australia's key marketing was being based. Estimates from 1996 for the growth in vineyard area by 2025 ~~were~~ achieved by 2002. This growth in supply was noticed by many key economists within the trade, but without intervention the message fell on deaf ears as producers kept planting aiming for their share of the growth.

Changes to costs of production and water

Supply have in part been due to issues of climate change, which have been predicted since before the Australian wine boom. However, as these were ^{very} long-term effects they featured very little in business plans for new vineyards.

Changes in key markets, such as Australia's main export market, the UK, have seen Supermarkets and multiple retailers taking more and more share of the off-trade sales. As these large corporations compete they drive down prices as far as they can, which given oversupply they have been able to do effectively.

Changes in consumer fashion often occur and the demand for the Chardonnays and Shiraz's of the 1990s has moved to more aromatic styles including Sauvignon Blanc, Pinot Noir, Pinot Grigio and Riesling. Production of these varieties is only a very small proportion of Australia's output making it difficult for the country to supply consumer demand. Regions such as Tasmania, which have the climates cool enough to produce these wines have not been pushed, so supply remains low and consumers turn to competitors, such as New Zealand for supplies.

The predominance of big brands in Australian wine has helped drive the sales of these wines, especially at lower price points. However, having these wines well known by consumers in the off-trade has ~~effected~~ made them ineffective in the on-trade.

as consumers become aware of the high mark-ups placed on these wines.

Large producers have also pushed for economies of scale, demanding growers produce grapes to a given price point. This leads to a low emphasis on quality especially as growers costs increase in terms of water supplies, etc. Again this was highlighted during the boom by many producers seeing the ~~falling~~ growing supply and the push for cost-cutting.

As prices have been forced down Australia's brand image has been effected as a whole. This has made it difficult to push regional ~~wines~~ and more premium wines. This was highlighted by the AWBC as the oversupply was on the horizon, but without action from the producers to address the oversupply it had little effect.

In addition several other New World countries have entered the market successfully including USA, South Africa, South America and New Zealand. This together with restructuring of some of the Old World production has lead to greater competition from elsewhere, as others emulate the successful formula that originally pushed Australia into the boom.

The global economic slowdown has also been a major contributor to dropping sales.

as consumers in markets such as UK and USA are less inclined to spend on commodities such as wine. This ~~was predicted~~ is only secondary to oversupply issues however, as even recovery from this would lead to much Australian wine still being uneconomical.

Section C

As the oversupply forces prices lower and makes vineyards uneconomical, growers will be forced to grab-up or mothball vineyards, as they cannot run at a loss indefinitely. This will mean that supply and demand will ~~lose~~ even out in the long-run.

However, as it is the smaller growers, who will be hit first by these costs, it will be these vineyards which ~~are~~ are likely to be first to go rather than ones which ~~are~~ may be more problematic to the industry at the moment. In order to survive these growers will need to diversify to meet consumer demands rather than continuing to supply previous fashions, which may not be possible in all regions due to environmental restrictions.

Larger companies such as Fosters are already restructuring their supply to focus on higher price levels, where Australia is in a better position to compete long term. ~~However~~ This is a particular focus for Australia in the US. In markets such as the UK they ~~will need to~~ recover may take longer as consumer perceptions need to change to accept Australia as not just a producer of economical wines.

Focus here is more on the on-trade, but

will need to be mainly through more boutique producers rather than the known brands.

As other markets grow, such as China and other Asian countries, Australia ~~will~~ is in a strong position to promote itself. This is particularly true of the large brands, which may gain distribution through their parent companies. Jacob's Creek for example is ~~been~~ already becoming popular in China ~~as~~ using the distribution network in place through Pernod-Ricard Asia.

The distribution of sales is therefore likely to be more spread across markets and more resistant to economic slowdowns in individual markets.

Climate change will continue to be an issue and ~~say~~, but will affect some regions more seriously than others. This will ~~also~~ require diversification in places and possibly grubbing up as more regions become uneconomical to grow grapes.

Potential growth is predicted amongst some of the family-run businesses which are large enough to ride out some of the rises, but don't have as much issue with brand images.

March 2011

Alcohol and health

Barely a day seems to go by without some lurid report in the press about the damage being caused to society by alcohol. The World Health Organisation estimates that alcohol is the third most common cause of death after high blood pressure and smoking. The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) reported that in most parts of Scotland hospital admissions related to alcohol were higher than those attributable to any other cause including heart disease. Putting a cost on the damage done by alcohol is a contentious business. Taking the UK as an example, in 2008 the UK National Audit Office calculated that the annual cost to the National Health Service of alcohol misuse was in the region of £2.7 billion. The total cost of alcohol on society has been estimated to be as high as £55 billion in the UK, but this is certainly not a problem that affects the UK in isolation.

The governments of various countries have adopted or are adopting a number of strategies to try to limit alcohol consumption. These include:

- High levels of tax (e.g. excise duty, VAT etc).
- A minimum price per unit of alcohol.
- Restricted availability (monopolies and licensing, minimum age for purchase).
- Restrictions or bans on advertising and sponsorship.
- Limits on editorial content.

While some complain that these measures are oppressive and authoritarian, most governments impose some controls for the health of their population.

Answers: 205

Passes: 138 (67%)

Examination question (all sections compulsory)

- a. What damage does alcohol do to society in your local market? (40% weighting)
- b. How effective are the various tactics available to governments to limit the damage that alcohol causes society? (40% weighting)
- c. Should governments and doctors be involved in trying to control the alcohol consumption of adults? (20% weighting)

This was a disappointing pass rate, for an assessment that usually generates better results. Since the subject matter is published ahead of the examination, candidates have time to prepare in advance by researching the topic and assimilating the information they have gathered. This should therefore make it easier for them to formulate their answer on the day of the exam. A short essay plan always helps in this respect, but far too many candidates seem reluctant to spend time on this in the exam. This often means they end up losing sight of the points they should be addressing and they fail the answer the question as set in the process. Another common cause of failure is because some candidates simply do not write enough to address the question in sufficient detail. In the time available, examiners are looking for around five to six sides of text in average size handwriting. This should be easily achievable, PROVIDED the candidate has prepared well ahead of the exam, doing research and background reading.

Section a) was factual, and was handled well in most instances. Some candidates lost marks by writing in general terms rather than on the specific damage to their local market. The best scripts supported claims with statistical evidence which candidates had gathered themselves. Less imaginative candidates simply repeated the statistics presented before them in the case study brief.

Section b) was more analytical, and generated weaker responses from a large number of candidates. Some examples of policies being adopted to limit the damage that alcohol causes society were listed in the candidate brief. As with the statistics mentioned above, weaker candidates limited their discussions to these without bothering to look any further. In the worst cases, they did not even address all of these examples. Whenever examples are given within the brief, these are always the MINIMUM that candidates should consider, with higher marks awarded where candidates look beyond this information. The best candidates did this, and presented evidence (including that relating to historical and cultural factors) to support any assertions they made. Some candidates also argued against specific policies which they felt were counter-productive or unlikely to work. This is exactly the kind of analytical thought that is required in the WSET Diploma. Unfortunately, too many candidates simply stated what tactics are being employed with no real discussion or review of the effectiveness of these.

The final section provided an opportunity for candidates to reflect on the broader relationship between society and the individual and give their personal opinion.

However, any opinions made needed to be supported by reasoned argument. It would have been quite feasible to argue that governments and doctors should not intervene in any way, however, strong reasoning and evidence should have been deployed to support such a stance. In general, responses here were uninspiring. Some candidates ignored this section completely, whilst most simply repeated points made previously in sections a) and b), bringing nothing new to the discussion. When a question asks you to speculate or give a personal opinion in the way this does, one of the best approaches is to raise questions (and, of course, offer your thoughts in answer to them). For example, the best candidates queried how far, if at all, governments and doctors are entitled to interfere with an individual's consumption of alcohol. Should alcohol drinkers as a whole be penalised (for example, with the imposition of duties and taxes or restrictions on availability of alcohol) in an effort to control the minority who might abuse alcohol? Should doctors concentrate on those who become ill as a result of alcohol abuse rather than interfering with those who are healthy and drink sensibly? These are examples of the kind of questions that could have been posed and explored in answer to this section of the question.

The following script was well written, provides lots of statistical evidence in support of their claims which are well argued. This candidate is also one of the few who made a good attempt at section c).

An alcoholic drink a day, may keep the doctor away, but excessive consumption ~~to~~ causes many health, behavioural, social and economic burdens to society.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) estimates that 10% of the total disease burden is alcohol related, and Lancet Journal says that 1 in 25 deaths are from alcohol abuse. Alcohol abuse is as dangerous to global health as tobacco was a decade ago (Lancet). Alcohol consumption that is excessive causes increases in cancer, liver ~~cirrhosis~~^{exposure}, pancreatitis, (WHO).

In America fetal Alcohol, ~~alone~~ alone effects one in 100 to 1 in two thousand babies, an estimated annual health cost of \$1.9 billion (March Institute).

However, it is not just health costs, Society is effected on a deeper level. Where as the health costs are ~~estimated~~ to be \$22.5 billion, the total cost to ^{American} Society is estimated to be \$75 billion, more than 300 days (Association of American Physicians).

Excessive Alcohol consumption effects violence, crime, suicide, family disintegration, loss of productivity, randemism. (WHO).

The March Institute states that women who ~~partner~~ abuse alcohol are 3.6 times more likely to be the victim of domestic violence. CBS News found that 77% of rape victims were under the influence of alcohol. Over the past 10 years 250,000 ~~people~~ have been killed in driving accidents where the ~~driver~~ had consumed alcohol. Death from impaired driving accidents is the leading killer of youngsters 16-24 (DUI Stars).

In America 24% of suicides were alcohol related (MedSurg) and 2/3s of inmate violence was related to alcohol (Marm).

(Outline) → An average of \$80,000 per US-based college was spent due to ~~landfill~~, primarily a result of excessive ~~alcohol consumption~~ alcohol consumption. Employers spent \$28 billion on employees and their dependants in 2006 as a result of alcohol-related accidents (Journal of Industrial Medicine).

The cost on society is large and extends beyond health issues and financial expenditure. It generates families and society in a way that becomes part of a society's culture. It is therefore important to look at ways to bring ~~drinking~~ ^{alcohol drinking} down to a moderate level.

Governments employ many tactics to limit the damage to society caused by alcohol. One tactic employed almost universally is to apply a 'sin tax' an excise tax onto alcohol products. Excise tax is an indirect tax, which means it is not based entirely on the value of the product, but it is used to increase revenue and discourage behaviour. Taxation is a blunt tool, but highly effective (WHO). Alcohol has been found to be price elastic, if you increase the price, demand falls. Therefore adding a tax and installing a minimum price per unit onto alcohol is an effective and low cost strategy to curb binge drinking (WHO). ~~RECOMMENDATION~~, The availability of alcohol plays an important role in consumption. The Journal of Public Medicine states that the more retail convenience establishments selling alcohol the more crowded assault there will be in that area. There are many ways the government can restrict availability of alcohol. These include, regulation of the number of ~~outlets~~ ^{outlets} where one can purchase alcohol, enforcing a minimum age to drink alcohol, regulate the selling hours of alcohol, regulating the promotion of alcohol and increasing education on the effects of excessive drinking.

→ The BBC reported a pilot program in West Lothian,

Scotland, aimed at reducing binge drinking. In this scheme they raised the age to purchase alcohol at retail from 18 to 21, they limited the hours one could buy alcohol, they banned discount promotions and use specialty alcohol chemicals to poison the products a speckle item. The ~~the~~ program was a success. There was a 57% decrease in reported assaults and a 55% decrease in calls from residents complaining about youths behaviour in the area.

Selling hours play an important role, in ~~the UK~~, they recently extended the selling hours ^{which has resulted in} seen a 20% decrease in violent crimes and 14% decrease in personal injuries (Morning Economic News). Perhaps one of the biggest states governments can take is to enforce a state monopoly on the sales of alcohol. This occurs in Sweden and in 18 states of the USA. The aim is to moderate drinking by removing the economic incentives of selling alcohol cheap. The Mann Institute found that when a state was privatized, there was a raise of 47% in alcohol sales. In British Columbia, upon privatization there was an increase of 33% in establishments selling alcohol in six years. Therefore we can assume that a state monopoly on alcohol sales is effective in maintaining ^{higher} affluence and keeping the number of establishments selling alcohol in check.

The UK and Scotland have seen a huge increase in alcohol consumption, which has in part been contributed to the relative price of alcohol, which in Scotland has fallen 70% since 1980. In the UK two thirds of

alcohol has been purchased at retail, Sold cheaply by stores as a loss leader, to get people into the stores. This creates a cultural norm or 'loading up' at home before heading out on the town.

In comparison Italy ~~is~~ has seen consumption plummet, this has occurred as the relative price of alcohol has risen and culturally it is ~~favoured~~ ^{culturally} ~~favoured~~ ^{one drinks alcohol primarily} ~~drunk in public~~ drunk in public. In Italy one ~~drinks~~ ^{drinks} primarily with food.

Another tactic taken by governments is to restrict the advertising & sponsorship industries with regards to alcohol promotion. Whether the Portman Group Code in the UK or DISCUS in the USA, regulations include NOT promoting alcohol to minors, not ~~insinuating~~ insinuating that alcohol will improve your driving or sexual performance and not associating a higher alcohol percentage as better. The WHO has found the bans on advertising to be minimally effective.

Adage lists the biggest alcohol industry advertisers as at the bottom of the top 50 category.

Perhaps the ~~biggest~~ biggest tactic in controlling alcohol consumption ~~was~~ by the WA government was Prohibition, a complete ban. This brings us to an interesting point - to what degree is keeping drinking to a moderate level an issue of personal responsibility or one to be controlled by the authorities.

Given that there are benefits to the alcohol industry, such as direct and indirect employment, tourism, advertising, hospitality, tax revenues to name a few (International Centre of Alcohol Policies) as well as health benefits, in moderation alcohol can reduce the risk of heart disease & stroke (Mann Institute) Wine contains resveratrol which is an ~~antioxidant~~ ^{antioxidant} and can benefit memory, reduce risks of dementia,

reduce plaque & tooth decay (Wise Spectator). It seems that there is a valid argument against prohibition and hence a middle ground ~~concentrating~~ on developing a culture of moderate consumption should be the goal.

Given the financial costs to society both health and for social services, dealing with the aftermath of excessive drinking, taxation and a minimum price of alcohol are effective and I believe justified. ~~Raising~~ Raising revenue to pay for these costs seems to be a responsible measure by the government and an increase in price has proven to be effective in curbing binge drinking.

The BBC reported a movement in the UK where people admitted M&E for drinking-related issues should pay for their hospital treatment. This is more controversial, but would act as a ~~deterrent~~ deterrent to excess drinking.

Government and doctor control is form of social control, but it does not teach the public to be more personally responsible. A change in culture, where the public want more moderation and do not seem to drink in excess would be the ideal way to stop excessive consumption of alcohol, but this requires a cultural attitude change and is a long term goal.

Educational on the effects of alcohol, have so far proved minimally effective (WHO), even though there is a high public perception about an educational approach.

In conclusion, I believe we need to combine a

Mixture of government enforced laws, with
bans aimed at changing individual perception &
annual norms about drinking. With both approaches
running simultaneously, we would achieve both a
short term reduction in drinking, and a long
term decline in people wanting to drink in excess.

June 2011

The emergence of Asia's wine industry

Asia is set to become the dominant economic region of the 21st Century. China and India have huge populations and the potential exists for more to become wine consumers. Japan already has a well established wine trade. The global drinks industry has been active in developing these markets for some years now.

Wine production industries have emerged in India and Japan, and even by 2006 China was the eleventh largest producing country in the world. Vineyards have had to be laid out and wineries built. Decisions were made in the first instance on where to plant, as well as what to plant, which training and trellising systems to use, and other choices associated with establishing a new vineyard.

In some instances, vineyards and wineries have been established in regions rarely, if ever, considered suitable for grape growing and wine production. Establishing new vineyards and launching new products are risky undertakings in any marketplace. Yet the pioneers of wine production in India, China and Japan face additional challenges not only due to geographical location. There are also issues to be addressed in the development of consumer markets. The success of a new product is not merely determined by its quality or style. Success in one market is no guarantee of success elsewhere.

Nevertheless, sparkling wine from India and Chardonnay from China are no longer the oddities they once were and the world of wine is set to become even more diverse in years to come.

Answers: 179

Passes: 150 (84%)

Examination question (all sections compulsory)

- a. Briefly describe grape wine production in India, China and Japan (30% weighting)
- b. Why are wine production industries being developed in these countries? (30% weighting)
- c. Discuss the challenges producers are facing in each country and explain how these can be overcome. (40% weighting)

This question was answered well with 41% of candidates achieving a merit grade. The first part of the question was factual and largely a case of reporting on information contained in the course study notes. Candidates who answered this section well gave an outline of production in these three countries, naming key regions of production, giving an indication of levels of production, varieties grown and types of wine produced. For example, in terms of production in India they wrote that only around 10% of grape production is for wine, with the rest destined for table grapes and raisins. They explained that vineyards can be found in the temperate north-west (Punjab) through to the south in the state of Tamilnadu, but that not all of these are ideal for production of grapes for wine. They made specific reference to Sula Vineyards, and also explained where this is and what styles of wines it is known for producing (eg well-made Sauvignon Blanc, Chenin Blanc and Shiraz). There was also mention of some of the earlier “successes” such as Omar Khayyam sparkling wine.

Section b) of the question required candidates to think beyond the factual content of the study notes. Those who did well in this section demonstrated evidence of original thought and commercial awareness.

Reasons given varied from the very obvious, such as the huge potential for domestic consumption due to the size of these markets, to the very market specific reasons such as the government backing for winemaking in China where they are trying to shift the focus of alcohol consumption from grain based spirits to fruit based wine. Those with strong commercial skills were aware of the two key reasons for this move – a shortage of grain and health concerns. There were also lots of other imaginative reasons such as a possible prejudice against imports, the impact of different food and wine cultures which means that European style wines are not always the appropriate or acceptable choice in Asian markets, a demonstration of national pride in domestic wine production, or even suggestions that the creation of vineyards has become the new “hobby” for the newly emerging, bourgeois, wealthy locals.

The final section accounted for the largest portion of the marks – 40%. This was deliberate as there was certainly a great deal to cover in terms of discussing the challenges facing each country, and equally importantly, explaining how these could be overcome.

Candidates who tackled this section well started out by raising some challenges which are common to all three countries, such as:

- Lack of resources, expertise, skilled labour or capital;
- wrong type of climate, problems with water regulation – too much/too little and at the wrong time;
- lack of wealth (particularly in India) may restrict ability to mitigate climatic problems;
- logistics - transport problems due to isolation of vineyards;
- educating the consumer – need to work towards acceptance of the product by trade and consumer (for example, French wine is frequently used for entertaining in these markets as it is regarded as being more “prestigious”;
- access to global markets is a big challenge.

They then followed this up with an analysis of the problems SPECIFIC to each country. For example, in respect of India, good candidates explained how most of the country is unsuitable for conventional vine growing, with hot summers, high humidity, heavy monsoon rains and temperatures in areas ranging from 8°C in winter to 45°C in summer – all extremely unsuitable for quality grape growing. Solutions were put forward on how to overcome these such as high trained vines with wide row spacing to prevent sunburn and maximize aeration. They also referred to the problems associated with a sub-tropical climate, which in warmer tropical regions results in vines cropping more than once a year resulting in a shortened productive lifespan of the vine, explaining how lack of seasonality results in problems achieving dormancy in the vine which in turn compromises quality. They explained how vineyard location was crucial in overcoming this and achieving quality in the grapes. They also discussed the many cultural problems – for example, the religious and official attitude to alcohol which did not encourage the development of a wine industry in the early stages, but explained that more liberal government policy and the emergence of wine-drinking “middle class” Indians has now resulted in growing demand for wine. These candidates then went on to consider problems unique to China and Japan such as the historical problems associated with overcropping in China because vineyards in the early ‘50’s were planted on flat land with fertile soil, or the challenge of growing grapes on Hokkaido in Japan due to the extreme cold, which necessitates the employment of winter protection methods and varieties suited to intense cold such as vine crossings and hybrids. These are just two examples of challenges facing these countries - there were many more that the best candidates identified.

The following script achieved a fail grade. It is not a complete disaster – it gives an overview of winemaking in the three countries and offers some valid reasons for its development, and there is some discussion of the challenges, but none of the sections is covered in sufficient depth for a pass grade.

The Emergence of Asia's Wine Industry

Who would have thought fine sparkling wines from India or excellent Bordeaux blends from Japan just 50 years ago? The Decanter magazine deals with China almost every other month in its global wine news. Today we encounter more and more wine stories from Asia mainly due to fast growth of economy and population there.

The history of wine production in India, China and Japan goes back thousands of years, although traditionally spirits are the alcoholic beverage of the choice and teas are most often consumed with or without meals like wine would in the West. In India, during the British regime red wine (claret) was introduced and production of claret has begun as well. In modern days, thorough studies are being done in search for good geolocation suitable for winemaking. And these researches are beginning to get paid with some surprising results.

Whereas India had to watch for phylloxera and most often used grafted vine for their wine production, in China rootstock is often used due to drier alluvial soils. Large companies like Great Wall and Changyu dominate the grape wine production there.

As in India and China, in Japan there is originally very few (if not none) *Vitis vinifera* for wine making. So wines made of some native

grape varieties are common in all three countries. According to the Oxford Companion to Wine (2006), Japan's sophisticated interest in wine is due to its earlier economic development, compared to India or China, followed by Western wine producers' persistence. This led to steady research and trial for wine production in Japan.

All in India, China or Japan, climates are not so friendly for viticulture: summers are too humid thus prone to rot, winters are harsh, and on top of that some tornadoes would sweep the vineyards frequently. But winemaking in these countries are developing perseverently.

The main reasons for such development is largely due to the expansion of population and affluent markets as mentioned ahead. Japan is a little different because its soil is mostly acidic, unless you find volcanic soil excellent for vine growing. But in case of India and China, the land is vast and there is also almost unlimited supply of human resource. Therefore there are great possibility of carefully crafted wines to be produced as a result of many trial and errors without enormous investment compared to Australia for example.

Another reason for wine production being developed in these countries would be their culinary heritages. All Asians boast of their own food traditions but with more frequent

overseas travels and curiosity towards other cultures, particularly Japan, India and China are experimenting their traditional dishes with this comparatively new beverages; wine.

Obviously many challenges follow in their ventures. There are several factors. First, wine is not a traditional alcoholic drinks. Therefore for wine producers, marketing is a crucial element in their survival. In China, they have put themselves in the world wine map by 143%. Vineyard growth and three times of its wine production between 1998 to 2004. (World Atlas of Wine, 2007) But, 95% of Chinese drink spirits. There is very small room for wine market.

However, or ironically, among that remaining 5%, 90% is domestic bulk wine. For fine wine producers it is very difficult to compete with few very large producers. It is the same story in Japan as well in which few conglomerate beverage companies dominate the market.

There are other challenges such as taxation, weak wine association, need for wine education to the public, etc. Nonetheless, wine production in these countries are exciting because it is still developing with many possibilities.

In contrast, the following script is well written, with a good introduction, comprehensive overview of the three regions and sound observations in the second section. This candidate has also made reference to their sources of research and the

stats used in their script. Being critical, there is some overlap between sections, and the marker has to be relatively flexible as the structure is not perfect, but the general impression is of a well argued piece of work and the length is extremely impressive at 10 sides of text compared to only three in the previous example. It is only possible to achieve this if the topic is very well researched ahead of the exam.

The Emergence of Asia's Wine Industry

Introduction

Over the past decade, Asia's wine production has increased dramatically. Between 2004 and 2008, Asia's total percentage of global wine production rose ~~at~~ from just over 1% to 5%. Asia does have an ancient history of wine production but it is not until the 1980s that the modern wine industry began to take off. Asia generally has a poor reputation for the quality of its wine but proof of how far the Asian wine industry has developed was the medals awarded to Asian wineries at this year's International Wine Challenge Competition - both Chinese and Indian wines were awarded Silver medals - something that would have been unheard of just 5 years ago.

A Wine Production

India

Wine production in India has been growing steadily for the past 15 years. Traditionally India has grown grapes for non-viticultural purposes. Only a tiny

Percentage are destined for winemaking.

In 2009 India produced about 1m CAS of still wines. Domestically produced wines account for 80% of total

consumption. The reality is that as Francis Robinson points out in his Concise Encyclopedia of Wine, India's subtropical climate is not really suitable for viticulture.

Growing vines in the Indian climate is a challenge as the vines are never dormant.

India does not have a great deal of viticultural expertise so the emphasis has always been on quantity rather than quality. A variety of international grape varieties are grown with a 60/40 breakdown between red and white grapes.

There are about 300 wineries in India

but the top 5 account for about 50% of all production. The no. 1 winery

currently is the Suba Winery which was awarded a Silver IWC medal this year for its Sauvignon Blanc. This however is an exception - most domestically produced

wines are of a poor quality. The

Indian wine industry is also suffering from over-production issues. Wineries have

dramatically increased production over the last 5 years but consumption has not increased in line so there is a surplus situation.

Many foreign wine companies have invested in India and have provided

their expertise. In 2008 the Indian

Grape Processing Board was set up

by the Indian government to try & improve & monitor the quality of domestically produced wines.

Chinese Wine Production

Grape wine in China is a relatively small industry, though according to Rabobank, it has grown by an average of 20% / yr over the last 5 years. Some experts predict that China will be the world's largest producer by 2060.

Wine production in China is based in the North East in the Maritime Climate of Shandong and in the extreme Continental Climate of the North East. China currently produces around 93M cas of wine domestically. As with India, China has a very low level of viticultural expertise and is dependent on foreign expertise to really improve quality. There are around 600 wineries in China but again it is a very consolidated industry with 3 wineries accounting for 50% of production - Changyu Dynasty. Quality control of Chinese wines is very low. Many wineries import very cheap bulk wine to add to their own grapes. The legal requirement is for Chinese wines to be 50% Chinese grapes. However, even this

low limit is not monitored. There are however some very good quality boutique wineries emerging such as) the Grace Winery (in conjunction with Torres). The Chinese climate is not suited to viticulture really with its extreme cold winters (vines have to be buried over winter to ensure they survive) and hot, humid summers which means there is a lot of fungal disease. Also the climate means that many international grape varieties do not ripen properly and Chinese wines are characterised by a 'greeness'.

Japan Wine Production

Wine production in Japan is relatively small compared to India and China. Again, the climate is not ideal for viticulture. There are about 200 wineries in Japan producing about 100,000 cases of wine. Most (60%) of wine consumed in Japan is imported. The main importers Morita and Suntory account for over 50% of total production. These wineries benefit from foreign investment and joint ventures (Pernod Ricard). Although international grape varieties are grown, it is the native Koshu grape that Japan is becoming best known for. This is a very delicate, white wine grape variety which is native to Japan.

B Wine production industries are developing in Asian countries for a number of reasons

First of all, European wine markets are very mature and there are limited opportunities to develop. Leading global wine producers want to exploit the emerging Asian market and are working with local producer in a series of joint ventures.

The Asian economies, particularly those of China & India are booming with GDP predicted to grow by 10% & 7% respectively in the next year.

Japan is a different case - it is already a relatively mature wine market and its ^{GDP} growth over the next years is predicted to be just over 1.2%.

As Asian economies boom, there is a growing sector of ^{upper} middle class in the population which has more disposable income. In India there are already 300,000 millionaires and in China, Wine Intelligence estimate that 1% of the population is now classified as middle class.

With more disposable income, people travel more and become more exposed to western habits. Hence they see that wine is a desirable alcohol.

to consume and they begin to develop western habits. Of course, domestic producers want to take advantage of this trend as well and want to produce wines that can meet growing internal demand. If they can successfully do this with the help of foreign investment they will but China & India are fiercely patriotic - they want to produce a domestic product that can compete with imported wines. ^{The potential is seen in recent news that Moet-Hennessy has set up its own winery in China.}

C Challenges facing Producers

~~India~~ India:

There are many challenges facing producers in the Indian wine production industry. The industry was booming until 2009 when a series of factors have led it to go into decline. First of all, there was the oversupply issue. India's then leading winery Indage had over borrowed and went into liquidation. Indage had been responsible for 80% of sparkling wine production & a great percentage of still wines. In addition there were the Mumbai terrorist attacks which seriously affected the tourist trade and demand for wine. Domestic producers had over estimated the consumer demand for wine - consumption habits did not increase in line with production.

Consumption did not increase as there is a lack of wine knowledge and information in China – only 0.5% of all alcohol produced is wine.

In addition, government taxes on wine are very high so a bottle of wine is double the price of a bottle of domestically produced whiskey.

Also Indian consumers are not used to consuming alcohol with food and wines do not tend to go with Indian cuisine. Beer and spirits continue to dominate Indian alcohol consumption.

Wine consumption will inevitably increase but it will be a long-term development.

Also the Indian government prohibits any advertising of alcohol which limits education opportunities.

Many challenges face the Chinese wine industry as well. Quality is a key issue. As Chinese consumers become more educated about wine, they may realise that domestically produced wine is of a poor quality.

At the top end, consumers a drinking ~~top~~ to P. Bordeaux growths (China is now no. 1 export market for Bordeaux). There is a huge gap between this top end consumption and everyday consumption.

About 95% of all wine consumed in

China is domestically produced so this gives producers an advantage. However Chinese consumers drink predominantly red wine (white wine is seen as unlucky) and wine only represents around 6% of total wine consumption. The Chinese still prefer their local grain spirit Baijiu and beer. Like the Indians, Chinese do not have the habit of drinking wine with food. Consumer education is therefore a key challenge.

Distribution is also a major challenge for producers. Each Chinese province, is like a country in its own right with different consumer tastes and regulations. There are very few national distribution networks so establishing national brands is a key challenge. Storage facilities for wine is also an issue - very few distributors have temperature controlled transportation/warehouses etc so again this affects quality.

Pricing is another challenge - consumers have to pay the price for approximately 50% additional charges for VAT, alcohol duty etc - it makes the UK look like a cheap place to do business!

Another issue is scale of production, China has succeeded in many consumer industries ~~through~~ such as electronics & toy manufacture through economy of

scale but with the wine industry there are no economies of scale.

Chinese agriculture is all Government controlled and most grapes are grown by local co-operatives with individual growers having an average plot size of 0.5 hectares. This makes it difficult to control supply. Also with such poverty in China, there are other challenges – vines are often staked with concrete pails as wooden stakes are used by the workers as fuel in the winter.

Some domestic wineries are looking to invest in vineyards in the New World e.g. Australia so that they are better able to control their grape supply. Wineries e.g. Castel & Torres – will help the Chinese producers to ^{work hand-in-hand with international} ~~Japan~~ ^{help} up their game in terms of quality.

Japan is a different market and has different challenges. The wine consumer in Japan has a much better level of wine knowledge than his Indian or Chinese counterpart. In Japan 60% of all wines consumed are therefore imported. The challenge for Japanese producers is therefore to improve the quality of their wines to compete with imported wines. Another challenge is the stability

economy which has been exacerbated by this year's tsunami. This has had a dramatic impact on wine consumption.

Japanese producers need to develop wines like Koshu which actually go much better with Japanese food than many imported international wine varieties.

Conclusion

There are many challenges facing the Asian wine industry, but industry experts are unified in their view that the market will continue to grow. The pace at which it will grow is an issue of debate. How quickly can nations of non-drinkers form a wine-consuming culture? The pull between cultural traditions and the appeal of new western habits will continue to dominate Asian cultures.

In my view, we are looking at a long-term view. ^{Asian} China is never going to adopt the wine-drinking habits of France but wine can come at a growing niche in its alcohol consumption habits.

Unit 2, Wine Production

This report does not 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. Visits to wine growing regions and winery tours are also invaluable in understanding the “theory” of this unit.

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 on the tasting paper, taking each section in the paper and explaining 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. Another 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 (possibly 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 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 poses more of a challenge and therefore differentiates 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, work well together and allow the exceptional candidate to shine.

Looking at the key headings on the examination paper, these are the key 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 achieved. 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. Colour is certainly an area where many candidates 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 end, which applies more to ruby. For red wines, look at the rim to see if it is still basically pink-red (i.e. ruby) or is showing some orange/brown (i.e. garnet). Almost all wines are one of these two. “Purple” should be reserved for wines that still display a distinct youthful blue colour at the rim, and “tawny” for wines that are distinctly brown in colour. For rosé wines the colours are pink (bluish pink), salmon (pinkish orange), orange (brownish pink) or onion skin (brownish-orange). The colour of white wines is most easily assessed at the core where the wine is deepest rather than at the rim as with red wines. Nearly all white wines fade to a water-white rim, where the colour is almost imperceptible.

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. It is helpful to cluster the aromas into ‘primary’ (deriving from the grape, but probably including some fruity fermentation esters); ‘secondary’ (deriving from production, including malolactic by-products, lees extracts, and oak extracts), and ‘tertiary’ (deriving from ageing processes, whether reductive or oxidative). These in turn help you determine where the wine sits, in terms of its development.

‘**Youthful**’ indicates the wine is dominated by primary and, (in the case of some wines) secondary aromas (mainly fruit and oak). It is common for secondary aromas, when present, to stand apart from the fruit at this stage.

‘**Fully Developed**’ indicates that the dominant aromas are tertiary. In contrast to youthful wines, the secondary aromas are usually fully integrated at this stage.

Many wines pass from ‘Youthful’ to ‘Past their best’ without ever being ‘developing’ or ‘fully developed’. Only use ‘**Developing**’ if the wine is changing in ways that will lead to it becoming more interesting at some point in the future.

As already stated above, it is good discipline to think in terms of ‘clusters’ of aromas such as:

- primary fruit (type of fruit, under-ripe or over-ripe, fresh or jammy)
- lees/autolysis
- malolactic
- oak
- reductive tertiary characteristics
- oxidation.

A wine is not fully described unless at least some descriptors from each of the main clusters present in the wine have been listed. For a wine to be considered as "complex" it must include several aroma clusters.

Palate

Many candidates are guilty of loose, unquantified or vague application of the Systematic Approach to Tasting Technique (SAT) when assessing the palate. 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 (s)he 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 also 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.

Many candidates forget that the Systematic Approach is a five point scale (low / medium (-) / medium / medium (+) / high), rather than a three point scale (low / medium / high). It is useful to start with the three point scale for your initial assessment and then refine this within the five point scale.

Assessing tannin is a two stage process which includes both the level and nature of the tannin. Using the five point scale, start with the three main groups (low-medium-high) and then refine this within the medium category if necessary to arrive at a level which best describes the wine. As an example consider two wines from Châteauneuf-du-Pape, one Grenache dominated, the other having a large percentage of Syrah in the blend. Both may be categorised as having medium tannin on a three point scale. However, the Grenache based wine would probably be more accurately graduated as medium or possibly medium (-) whilst the Syrah dominant wine would have higher levels of tannin, probably medium (+), but the difference would not be enough for it to be graduated as high. It is this level of accuracy that ensures high marks.

When describing the tannin's texture you should use the tannin descriptors in the Systematic Approach. Assessing the texture in addition to the level shows how a wine with a low level of unripe tannin can seem very astringent, whilst a wine with high levels of ripe tannin can seem soft and velvety.

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.

Assessing body accurately can be difficult for many candidates. Alcohol, sugar and extract can all contribute to body, whereas acid seems to lighten body. Ripe tannins can add to body but hard tannins can make a wine seem thinner. Wines that are high in sugar but low in alcohol are hard to assess. Looking at viscosity can help in this instance. Wines that are high in acid and tannin (such as Barolo) can also seem hard and thin, but looking at the weight, concentration and viscosity will help to accurately assess them as full-bodied.

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. For example, woodiness and spiciness tend to increase on the palate whilst floral notes tend to be less noticeable than on the nose.

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 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, typicity 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 more 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 a previous 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 lose 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 2011: White wines from Riesling

Answers: 87

Passes: 57 (66%)

This was a reasonably good set of results with 31% of candidates achieving a merit grade. The variety was easy to spot for the majority of candidates, helped by the classic German Mosel. However, although the variety was often identified along with the three regions/countries (Australia/Clare Valley, Mosel, Alsace), candidates were less good at matching the location to the correct wine, suggesting there was an element of guesswork at play rather than tasting ability. In addition, the reasoning offered for Riesling being the variety was also often weak. The obvious clues were the pale colour and high levels of acidity, the classic aroma and fruit characteristics ranging from simple citrus (lemon and lime), stone fruit and floral notes and the unmistakable petrol/kerose notes which are unique to this variety. The range of styles also ruled out many other varieties. Austere and mineral, dry through to medium sweet, - there are only a few varieties that have this level of versatility.

June 2011: White wines from Sauvignon Blanc

Answers: 376

Passes: 330 (88%)

This was a very good result with 41% of candidates achieving a merit grade. It is certain that the inclusion of a New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc made it easy for most candidates to spot the variety. Those who then used a combination of tasting skills and logic were able to deduce that the wine with clear Sauvignon Blanc characteristics but of a far more restrained nature was therefore most likely to be from the Loire, and the oak character on the other wine could only realistically point to one style, a Fumé Blanc from California.

On the other hand, this wine also sent a number of candidates on the wrong track, with many unable to see past the oak and therefore assuming it to be an oaked Chardonnay. This meant they then had to make the other wines fit this incorrect conclusion, for example by attributing the high acidity of the New Zealand wine to a Chablis. Other candidates confused the Fumé Blanc with Chenin Blanc or simply thought the wine was "corked".

Question 2: Wines with a common theme

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

January 2011: Red wines with a common link in respect of origin	
Answers: 87	Passes: 53 (61%)

In this question, the wines were all from South Africa – Pinot Noir, Pinotage and Shiraz. Identifying the grape varieties was the key to success in this question. Those who spotted the Pinotage generally had no trouble with the final part of the question. However, it is these final 10 marks that often decides who passes and who fails in this paper. In theory, it should still be possible for candidates to gain marks for their reasoning even if they fail to identify the country. In reality, this is rarely the case as candidates are often too brief in their reasoning for a section worth five marks. This tends to suggest the identification of the country is sometimes based on guesswork rather than analytical deduction. Italy was a popular choice of origin, but this was rather illogical given the forward fruit and jammy character of some of these wines. The high alcohol suggested a warm climate and this took some candidates to the US, but it was the classic burnt, medicinal, metallic and earthy character of the Pinotage that should have led candidates to South Africa.

June 2011: Red wines with a common link in respect of origin	
Answers: 376	Passes: 248 (66%)

As with the January exam, candidates were required to identify the country of origin - in this instance, Australia. The wines were Yalumba Bush Vine Grenache, Wynns Coonawarra Cabernet Sauvignon and Peter Lehmann's Barossa Shiraz. The Coonawarra caused the fewest problems and those candidates who identified it as such generally did well in the question. In contrast, the Grenache was identified by only 56 of the 376 candidates with a large number of candidates concluding that it was Pinot Noir or Gamay. Italian varieties were also a common option. This inevitably led candidates to an Old World location, and even many of those who identified the variety as Grenache ended up in Spain, assuming the other wines to be

Tempranillo. In general, candidates missed the relatively low acidity and high alcohol on this wine (the Grenache), which should have discounted these options as illogical.

As in previous years, the final section of the paper was where weaknesses showed up, such as the candidate who concluded that the country was France because “*all 3 wines are red and not many countries produce more red than white wine*”. This shows appalling ignorance and naivety at this level.

Tasting Paper 2

Question 3: Partly-Specified Wines

As the focus of this question is to test candidates’ ability to differentiate between the quality level of the three wines, it is vital that candidates understand 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 a large number of 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 these characteristics. Once the premium wine has been identified, the other two should fall into place.

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 unearth in this process to an evaluation of the possible quality level. In reality, for many, quality assessment is an area of weakness so this paper is not as easy as it appears.

January 2011: Red Bordeaux

Answers: 87	Passes: 68 (78%)
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This was an impressive set of scripts, with an equal number of pass and merit grades. The line up here was a generic Bordeaux brand (in this case Mouton Cadet), a mid priced Médoc and a premium Margaux from the 1998 vintage and clearly showing considerable age.

As is so often seen in Diploma tasting exams, many candidates were poor at recognising the quality of the premium wine which had a retail price in excess of £30. In the worst instances, this was deemed to be the cheapest of the three wines. As with previous exams, there are a number of candidates who confuse ripe jammy fruit with quality – basing judgements on power of fruit rather than subtlety, complexity or elegance.

The following script gives a reasonably accurate, albeit simplistic, description of the Cru Classé wine itself, but the assessment of quality is weak.

WINE No. 9

Appearance: (3 marks)

Bright deep garnet going to
a lighter salmon → water white
rim. Some distinct tars.

Nose: (7 marks)

Clean nose of medium (+) intensity, developed.
Aromas of forest fruits, blackberries, blackcurrants,
cassis & blackcurrant jam. Also a vanilla
aroma, quite toasty oak, dark, bitter chocolate.

Palate: (10 marks)

This is a dry wine with medium acidity
and medium (+) alcohol. The tannins are
substantial - grainy & quite chewy.

Flavour intensity is medium and of new
oaky flavour along with black forest fruits
cassis, & a little mint.

Detailed assessment of quality: (9 marks)

This is a good wine, but its very noticeable
tannins mean it should be drunk with
protein to soften these. However, the
mouthfeel is good - quite silky, and
the fruit flavours also are pleasant
and distinctive.

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

Can drink now but will age due to
tannins & overall structure. Up to 20 years

The comments relating to the "Assessment of Quality" do not convey the obvious high quality of this wine. The reference to drinking the wine with protein to soften the tannins is not relevant and the other comments are vague and unquantified.

In contrast the next script is far more precise and expressive in terms of the characteristics of the wine and the assessment of quality is considerably more extensive, making a number of accurate observations and placing the wine in the correct quality category. With nine marks available for the assessment of quality, it should be clear to candidates that an extensive and well argued analysis is required, and this candidate has approached this well although there was clearly still room for improvement.

WINE No. 9

Appearance: (3 marks) The wine is clear and bright with a deep ruby core and a garnet rim. The wine has teeth.

Nose: (7 marks) The wine is clean with a pronounced intensity of rich black fruits, black cherries, black berries, black cherries, coffee, chocolate, tar. The wine is developed.

Palate: (10 marks) On the palate the wine is dry with high alcohol, medium+ tannins, full body and medium+ acidity. The flavor intensity is pronounced with cherries, plums, blue berries, coffee, sweet spice & tar and a Savory note. The wine has a long length.

Detailed assessment of quality: (9 marks) This is an outstanding wine with pronounced intensity on both the nose and palate. The wine has complexity from integrated oak and bottle age and still retains classy fruit on the palate and length despite its development. This wine has a long length which has depth as well as breadth of flavor. The overall balance is good although the alcohol Readiness for drinking/potential for ageing: (4 marks)

is slightly high. This wine is developed and drinking immediately now. The colour and nose suggest it is fully developed however there is still a pleasing amount of genuine fruit character on the palate which would allow it another 2-3 years.

June 2011: Red wines from the Northern Rhône	
Answers: 372	Passes: 321 (86%)

All four tasting questions in the June exam generated high pass rates. This shows very clearly how the pass rate in the January exam is adversely affected by the large number of resit candidates who failed at a previous attempt, as these form a much higher percentage of the total number of candidates sitting in January than they do in June.

The wines in this question were Crozes-Hermitage (£9), St Joseph (£14), and Hermitage (£30). Candidates were not required to identify the wines or give an indication of price, but did need to give a very detailed assessment of quality worth 9 marks in each instance. As this is often the weakest section of tasting notes, this is where marks were inevitably lost

The following two scripts show the two extremes of the grade bandings. One script has written extensive notes in all sections and for all three wines, the other has large sections of blank white paper. This candidate seems oblivious to the significance of the marks allocation of the various sections, for example writing only three words in a section worth nine marks.

WINE No. 7

Appearance: (3 marks)

Clear and Bright. Deep garnet colour with ruby rim long legs

Nose: (7 marks)

Clean, medium intensity of developing aromas of black fruit, plum alcohol, ripe fruit, neval, oak, caramel, vanilla, sweet spice, champignon, wet leaves, black pepper

Palate: (10 marks)

Dry, high acidity, medium tannins a little harsh, medium (+) alcohol, medium (+) body, medium weight, medium flavours, intensity of black pepper, ripe black fruit, blackcurrant, champignon, wet leaves, oak

Detailed assessment of quality: (9 marks)

- Acceptable red wine

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

Ready to drink, but tannins will be fully integrated in 2-3 yrs

WINE No. 8

Appearance: (3 marks)

Clear and Bright. Medium (+) garnet with ruby rim, long legs.

Nose: (7 marks)

Clear.. medium intensity of developing aromas of black fruits., plum
black pepper,

Palate: (10 marks)

Dry, medium (+) acidity, medium (+) body, medium(+) tannin',
medium(+) alcohol, medium (+) flavour intensity
medium (P) length

Detailed assessment of quality: (9 marks)

- very good red wine

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

Ready to drink, it will improve in 1-2 yrs and hold up for 5 yrs more

WINE No. 9

Appearance: (3 marks)

Clear and Bright. Deep garnet with ruby rim long legs.

Nose: (7 marks)

Clean, medium A) Intensity of developing aromas of red fruit, strawberry, meaty jammy

Palate: (10 marks)

Dry, medium (+) acidity, medium (+) soft tannins, medium (+) alcohol, medium flavour intensity of
medium (+) body, medium A) length.

Detailed assessment of quality: (9 marks)

- Vin de pays level, good red wine

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

- Ready to drink now, and hold for 2-3 yrs

This candidate achieved very low marks for a script that is no better than a very basic Level 3 tasting note. This candidate needs to improve considerably if they are to have any chance of success in this qualification and should aim for a similar level of accuracy and detail as the following candidate.

WINE No. 7

Appearance: (3 marks)

The wine is clear. Slight
has a ~~dark~~ & ruby core with a pale
ruby rim. It deposits legs on the glass.

Nose: (7 marks)

The nose is clean, developing medium
intensity and shows ~~notes~~ of,
red-currant, some cherry, plum, raspberry,
cedar, walnut.

Palate: (10 marks)

The palate is dry, ~~medium plus~~ ^{high} acidity,
medium tannin that are a bit ~~tannic~~ and
green. The wine has medium alcohol,
medium intensity and shows flavors of,
sour cherry, red currant, apple skin, raspberry,
pepper and ~~raspberry~~ ^{cherry}. The length is medium.

Detailed assessment of quality: (9 marks)

The wine is ~~good~~, ~~acceptable~~. The wine
is out of balance as the spice of
acidity dominates the palate and ~~overly~~
~~excessive~~ the fruit. The fruit is fresh and
evident but has little complexity and
concentration. The length is acceptable but
is dominated by the basic acidity and green
tannin.

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

Drink now. Will hold for ~~some~~ 3 years
The fruit will disappear and the wine will
become very acidic and tough to drink.

WINE No. 8

Appearance: (3 marks)

The wine is clear and bright
has a medium ruby core and
a pale ruby rim. It leaves legs on the
glass.

Nose: (7 marks)

The nose is clean, youthful, of medium
intensity and shows aromas of red-
currant, cranberry, apple blossom, sour cherry,
raspberry and strawberry. It has a slightly tarted
nature of solid sweets.

Palate: (10 marks)

The palate is dry, medium in acid, has medium
tannin that is tarry and drying but not涩 (salty). The wine has medium + alcohol, medium
intensity and is medium bodied. It shows
flavours of sour cherry, cranberry, redcurrant,
raspberry, rosehip and blood orange. The length
is medium.

Detailed assessment of quality: (9 marks)

The wine is good quality. It has a good
concentration of fruit on the palate although
it lacks complexity. The acidity, body
and alcohol are almost in balance and
this leaves the finish although quite soft fresh
and zippy. The lack of tertiary and secondary
qualities mean that the wine cannot be better.

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

Drink now. The wine will not improve but
it will hold its character for 2 years before
it starts to decline.

WINE No. 9

Appearance: (3 marks) The wine is clear + bright.
Shows legs on the glass and is medium plus ruby at the core and pale ruby in
an medium width rim.

Nose: (7 marks)

The nose is clean developing, and
medium + intensity. It shows aromas
of red fruit, strawberry, red plum, raspberry,
red currant, coffee, leather, mushrooms
meatiness, sweet spice.

Palate: (10 marks)

The palate is dry, medium plus acidity,
medium plus alcohol, medium plus tannin which
is dusty and drying but quite fine grained in
construction. The wine is medium plus acidic
and medium + intensity. The wine shows flavors
of Dawson, some dried up red currant, sweet spice,
oak, leather, meatiness, Truffle, pepper, clove, cranberry. Length
Detailed assessment of quality: (9 marks) is medium plus.

The quality is very good. The palate is elegant,
complex and concentrated it has a great
balance between acidity, fruit concentration and
~~alcohol~~ tannin. There is a nice balance
between subtle primary fruit and tertiary
hubs. The length is long and finishing
and the structure appealing. Finishes a little hot.

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

"Dark Dawson" will improve for 5 years
and hold for a further 5. The fruit will
become more savoury but the acidity will keep
the wine fresh. Tannin should soften and integrate
more.

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 a candidate to write accurate tasting notes, yet not identify the wines and still pass (sometimes even with a high grade), whilst another 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 accurately 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.

Candidates often decide what the wine is having smelt or tasted it, and then write their tasting note to match this assumption, which in some instances may be incorrect. This is easy to do under examination conditions and is very tempting when you think you recognise the wine. However, it is always a bad move as the tasting note is invariably less accurate because 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 reviewed, and only then to reach a conclusion as to what it might be.

January 2011: White wines – Hahn Estates California Chardonnay 2008, Faldeos Nevados Argentinean Torrontés 2009, Domaine Huet Le Haut-Lieu Vouvray Sec 2008	
Answers: 87	Passes: 57 (65%)

Answers: 87

Passes: 57 (65%)

The California Chardonnay was the wine that candidates seemed most comfortable with, largely because the oak made it easier to describe, although the quality was often misjudged with many identifying it as top quality Burgundy. The Torrontes was also relatively easy, but often confused with Gewurztraminer. However, the complexity and elegance of the Vouvray was missed by many candidates, with some describing it as oxidised and of “poor quality”.

The examiner also noted a number of simplistic errors such as describing the wines only as “yellow” rather than using the precise terms listed in the Systematic Approach. A large number of candidates seem to get confused about the assessment of intensity on the appearance, resulting in contradictory comments such as “pale lemon of medium intensity”. It is impossible for the examiner to allocate any marks in such instances as it is unclear whether the intensity is pale or medium.

The following two scripts for the Vouvray show the difference between a fail grade and a distinction. Apart from the obvious difference in the length of all the sections, there is also an issue of accuracy. The "fail grade" script describes the wine as "jammy" and "oxidised". Putting aside the fact that this wine was neither jammy nor oxidised, these descriptors also make the assumption that this was a Pfalz Riesling illogical.

Fail grade script:

WINE No. 12

Appearance: (3 marks)

CLEAN, MEDIUM INTENSITY, GOLDEN GREEN

Nose: (7 marks)

CLEAN, INTENSE, DEVELOPING

COOKED PEARS, JAMMY, SLIGHTLY OXIDIZED, PEACH, APPLE

Palate: (10 marks)

OFF-DRY, MEDIUM ACIDITY, PRONOUNCED ACIDITY, INTENSE,
LOW ALCOHOL

COOKED PEARS, PEACH, APPLE, JAMMY OXIDIZED

MEDIUM FINISH

Assessment of quality: (5 marks)

GOOD QUALITY. INTENSE AND RICH, GOOD ACIDITY AND BALANCED
STRUCTURE CREATE THIS

Readiness for drinking/potential for ageing: (3 marks)

DRINK NOW OR IN THE NEXT 3 YEARS

Approximate age of wine: (1 mark)

6 YEARS

Predominant grape variety/varieties: (1 mark)

RIESLING

Country of origin: (1 mark)

GERMANY

Region of origin: (2 marks)

PFALZ

Distinction grade script:

WINE No. 12

Appearance: (3 marks)

It is clear and bright. It has medium minus intensity of lemon colour. It has a wide watery hue, golden flecks and legs appear on the glass.

Nose: (7 marks)

It is clean. It has pronounced intensity and is developing. It has aromas of apricot, nuts, grapes, yeast, bread, citrus, lemon, apple.

Palate: (10 marks)

It is off-dry. It has high acidity and no tannin. It has medium alcohol and medium plus body. It has pronounced flavour intensity and flavours of baked apple, almonds, honey, citrus, bread, lemon, and apricot. It is creamy and balanced. It has medium plus length.

Assessment of quality: (5 marks)

Very good. Great complex nose and palate both with good intensity. Fruit and acidity in balance, wine as a whole well structured and delicious.

Good length and ageing potential.

Readiness for drinking/potential for ageing: (3 marks)

Drink now, will improve over 3-4 years thanks to acidity and concentration. Can keep for 8-9 years.

Approximate age of wine: (1 mark)

1 year old

Predominant grape variety/varieties: (1 mark)

CHENIN BLANC

Country of origin: (1 mark)

FRANCE

Region of origin: (2 marks)

LOIRE

June 2011: White wines – St Michael-Eppan Pinot Grigio Alto Adige 2009, Pouilly-Fuissé, Aux Charmes, Château de Beauregard 2008, Oremus 5 puttonyos Tokaji 2000

Answers: 372

Passes: 274 (74%)

Despite the high pass rate, most scripts were sound passes (42%) rather than high grades and the marker commented on extensive use of “generic” descriptors such as “oak”, “floral”, “citrus” rather than the more precise descriptors expected at this level.

The Tokaji should have been the wine that candidates were able to place with relative ease. It was often identified as a botrytised wine, but from other regions such as Bordeaux or the Loire. These candidates tended to pick up good marks for the description of the wine and this was not necessarily an illogical conclusion to reach. In fact, many candidates become obsessed with “getting the identity correct” and will often ask for their script to be remarked on this basis, believing that they could not possibly have failed if they identified the wines. In reality, this is the least important aspect of the question as provenance accounts for only 9% of the marks, so it is perfectly feasible for these candidates to fail because of inaccuracy in the tasting notes. The following script illustrates the reverse of this scenario perfectly – this candidate has identified only one wine correctly, but the tasting notes themselves are accurate and the assessment of quality is well argued, so this candidate achieves plenty of marks on this basis.

WINE No. 10

Appearance: (3 marks)

Clear and bright, pale lemon, wide watery rim
bubbles /CO₂/ persistence in glass, legs & tears, green tints

Nose: (7 marks)

Clean, youthful, medium (-) intensity
grapey, apple fruit character, mineral-stoney
quite neutral, green apple, ~~peach~~, pear drop

Palate: (10 marks)

dry, medium acidity, medium alcohol
medium body, medium (-) length
neutral, citrus & stone fruit character, pears, melon
~~sauvignon~~ simple & straightforward, ~~or~~ even slightly grapey

Assessment of quality: (5 marks).

~~Good~~ Acceptable, insufficient fruit & flavour concentration
to balance body and alcohol. Little complexity, little
length, warm finish. Simple & straightforward quaffing wine

Readiness for drinking/potential for ageing: (3 marks)

now, will not improve, drink within six months

Approximate age of wine: (1 mark)

1 year

Predominant grape variety/varieties: (1 mark)

Pinot Grigio

Country of origin: (1 mark)

Italy

Region of origin: (2 marks)

Veneto;

WINE No. 11

Appearance: (3 marks)

Clear and bright, medium lemon, legs & tears
bubbles / CO₂ / petillance in glass, medium watery rim,

Nose: (7 marks)

Clean, developing, medium intensity
vanilla spice from oak, buttery / creamy
~~stone~~ ripe stone fruit character - peachy

Palate: (10 marks)

Dry, medium (+) acidity, hints of wood tannins (slight dryness on cheeks), medium (+) alcohol, medium (+) body, medium (+) length.

Ripe stone fruit character with hint of citrus (lemon)
vanilla spice (sweet) from oak, creamy richness - butter.

Assessment of quality: (5 marks)

Very good. Good flavour concentration balances oak, acidity and tannins. Ripe fruit complements acidity for perfect balance. Good length + nice complexity harmonious.

Readiness for drinking/potential for ageing: (3 marks)

drinking now, will hold 2 years, drink within
~~three~~ years

Approximate age of wine: (1 mark)

3 years old

Predominant grape variety/varieties: (1 mark)

Chardonnay

Country of origin: (1 mark)

Australia

Region of origin: (2 marks)

Yarra Valley

WINE No. 12

Appearance: (3 marks)

Clear & bright, medium (+) gold, orange tints
legs & tears.

Nose: (7 marks)

Clear, developing, pronounced intensity
Ripe fleshy apricots, creamy, orange blossom
Honey, apple compôte, beeswax (noble rot?)
Sweet vanilla spice, cloves

Palate: (10 marks)

~~Fusions~~ medium (+) sweetness, pronounced acidity, medium
alcohol, ~~medium~~⁽⁺⁾ body, long length.

Ripe fleshy apricots, apple compôte, citrus zinginess
sweet vanilla spice, floral notes - honeycomb + orange blossom
Rich & creamy. hint of cloves *

Assessment of quality: (5 marks)

Outstanding, acidity & sweetness in perfect harmonious
balance. Great concentration of fruit flavor which carries
along long length. Very sweet yet remains refreshing with great
Readiness for drinking/potential for ageing: (3 marks) acidity, lovely complexity with floral fruit & wood
notes.

drinking now, will go on developing 10 years, drink
within 15 years

Approximate age of wine: (1 mark)

4 years

Predominant grape variety/varieties: (1 mark)

Chenin Blanc

Country of origin: (1 mark)

France

Region of origin: (2 marks)

Lorraine Valley - Côteaux du Layon

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 use any time remaining to 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 determine 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 2011

Group A: Compulsory Question

Describe the DO regions of Ribera del Duero, Rueda and Bierzo. Discuss how factors in the vineyard and winery account for the style and quality of wine produced in each of these regions. (Each region carries equal weighting)

Answers: 83

Passes: 29 (35%)

Results for this question were extremely poor with only 29 candidates out of 83 passing. Despite the very low pass rate, there was a small core of candidates who achieved good marks – 12 with merit and 7 with distinction. The problem was clearly at the lower end of the scale with half the candidates sitting the theory paper achieving a fail (unclassified) grade. As this was a compulsory question these weaker candidates had nowhere to hide and their very poor performance has pulled the pass rate down to this very low level. It was certainly anticipated that weaker candidates would find the section on Bierzo more challenging, but the other two sections were certainly mainstream enough that a candidate who had studied the materials sufficiently should have been able to get a borderline pass on the strength of these sections alone.

As in the past, when asking similar styles of questions, candidates are able to write fairly credible tasting notes for the various wines, but are unable to explain convincingly **why** the wines taste the way they do, and this is what this question is all about. This is a classic example of the way the questions in the Diploma exam require candidates to apply both explanation and application in their answers rather than just factual recall in the form of the tasting note (see page 5 of this report for more on this).

Most candidates were able to write reasonably knowledgeably about Ribera del Duero, but the section on Rueda was often incorrect and a number of candidates wrote nothing at all on Bierzo or clearly relied on guesswork.

Candidates who answered the section on Bierzo well started out by explaining that this region is geographically close to Galicia but is protected from Atlantic influence by mountains. They were aware that this region is becoming increasingly fashionable as a producer of red, Rosado and white wines, many commanding premium prices. They described how vineyards are planted on gentle slopes at lower altitude than the other two regions, that the climate is not quite as continental with cooler summers and milder winters giving the wines a delicacy. They noted that soils are rich and fertile, containing slate and granite and that this is particularly suited to the grape variety of the region, Mencia. They explained how the character of this grape influences wine style, with specific reference to its herbaceous quality. They also wrote about the white grape of the region, Godello, describing its characteristics and how barrel fermentation and aging on the lees results in creamy, fruity wines that

retain their freshness. They also wrote about fermentation and ageing of the red wines and how this differs from the other two regions, making specific reference to the need to retain fruit character and ensure that oak does not overpower the delicacy of the Mencia grape. All of this information was readily available and should have been covered during the learning and revision process, but this clearly was not the case in many instances.

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

<p><i>Assess Austria's strengths and weaknesses as a producer of still, light wines. (An essay format is COMPULSORY for this question)</i></p>	
Answers: 56	Passes: 31 (55%)

Assess Austria's strengths and weaknesses as a producer of still, light wines. (An essay format is COMPULSORY for this question)

Answers: 56

Passes: 31 (55%)

Every Unit 3 theory paper contains one question that must be answered in an essay format. These questions are usually more topical and discursive in nature and are therefore more suited to this form of response. Although fewer candidates tend to select these questions, those that do, invariably do very well. However, although in this instances half of those who passed did so with a merit or distinction grade, the pass rate for this question was not exceptional by any means. Far too many responses were simplistic and in many instances, without knowing what the specific wording of the question was, the reader would have had no idea which country was being written about. There were also far too many candidates who simply "grouped" Austria and Germany together, assuming that they both suffered from the same problems. This showed a lack of understanding of Austria's wine industry.

A number of candidates failed this question because in the heat of the moment they misread it and wrote an essay about Australia rather than Austria. This was a heavy price to pay for a lapse in concentration and was particularly foolish as the next question WAS on Australia, and common sense should have told them that there would not be two questions on Australia on the same paper.

<p><i>In relation to Australia, write a paragraph on FIVE of the following:</i></p>	
a) McLaren Vale b) Cabernet Sauvignon c) Len Evans d) Blending e) Oak f) Penfold's Grange	Answers: 70 Passes: 43 (61%)

- In relation to Australia, write a paragraph on FIVE of the following:*
- a) McLaren Vale
 - b) Cabernet Sauvignon
 - c) Len Evans
 - d) Blending
 - e) Oak
 - f) Penfold's Grange

Answers: 70

Passes: 43 (61%)

This was a good result for a “paragraph style” question, as this type of question is often answered as a last resort. However, despite the good pass rate, at the lower end of the achievement scale, there were a greater number of very weak candidates achieving the fail (unclassified) grade than those who missed the pass mark by a small margin. Those achieving low marks, either wrote too little or did not answer all five sections. The weakest section of the question was on “Len Evans” which was only attempted by four candidates, all of whom addressed this section badly. Many responses were also far too generic – specifically the sections on “Cabernet Sauvignon”, “blending” and “oak”. It was not enough to simply describe the characteristics of Cabernet Sauvignon, unless this was specifically explaining how these differ when grown in Australia compared to other locations. However, the best marks were achieved by candidates who explained how the variety differs when grown in the various classic locations in Australia such as Margaret River, Coonawarra etc, or those who illustrated their answer with reference to specific producers renowned for their Cabernet Sauvignon wines.

The following candidate wrote knowledgeably about each section they covered and achieved a high grade as a result.

a) McLaren Vale.

McLaren Vale is in South Australia close to Adelaide. Being, as it is, closer to the sea than, say, Barossa it has a more moderate climate with maritime influence. The climate is Mediterranean and rain tends to fall in winter and spring. Soils contain red and brown clays and some sand. Grapes grown here include most of the international varieties: chardonnay, shiraz, cabernet sauvignon but not those, such as riesling & pinot noir, which require a cooler climate such as Clare Valley or Mornington Peninsula respectively. Producers here include d'Arenberg.

b) Cabernet Sauvignon

As with many other international varieties, Cabernet Sauvignon has been enthusiastically planted in Australia, most notably in the region of Coonawarra where, arguably, it reaches its most compelling, structured yet fruit-forward apogee. Since it is a variety which thrives in all but the coolest regions of the world it is unsurprising that it has

found a welcoming home in Australia. ~~the region of Coonawarra~~ ~~most notably in the Barossa Valley~~ With its warm Mediterranean and continental climates, a benefit of cabernet Sauvignon is that it doesn't lose acidity quickly once it has reached ripeness (unlike Chardonnay) which allows growers to give prolonged 'hang-time' if they want to create a particularly rich, full-bodied version of the variety.

Petaluma (owned by Brian Croser) and Wynd's make particularly fine examples.

It is also blended (unusually) ^{for Cabernet} with Shiraz in Australia, the Shiraz adding fruit and flesh, with Cabernet giving the structure.

c) Blending

There are two elements of blending I'd like to cover — one is the blending of grape varieties and the other is blending from different parcels of land.

Blending of grape varieties

Very many of Australia's finest wines tend to be single varietal; the desire being to express perfectly the fruit character of the variety, be that the mineral, lime/lemon character of Riesling produced on Polish Hill in the Clare Valley by Grosset, or Jim Barry's interpretation of Shiraz in 'The Armagh'. However, blending of grapes does occur and blends tend to reflect

those of the blends of Europe such as Shiraz, Mourvedre, Grenache or Cabernet Merlot.

However for red wines, those blends can be very successful (such as the Rhône blends of Heathcote). Whites on the other hand tend to fall into the same, somewhat more bland, camp — and that is the blending of Chardonnay with another (lesser grape) being added for padding (such as Colombard or Semillon).

Blending from different parcels of land

Whilst there is merit in, and evidence for, the use of the term 'terroir' in Australia, this concept is ~~is~~ really in its infancy when compared to somewhere like France, where hundreds of years of trial and error have resulted in the perfect marriage between vine and 'climat'. Different areas are known to be particularly suited to particular grapes, but the nuances of fine-granularity ^(micro) site-specific characteristics has yet to be learnt. For this reason it is common to blend grapes from different parcels of land and for the winemaker, not terroir, play the role of 'superstar' in creating some of Australia's finest wines.

e) Oak.

In the 1990s, the ~~was~~ collective wine-drinkers' thirst seemed unquenchable for over-oaked, full-bodied red and whites from Australia.

And the Australians made hay while the sun shone. Oceans of cheap, quaffable, but oak-soaked wine poured out of Australia in the form of Yellow tail and the like. Techniques like oak chips & oak steves allowed the oak flavor to be imparted quickly and cheaply to the otherwise relatively neutral wine.

Thankfully those days are mostly behind us, and Australia (like America) is beginning to realise that oak heavy wines are no longer de riguer (if they ever were).

This trend has been seen, too, in the fine wine segment, where all too often, Chardonnays were over-oaked and buttery and lacking in finesse.

Happily in this segment too, the trend for sometimes 200% (2 new sets of barrels for a single vintage) ^{new} oak has waned and winemakers are seeking greater subtlety and a more judicious use of oak. None the less, it is still the ~~aging~~ ^{new} oak barrel is still the ageing container of choice for many of the better winemakers in Barossa (for Shiraz), Coonawarra (for Sauvignon) and McLaren Vale.

f.

Penford's Grange.

Probably Australia's ~~most~~ most well known, and arguably its finest wine, made from a blend of ^{Shiraz} grapes coming from disparate parts of SE Australia including Koonunga Hill.

It was first made in the early 50s by Max Schubert, but was derided by its critics as being like 'a dry port' and in fact, Schubert was ordered to stop making it. Instead of stopping, however, Schubert went underground and continued making it; ~~until~~ in 1957 it was 're-discovered' and began to develop a cult following from that point on.

Penfolds now has a wide range of other wines, named after their Bin numbering system. It is now owned by the drinks giant Foster's. Its back vintages are prized and highly priced.

Describe the climate, main soil types and key grape varieties found in the four districts of the Loire Valley (40% weighting). Explain how these factors, and others, combine to produce Muscadet Sèvre et Maine sur lie, Bonnezeaux, Chinon and Sancerre. (60% weighting)

Answers: 77	Passes: 27 (35%)
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Like the compulsory question, this was also a very poor result, with no distinction grades and more fail (unclassified) grade scripts than any other grade band. Clearly, it is undesirable for so many candidates to fall into the lowest grand band, but this is a phenomenon we have seen more and more frequently as candidates approach this qualification without first consolidating and building on the knowledge they gained at Level 3. Too many candidates are rushing into the Diploma programme on passing

the lower WSET qualifications (sometimes with low level pass grades), without fully realising the significant difference in the level of the Diploma. Whilst it is understandable that any candidate can do poorly in one or two questions, anyone achieving more than one or two fail (unclassified) grades in the Unit 3 theory paper really needs to question whether they are ready for this qualification.

Ironically, this was the most popular question on the paper, presumably because it looked easy in comparison to others. This meant, like the compulsory question, it was answered by a large number of the weaker candidates who took the exam in January. This should have been a very straightforward question, but there were 2 key reasons for low marks:

- Many candidates failed to read the question carefully enough to realise that the first part required them to consider the sub-regions in broad terms, not just in respect of the named wines.
- Many candidates simply repeated the same facts they had given in the first part of the question also in the second part rather than DISCUSSING WHY the wines taste the way they do.

For example, having identified the four sub regions as Nantais, Anjou-Saumur, Touraine and Central Vineyards, candidates should have referred to a number of different soil types and grape varieties when writing about Anjou-Saumur in the first part of the question, not just those that relate to Bonnezeaux.

In addition, far too many scripts were presented in bullet point format, and this is a common theme in all questions. It is not possible to demonstrate the required level of understanding or “application” of factual knowledge in this format as there is no discussion or analysis – usually just simple statements of fact are presented with no explanation. Too many candidates fail to understand that this is the key difference between the WSET Level 3 qualification and the Diploma. There were also extremely elemental errors such as not being able to name the four sub regions correctly or listing the wrong grape variety for Muscadet. At this level, candidates should know that this wine is not made from the Muscat or the Muscadelle variety.

The following script is a good example of one of these very weak submissions. This candidate has identified the four sub regions as Sancerre, Touraine, Nantes and Muscadet. Clearly only two of these are regions. The information contained within these sections is correct in parts, but not always under the correct heading. For example, they state what the soil and climate is in the Central Vineyards, but incorrectly refer to this sub region as “Sancerre”, which is the wine not the region. Similarly, they list the climate, soil and grape for the Nantais but do so under the heading of Muscadet – once again, this is the wine not the region. To make matters worse, they do have a heading of “Nantes”, but very little of the information given under this actually relates to the Nantais, for example the reference to Chenin Blanc and the range of wine styles from dry to sweet. This candidate gained very few of the 40 marks available for this section of the question. The second part of the question was better, factually correct but far too superficial for this level of qualification. It is presented as a list of facts with no explanation of how these factors account for the style of the various wines.

four districts of the Loire

1 Sancerre, Pouilly Fumé

located mostly inland east, closest to champagne area

Sancerre and Pouilly-Fumé have limestone underbase

with flint, which provide an smoke tone sometimes

also very important soil is Kimmeridge clay same as in Chablis. high mineral soil with fossils gives an austere mineral taste. semi continental, Sauvignon Blanc.

2 Touraine

semi continental with more maritime influences as it lies closer to the Atlantic. Here the soil is more thicker, made with clay and limestone and some gravel

Sauvignon blanc, Pinot noir, Cabernet Franc

3 Nantes

maritime climate. The Loire river provides a great humidity and close to the Atlantic Ocean limestone with gravel soil. mostly common seen is Chenin Blanc grape in different styles from dry to sweet

4 Muscadet

closest area to the Atlantic Ocean. maritime climate

limestone based soil, grape variety melon de Bourgogne used for Muscadet wines. high acidity neutral aromas.

* muscadet Sevre et main sur lie

- made in the region closest to the Atlantic Ocean
- maritime climate.
- melon de Bourgogne grape variety, once brought by the Dutch in the 17th century to make brandewijn, an original grape from Burgundy.
- grapes are hand picked followed by a cold fermentation. sur lie, after racking ~~the~~ finer lees stay for 6 months providing tastes like toasted bread, high acidity is common ~~and~~ typical for this wine style.
- Sevre et main is an area above muscadet, small area.

* Bonnezeaux

- maritime climate with through the area the river Loire provides humidity for this wine style.
- made from botrytised Chenin Blanc grapes.
- area lies within Coteaux du Layon makes only sweet wines.
- late hand picked grapes, affected with noble rot are ~~then~~ pressed (low yielding) then cold fermented and stored in large casks.
- tasted like honey and apricot jammy

* Chinon

Semi continental climate in Touraine region

- made from Cabernet Franc, thick skinned grape with high tannins and moderate acidity, adds colour to the wine.
- Chinon lies in the middle of the Touraine region
- clay soils provides warmth and limestone soil minerality. →

• Chinon

- Cabernet Franc is hand picked
- after maceration it is fermented in oak, not always oak aged.
- resulting in wines with high tannins, spice aromas, dark fruit.

• Sancerre

- most inland region of the Loire
- continental climate
- limestone, flint soil
- flint provides some smokiness but its stronger in the Pouilly-Fumé
- can be made from Sauvignon Blanc or Pinot noir
- makes white, rose and red wines
- mostly common seen white from Sauvignon blanc
- hand picked grapes, cold fermentation, storage in large casks, can also be on Barricage (225L)
- mostly fresh style, refreshing acidity sometimes little smokiness.

In relation to North America, write a paragraph on FIVE of the following:

- a) Finger Lakes
- b) Rutherford Bench
- c) Willamette Valley
- d) Cascade Mountains
- e) Niagara Escarpment
- f) Mayacamas Mountains

Answers: 20

Passes: 16 (80%)

Although this question generated the best pass rate on the January paper, it was not a true reflection of the general standard in the exam overall. It was answered by only 20 candidates (25% of the total) and these fell into two distinct camps, those who did so because they were knowledgeable about the topic (accounting for the high pass rate) and those who did so because they mistakenly believe paragraph questions are the "easier" option. These either scraped a basic pass (9 of the 20 candidates) or failed dismally, with all of them achieving a low fail (unclassified) grade, with marks lower than 40%.

The best responses were not limited to those candidates taking the examination in North America – these accounted for only three of the seven candidates who were awarded a merit or distinction grade.

The following candidate answered all five sections well with a good level of detail.

Finger Lakes

The Finger Lakes are a collection of glacially cut lakes that are in the north of New York State. Viticulture here is split between the production of table grapes and ~~juice~~ ^{juice} (the majority) and winemaking. The climate here is marginal for grapes as the continentality is so huge. Winter temperatures can often slide ~~well below~~ ~~to~~ to -20°C and as a result many producers felt it was impossible to grow V. vinifera. However hard wood species that have the warmest and most protected sites have been shown to be able to not only survive but also thrive. Key amongst these is Leshkev. This grows on the steep slate slopes and with the best aspect it is able to ripen perfectly and produce wines with a clear and penetrating acidity and creamy varietal fruit. Other varieties, principally white and aromatic are made as are significant volumes from both American and hybrid vines. It is an AVA.

Rutherford Ranch.

Rutherford ~~is~~ is an AVA in the larger AVA of the Napa Valley that is located ~~the~~ north of the San Pablo Bay, north of San Francisco.

The Napa Valley is split into sections that reflect the changes in temperature that are found on the valley floor from South to North.

The South of the valley is cooled by morning fogs and sea breezes whereas midway up the valley at Yountville there are bottlenecks making the two AVAs to the north Oakville and then Rutherford considerably warmer. This change in climatic conditions means that the fruit from Rutherford is riper and produces denser and often more alcoholic wines (especially due to the California sunburn for long time) when compared to the equally凉爽Stay keep further to the south. The Ranch is the best section to the west

side of Rutherford where well drained, stony, alluvial soils combine with an easterly exposure on a very slight slope to produce the best wines from this pretty exclusive and highly regarded AVA. The grape variety that has near complete dominance among the plantings here is Cabernet Sauvignon.

Willamette Valley.

Willamette Valley is a large and subdivided AVA that is found in the State of Oregon.

It is located on the west side of the mountain divide in the north of America and as such it has a ^{Mediterranean} ~~continent~~ climate with rainfall falling mostly in the winter which means that although it can be light it may often require irrigation during the growing season in order to maintain photosynthesis. Summer temperatures are warm and the overall level of continentality low. The most successful grape variety here is the early ripening Pinot Noir which benefits from the warmth, much more than many

areas within the California and the extended sunlight hours which come with the latitude. However the greatest challenge remains the autumn rainfall which can arrive when annual bloom and volume varies greatly from one year to the next and which can come later with rot and flavour dilution.

This means that vintage variation here is more important than many other regions in America.

The most successful sub-AVA is Dundee Hills and quality overall has been improved by the use of better Dijon clones and investment from outside even from Burgundy itself in the form of Domaine Drouhin.

Cascade Mountains.

There is a mountain chain that runs the length of the western half of North America. Its name changes along its length but in the N.W. it is called the Cascade Mountains.

These run through the states of Oregon and Washington and cut off maritime influences from reaching the interior. Therefore areas to the west such as Willamette Valley, Walla Walla etc have a low level of continentality and higher level of humidity in their climate as well as increased cloud cover. Summers are milder as are winters.

To the east of this range the climate has a very pronounced continentality with very hard (ice killing at times) winters and almost desert like levels (lack thereof) of precipitation. Here in areas such as Columbia Valley, Walla Walla, Yakima Valley, irrigation is vital as is the selection of grape varieties that can survive the winter and ripen in a relatively short but often very hot growing season.

Niagara Escarpment.

This is an area that is a gentle slope that runs south towards the shore of Lake Erie in Canada. The soils are very varied and range from limestone to gravels and as such many different grape varieties both red and white are grown successfully. The agricultural importance of the slope is due to the lake effect.

Firstly in the summer warm air rises up the slopes and air cooled by the lake is drawn in up the slope, cooling the vines and moderating the heat in the hot summers. This air circulation keeps the vines healthy and helps reduce fungal disease (vital for the success of the ice wine production line). Secondly in the winter the cold air is drawn across the slopes thus being cooled by the frigid water. In this case the vines are kept in a safe cocoon of snow and ice until the delayed budding until after the greatest risk of spring frost have passed.

The most famous wine that is made here is the ice wine from either Vidal or Riesling. Most vintages are more fragrant than in Germany due to a similar wine in made and these delicious sweet wines are ~~dry~~ ^{jutly} very famous.

Compare this with an example of a weak response, in this instance on the Finger Lakes. Whilst what this candidate writes is also correct, it is extremely brief and superficial in contrast to the previous script.

a,	FINGER LAKES IS ONE OF THE THREE VINE GROWING AREA OF NEW YORK STATE. HERE THE SITE CLIMATE IS LARGELY DETERMINED AROUND THE INDIVIDUAL LAKES.
1	THIS IS A PRODUCTION AREA OF AROMATIC WHITE VARIETIES WITH SUCH AS RIESLING PINOT GRIS GEWURZTRAMINER.

Describe the roles growers (33% weighting), négociants (33% weighting) and co-operatives (33% weighting) play in the production and distribution of Burgundy's wines.

Answers: 63

Passes: 26 (41%)

Poor results was a general feature of the January exam and this was no exception, with a very poor, "bottom-heavy" pass rate of 41%. This is really disappointing as this was a question on a topic that is fundamental to an understanding of the wines of Burgundy.

Candidates generally knew that négociants were important to the trading of Burgundy wines, but were often naive in their understanding of the role of co-operatives and generally simplistic in terms of growers. In fact, most answers went no further than stating that very few growers make their own wine, but sell grapes to négociants who produce and distribute the majority of wine, while co-operatives have very little importance. This is certainly true, but extremely simplistic. The following script is a good example of such a response:

⑥

Without the growers or ~~wine~~ ^{grapes} in Burgundy you would have no wine, so they must read the list with regard to importance.

Due to the Napoleonic laws of inheritance vineyard ownership in Burgundy is fragmented to say the least.

Monopole (single) ownership is not common.

Burgundy winemakers therefore tend to farm parcels of land within a vineyard which is jointly owned ~~for~~ by some other or several winemakers.

Once made the winemaker will sell his or her grapes or ~~the~~ wines to a negotiant.

There are over 400 negotiants in France & of that approximately 45 sell 75% of its wines.

As the negotiant sells to several clients he needs to be able to access as many growers as possible and acts as a broker or more commonly will buy the grapes from the producer and make the wine themselves.

As the size of vineyard plot on average in Burgundy is relatively small, grower producers are not common. It makes sense therefore to sell to a negotiant or be part of a co-operative.

A co-operative winery will make wines for their customers by sourcing the grapes individually from individual growers.

~~A manager on wine~~
The power of the co-operative is in the fact that they can produce large quantities of wine in one place for the market.

Modern co-operatives in Burgundy will work closely with growers to ensure that viticulture standards are kept & maintained to ensure the reliability of the crop and its consistency from each grower.

With a co-operative the grower is still part of the team.

~~When a grower sells to a negotiant his role ends once the grapes have been harvested~~

By buying grapes in bulk the co-operatives can produce & distribute wines on a much larger & cost effective basis as opposed to an individual producer.

The grower ~~or the~~ can concentrate on ensuring he is growing the best grapes possible & leave the negotiant or co-operative the job of making & distributing the wine.

The comments relating to co-operatives go no further than explaining what a co-operative is. There is very little at all to link this specifically to the role of co-operatives in Burgundy – the candidate could have been writing about any wine producing region. To achieve high marks in this section, candidates should have discussed issues such as the following:

- Co-operatives emerged in the 1930's
- They have very little importance in the Cote d'Or where négociants are "king"
- They are significant in "lesser" regions such as Mâcon, and also Chablis
- Approximately 25% of wine in Burgundy is vinified by co-operatives
- They are vital for many small growers who do not have the means to vinify their own wine.
- They are very important in the production of generic Beaujolais (and Crémant de Bourgogne)
- They are not generally associated with high quality by the "fine wine" consumer.
- BUT Some co-operatives have a reputation for producing wines of high quality eg La Chablisienne which produces approximately a third of Chablis' wines, or the co-operative at Buxy.
- They are important because they give the 'man in the street' the opportunity to buy Burgundy wines, even if they are of humble origins.
- They have the flexibility and volume to build brands e.g. Blason de Bourgogne.

There was very little evidence of this kind of commercial awareness in the majority of scripts.

Discuss the factors in the vineyard (60% weighting) and winery (40% weighting) that account for the range of styles and quality levels found in DOCG Chianti and its sub-zones.

Answers: 53

Passes: 26 (49%)

This should have been a straight forward question, but many candidates simply did not answer it as set, instead writing anything they knew about the region or simply describing a typical Chianti without specifically addressing the factors in the vineyard and winery that account for the range of styles and quality levels. A surprisingly large number wrote little or nothing about the factors in the winery and whilst most candidates had an awareness of the topography of the region and the grape varieties grown, very few made any real attempt to DISCUSS how they affected the style of the wine or accounted for the different quality levels. This is a common problem, with far too many candidates not appreciating the difference between the factual recall which forms the assessment for lower levels of WSET qualifications and the evaluation and analysis of these facts which takes the assessment to this higher level.

June 2011

Group A: Compulsory Question

Describe the DOCG wines of Brunello di Montalcino Riserva, Recioto della Valpolicella and Dogliani. Discuss how factors in the vineyard and winery account for the style and quality of these wines. (Each region carries equal weighting)

Answers: 381

Passes: 267 (70%)

The compulsory question leaves nowhere for weak candidates to hide and this explains why more of those who failed this question, did so with a fail (unclassified) grade rather than a fail grade. Nevertheless, this was a good result for a compulsory question with a fairly equal split between pass and merit grades. Amongst the poorer scripts there were some very elemental errors in terms of the process of red winemaking, with candidates often stating that red grapes were pressed before fermentation, or were fermented in barrel, or that fermentation was stopped with SO₂, and similar illogical processes. Comments were also surprisingly weak on Recioto and knowledge of Gavi was also clearly lacking.

As always with this style of question, candidates were able to describe the wines well, but far too many were unable to then explain how factors in the vineyard and winery accounted for this style. There is certainly a technique to answering questions well. In the first instance, it is important to spend some time thinking about what the question is actually asking before writing anything, also using this time to decide how to approach the question. There are always key words that should determine both the structure and content of any response. In this case, there are two instructions – “describe” and “discuss”, and there are also a number of key words – the three named wines, and the words “vineyard”, “winery”, “style” and “quality”. Unless candidates write about all of these, they will not be answering the question as set. Candidates also often fail to appreciate what instructions such as “discuss” actually mean. Statements of fact, with no explanation will suffice. Candidates need to show that they understand the significance of the facts and can analyse “cause and effect”, but this is a skill too few of them have learnt. We always recommend that candidates map out a short “plan” before answering any question, yet there is clearly reluctance on their part to do this. The “key words” identified above would form the basis of the “plan”, and candidates should aim to jot down a few facts under each of these headings that would then be expanded on in the answer itself. For example in the case of the Recioto della Valpolicella, the following would appear under the heading “vineyard” – grape variety, climate, altitude, soil, aspect, harvesting. Under “winery”, the candidate would probably note “drying of grapes”, “fermentation”, “use of oak”. This is the “prompt” that these issues need to be discussed at length in terms of what they contribute to the wine in respect of “style” and “quality”. The essay plan does not need to take long to do – five minutes is plenty of time, but it is vital because it gives a firm ground on which to base the answer and makes sure all aspects of the question are addressed.

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

Give an account of the development of the Argentinean wine industry from its creation through to modern times (70% weighting). What are the prospects for the next 25 years? (30% weighting)
(An essay format is COMPULSORY for this question)

Answers: 246

Passes: 132 (54%)

With the compulsory essay question, it is not just a case of getting the facts across - structure is also important. With this particular question it was also important to read the question carefully. There were two distinct parts, the first very factual and the second far more speculative. Many candidates failed to address the first part of the question as set, giving an account of the "current" Argentinean industry rather than the "development from creation to modern times". Some scripts sat half way between the two – mentioning very briefly early settlers and then missing out much of the important development in the mid twentieth century, and going straight to the last 20 years or so.

To answer the second part of the question well, candidates needed a good understanding of the current wine industry in Argentina, and also commercial awareness of global trends and developments. This section required speculation, original thought and analysis of data rather than simply repeating "facts" from the study notes.

The following script is a good example of a candidate who has not answered the question as set and was awarded a fail grade as a result. This candidate has written in very general terms about improvements to viticulture and winemaking rather than documenting the development of the industry from the early days of its development in the Spanish colonial period in the sixteenth century.

There has been great changes in the Argentinean wine industry especially recently & it is undoubtedly not finished. Argentina used to be a traditional wine-making country a nowadays it is more and more turning to modernity. Viticulture, vinification & trade organisation are in permanent evolution & have greatly evolved over the past decades.

In the vineyard, methods used to be very traditional in Argentina: high training in Pergola, low to medium density, flood irrigation using the snowmelt of the Andes, hand harvesting... In the past years especially since the beginning of the 21th century techniques of viticulture changed & a more modern approach is gaining ground: new plantings with higher density & wire-training system, drip irrigation, grafting, more mechanisation (even if hand harvesting is still common)...

In the winery, identical evolution can be observed: use of modern equipments, stainless steel thermo-regulated vats, new oak... when it used to be mainly traditional old casks, less hygiene & temperature control - Flying winemakers convinced of the potential of the country helped big wineries in their wine-making methods to achieve a more international style - Matching sites with grapes has also been a very important evolution & helped achieving the best quality of production: high altitude sites & cooling effect for Torrontés, aromatic & fresher grape varieties produced in the Southern regions, special sites & soil types researchs helped identifying the ideal condition for

quality wines production.

The trade organisation has also seen many important changes. Big wineries with high investments possibility dominates the wine industry; Peñaflor, Catena Zapata...

Flying winemakers & foreign investors are also gaining ground: Michel Rolland, The Lurton's, Pernod Ricard, LVHT Group...

Great efforts & changes can be observed & the Argentinean wine industry is undoubtedly more mature. Nevertheless, the evolution is only beginning & the prospects are probably still of important evolutions in the next 25 years.

Hand harvesting is still often practised & mechanisation will undoubtedly gain ground. Traditional grapes are still widely grown (Bonarda...) & new grapes experimentation (Shiraz, Grenache...) will probably lead to new style of wine's production.

A clearer and more defined classification system will probably be adopted (similar to Chile?) with rules for labelling & defined stated areas.

The promising vineyards in the Southern regions of the country can also lead to new styles of wine produced & new varieties emerging (Pinot-Noir, Sauvignon...).

Argentina's wine industry's future is still full of hopes & expectations & will surely surprise us.

the development possibilities are still enormous & tomorrow will probably be the time for maturity.

In contrast, good candidates pointed out that it was in the 16th century that vineyards were first established near the Andes in Mendoza and San Juan during the Spanish colonial period. They explained how these early colonizers were probably responsible for introducing the Criolla and Cereza varieties (which still account for large areas of plantings to this day). They also wrote that it was during this early period that the pioneering work with dams and flood irrigation took place that makes viticulture possible to this day in Argentina's arid, desert conditions. They followed this with reference to the European settlers that came from countries such as Italy, Spain, France and Switzerland introducing grape varieties such as Bonarda, Barbera, Tempranillo, Torrontes and of course, Malbec, explaining that it was during this period that vineyard areas expanded substantially.

The next important historical development examiners were expecting candidates to cover related to the issue of communications. This was in 1885 when the railway link between Mendoza and Buenos Aires was instrumental in opening up the market for Argentina's wines not only in the domestic market, but also internationally. It was also at the turn of the 20th century that the new found wealth of Argentina fuelled expansion of wine production for the domestic market.

The next key period in the development of the Argentinean wine industry was the mid 20th century which was a time of political and economic upheaval that checked investment and slowed progress on export markets. Good candidates cited this as a period of hyper-inflation, excessive bureaucracy, corruption and social unrest. They explained that although domestic consumption continued to grow, all the problems identified restricted the emergence of a "quality wine sector". The best candidates pointed out that it was in 1977 that vineyard areas reached their peak in terms of production, but importantly also explained that most of the wine being produced from them was of very basic quality.

These better candidates then moved on to the more recent past – i.e. the "modern times" as referenced in the question, which many of them categorised as the last thirty years. They explained how domestic consumption has fallen since the 1970's (when Argentina had the world's third highest per capita wine consumption), they described how producers started to focus on quality rather than quantity from the late 1980's and how by 2000, the area under vine had shrunk from its "high" of the mid 1970's. They wrote about the growth on export markets, with really good candidates pointing out that the peso crisis in 2001 showed that confidence in Argentina's economy was still fragile.

Very few candidates covered this development as thoroughly as this, despite the weighting of the question (70%) giving a very strong indication that this needed to be extensive.

In relation to South Africa, write a paragraph on FIVE of the following:

- a) WOSA
- b) Climate
- c) Groot Constantia
- d) Durbanville
- e) Syrah/Shiraz
- f) Black Economic Empowerment.

Answers: 126

Passes: 42 (33%)

With a maximum mark of 80%, there were clearly some good candidates who answered this question, but with 40% of candidates falling into the fail (unclassified) grade band this was inevitably chosen by a large percentage of the weaker candidates and the results reflect this.

There were two sections that caused extremely low marks, and in many instances no marks at all. WOSA was often mistaken for the wine of origin scheme and candidates who made this error gained no marks for this section. Also, Black Economic Empowerment was frequently confused with the principles of "fairtrade" which is not the same thing. These candidates also achieved very low marks (if any) in this section. Responses on some of the other sections were also too vague, for example "climate" and "Syrah/Shiraz". Both of these needed to relate specifically to wine production in South Africa, so any discussion of climate should have included reference to unique features such as the Benguela current and the "Cape Doctor" and the impact that these have on viticulture, as well as other significant climatic aspects. In the section on "Syrah/Shiraz", whilst candidates were able to write about the grape in broad terms, not enough of them focussed on the use of this variety in South Africa. The best responses described the increased success with the variety, discussed how it suits the climate and granite soils and explained where it performs best, giving examples of key producers. They also showed that they understood the significance of both synonyms in the question, and related this to the two very different styles of wine produced in South Africa from this variety.

The following script is one of those who confused WOSA with Wine of Origin and lost out on 20 marks as a result. Other sections are good, with minor errors such as confusing the Benguela Current with the Humboldt Current, and the overall result was that this candidate narrowly missed out on a merit grade.

In relation to South Africa, write a paragraph on FIVE of the following:

a) WOSA.

Wine of origin South Africa is the quality designation set up for wines from this country in 1978. The wine of origin system is based on region, and, like other New World appellation systems, is not necessarily a guarantee of quality as it does not put restrictions on varieties, yields, production methods or styles made. It does mean that 85% of the wine in the bottle must come from the stated vintage and variety, and 100% from the stated area. The wine of origin system is split up into estates, districts, wards and regions which increase in size, but do not necessarily fit into one another. Areas can be bumped up from districts to wards and so on, as they expand. This happened recently with Walker Bay in the Coastal Region.

b) Climate

The climate in the wine-growing areas of South Africa is roughly Mediterranean, with damp, cool winters and warm, dry summers. In addition to this the African sun does have an effect. Inland, the country gets distinctly hotter as the climate becomes more obviously continental. Breede River Valley needs constant irrigation and can cultivate yields of up to 350 hl/ha in its fertile alluvial

plains. The coastal areas are moderated by the effects of the Humboldt current and the ~~the~~ ocean, and the cooling 'Cape Doctor' breeze that comes up from the Antarctic. This allows good ventilation and healthy fruit, and creates some genuinely 'cool climate' regions such as Elim, ~~Top~~ Elgin and Walker Bay that produce early ripening varieties such as Riesling, Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay and even ~~temperamental~~ Pinot Noir successfully. Elevated sites also get the benefit of this cooling effect, such as Tulbagh, which is inland but up in the Helderberg mountains.

c) Groot Constantia

Groot Constantia is a very old producer based in the Constantia region outside Cape Town. This historic region has water on two sides which moderates the heat and allows cool, crisp varieties to be made. The traditional speciality of the region is a Muscat Blanc à Petits Grains dessert wine - vin de Constance. The wine has been produced since the time of Queen Victoria, and is made by drying the muscat grapes on straw and fermenting the dried results. Groot Constantia also produce a Sauvignon Blanc (high acidity, typical green capsicum and floral aromas), Chardonnay (crisp, delicate, medium bodied) and of course Chenin Blanc.

d) Durbanville

Durbanville is a ~~region~~^(part) just to the north of Cape Town, in the Tygerberg ^{district} region. It is situated on the coast and benefits from the cooling influences and higher rainfall. As a fairly new region, Durbanville is still developing its potential, ~~but~~ it has a diverse range of soils - shale

and Table Mountain sandstone on the slopes, with some clay and heavier soil in the valley. Its vineyards are SE facing, and the cool breezes allow crisp Sauvignon Blanc and Pinot Noir to be produced there.

e) Syrah/Shiraz

The percentage of red grape plantings in South Africa has risen from 18% in 1990 to 40% in the mid-2000s.

The popularity of red varieties is spread between the Bordeaux reds, Pinotage and Syrah/Shiraz. Thanks to the range of mesoclimates and soil types in South Africa, ~~both~~^{two} two styles of this Rhone variety can be made successfully, and the South African winemakers have championed ~~the~~ the separate labelling of the two styles.

'Syrah' is a cool climate style, made in the image of a red from the Northern Rhone Valley. These wines are medium bodied with high-ish acidity, firm tannins and lots of structure, with blackberry fruit and distinctive black pepper on the nose. Made in cooler regions such as Walker Bay. 'Shiraz' is closer to the Barossa Valley model: full bodied with high acidity, high alcohol, soft smooth tannins and rich damson and plum characters. More likely to be made in a warmer region such as Paarl, and given treatment in new oak barrels.

The retail prices of Bordeaux Rouge and Cru Classé Haut-Médoc are very different. Discuss the differences in production (50% weighting) and marketing (50% weighting) that are responsible for this.

Answers: 343

Passes: 220 (64%)

This was the 3rd most popular question by a narrow margin, and the choice of 90% of the candidates sitting the exam in June. As with all seven questions in the June exam, good scripts were offset by very low marks at the other end of the scale – in this case from the lowest mark of 6% to the highest at 87%. Unfortunately, those achieving these very low marks in each question are often a number of candidates performing badly across the board rather than individual candidates who have a weakness in one subject only.

In general, candidates were better at describing the production of the wines than they were at discussing marketing, which required a good understanding of the marketplace for these wines. Responses were also considerably weaker on the Bordeaux Rouge, where observations tended to be simplistic and naïve.

The following candidate achieved a borderline merit grade. It is clear that they have sound knowledge of the Bordeaux region, but like many, it was their handling of the marketing aspect of the question that let them down. (This script has been retyped as the original is in pencil and did not scan clearly in its original format.)

"Cru Classe Haut Medoc (CCHM) and Bordeaux Rouge (BR) prices are very different despite proximity. CCHM on the left bank of the Gironde river occupies the pantheon of wine-making in its very exclusive sub-region of Bordeaux, while BR comes under the "and everything else" category.

The high prices achieved by CCHM, as evidenced once again by the en primeur prices expected for the 2010 vintage after the expensive 2009, 2005 and 2000 excellent crops, demonstrate that people are prepared to pay exorbitant prices for the very best.

The quality of CCHM is based initially on the physical environment of the region. It has a moderate maritime climate with even rainfall throughout the year. The vines are planted on well-drained gravel soils with clay and limestone.

Vines are densely planted and yields are low. Grapes are machine harvested but the quality of the grapes, ripeness and concentration are carefully selected.

The wines of generic BR are sourced from all regions, predominately Entre Deux Mers where the climate is continental – rainfall in winter and warm summers. The soils are mainly clay and alluvial and do not offer the nutrients and complexity of the corresponding soils in the CCHM.

Vines in BR are also densely planted but yields are much higher, with less discerning selection of grapes. Grapes are harvested and fermented simply and matured with only moderate oak contact, usually large barriques and old oak.

CCHM wines benefit from the highest quality equipment utilized for production and modern techniques such as reverse osmosis to concentrate the flavours. Maturation is in brand new, expensive, French oak and matured for 24 months before bottling. The makers of CCHM ensure only the highest quality grapes are used. During the blending process, they can also select from the different parcels of blended wine to create the finest possible and delegating what is to them inferior blends and parcels. These "inferior" blends often go into making their "second" wine. BR does not have this choice available to it. What is grown is fermented, matured and produced.

All prices are relative, and the attainment of very high prices that CCHM wines achieve is as much, if not more, to do with marketing than the quality of the wine in the bottle. Names such as Chateau Latour, Lafitte, Margaux and many others are in the luxury brand business as much as the wine business.

While quality is there, it is the image that the CCHM wines create that has developed that desirability factor leading to high prices. High demand for a limited perceived luxury product, leads to very high prices. As the world develops, and more people improve their economic situation, as evidenced by the growth of the middle-classes in China, the bidding for those luxury brands gets higher.

BR wines have, in the past, benefitted from the reputation of all French wines around the world. Unfortunately, as the world embraces more countries making more wine of good to excellent quality at reasonable prices, BR suffers. And it suffers in comparison to CCHM wines and the rest of the world which, given simple supply and demand, keeps prices at a much lower level.

BR cannot match the marketing allure of the CCHM wines and thus suffers by comparison."

Candidates with sound commercial knowledge of the market for Bordeaux wines were considerably more thorough in respect of the marketing of these two wines. They made the point that most Bordeaux Rouge is sold through multiple retailers, but also wrote that these retailers use very aggressive discounting. This results in very slim margins for producers, leaving little or no money for advertising with most relying on generic marketing by the CIVB. Those who brought a commercial strength to their response also referred to the current oversupply and decline in demand which is forcing ex-cellars prices down for this category of wine, with some candidates taking this further by making the point that selling prices of many of these generic wines are currently lower than the actual production costs. When it came to the Cru Classé wine, they started out by explaining that as demand for these wines outstrips supply, this allows producers, and subsequently retailers, to set prices as high as the market can stand. The better candidates also linked this to the effect of limiting supply by only using part of the annual production in the main label wine, with the rest going

towards the second label. Many referred to the recent expansion of Asian markets exerting further upward pressure on prices and constraints on supply as demand from these markets is for these “classic” prestige wines. Some candidates also pointed out that a strong secondary market for these wines means that there are more links in the supply chain, with each adding a profit margin which impacts on the final retail price. Some candidates also brought the issue of “en primeur” sales into the discussion at this point, explaining how hype and critical acclaim at the press tastings that are instrumental in setting the prices for these wines can also further increase the imbalance of supply and demand and force prices up. Even the most basic responses should have known that these estates have huge marketing budgets with PR taking a significant slice of this, with the entertaining of important foreign clients being “big business”. Yet many candidates did not even mention the concept of PR or marketing, let alone discuss it in any depth.

With respect to still wine production, write a paragraph on FIVE of the following:

- a) Israel
- b) Turkey
- c) Bulgaria
- d) Lebanon
- e) Romania
- f) Morocco.

Answers: 83

Passes: 46 (55%)

It was no surprise that this was the least favourite question on the paper, only answered by 2% of the 381 candidates sitting in June. 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 88%) and those who clearly did not have a clue (a bottom mark of 10%), with the latter far more prevalent than the former, with 24% of candidates gaining the lowest grade – fail (unclassified). The danger of the five part paragraph style question is that the final mark is affected if the candidate is unable to answer all five sections or if more than one section is weak. With all five parts carrying equal weighting, it only takes two weak sections for the candidate to be at a real disadvantage and likely to fail. Whilst some candidates answered all six sections, a far more common problem was those who only answered two or three sections rather than five. The only way to score high marks in these five part questions is to make sure responses are packed with facts, rather than generalisations.

On the whole, Lebanon was answered well, but there was considerable confusion between Bulgaria, Romania and Hungary. The study notes contain a vast amount of information about these three regions and it should have been a problem deciding what to leave out rather than what to include.

The following two scripts illustrate the difference between a failure and a distinction. These two candidates have both answered the same sections. The failure is largely correct in as far as it goes, but is extremely brief and totally lacking in any detail – it does not mention a single region in any of the five sections and the only grape varieties mentioned are Chardonnay and Cabernet Sauvignon in respect of Israel. In contrast, the other script is extensive, highlights the differences between the regions and shows very good knowledge of this section of the syllabus.

Fail grade script

Israel - A country with a tremendous history of winemaking. Known today for producing modern style wines from international varieties like Chardonnay and Cabernet Sauvignon. Land disputes with Palestinians and the desert-like climate are just some of the challenges for Israel.

Bulgaria - like Israel a country which is becoming known for producing varietal wines from the big international grape varieties. In recent years a lot of investment has been made to build modern wineries and update viticultural practices. The wines are still not widely available in the West but are directed to traditional markets in Russia and other former Soviet states.

Lebanon - A country well known for one producer - Chateau Musar, it, like Israel has a long tradition of winemaking but is not widely represented in the International market. The climate is well suited to grape growing when water is available, especially in the mountainous regions.

Romania and several other states like Georgia are thought to be the origins of the Vitis vinifera grape.

Like Bulgaria, Romanian ^{wine} is far better known in Russia than in the west. Primarily known for producing cheap red wine - recent investments and expansion of high-quality winemaking practices has made it possible to produce quality marketable wines here.

Morocco. — Along with Algeria, Morocco was once an ^{important} source of bulk wines to feed the demand from France. Now, that demand has slumped and is met primarily by vineyards/producers in the Languedoc. The hot Mediterranean coast of Morocco provided an excellent locate for the easy ripening of large q'tys of grapes whenever water is available. Since the crash in demand in the last 30 years Morocco's production has plummeted especially, as a muslim country domestic demand has not picked up the slack.

Distinction grade script

(a) Israel —

Israel is a relatively small country in the Mediterranean. Geopolitical issues have made growth in the wine industry difficult, but grapes are grown both for religious and commercial purposes in Israel. The main vineyards tend to be planted at altitude (in order to minimise the influence of heat), especially in the Galilee, Heights and Sea of Galilee areas. White grape varieties including Riesling and the hybrid ~~Zinfandel~~ Gewürztraminer Riesling tend to be popular. For vineyards to be designated kosher, the ~~wine~~ fields must be left fallow for one year in every seven and the vines blessed by a Rabbi. Much of the wine produced is for domestic consumption. Carmel is a major player in the industry; some wines from the Galilee Heights (Winery) are available in the UK.

(c) Bulgaria —

Bulgaria was a major player in the ~~WW~~ global wine industry, responsible for significant exports particularly of Cabernet Sauvignon until the end of the Communist era. Many of the vineyards were left to fall into a state of disrepair and there were many issues relating to the return of land to original owners. Some of these factors are still being resolved today. In addition, the age of many of Bulgaria's wines is quite old,

implying the need for further investment.

Despite these factors, Bulgarian wine climate is continental, but moderated by the presence of the Black Sea to the east. Although the country is divided into several wine-making areas, the EU recognises only the Danubian Plain area to the north and the Thracian Lowlands to the south.

In addition to international varieties (especially Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot), local varieties such as Mavrud (some similarities with Nebbiolo) + Melnik are grown.

(d) Lebanon —

A French presence in Lebanon led to the development of the Lebanese wine industry. As with Israel, geopolitical factors place some constraints on its growth. Conditions are attractive, with the country offering a Mediterranean climate + grapes typically being grown at altitude, especially in the Bekka Valley.

Given this legacy, a wide variety of French grapes from Bordeaux (esp Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot), the Rhône (Syrah, Grenache) and the south (Cinsaut, Carignan) are grown. In addition, white varieties are also present.

Much of the profile of the region stems from Château Musar, owned by Serge Hochar, and making wine for over 30 years. The wines are concentrated with pronounced aromas + volatile acidity. Château Musar retails in the UK off-trade for a £48 / \$110.

Other producers include Château Kefraya +

Château Ksara. The industry is also growing in profile and the country had its own stand at the London International Wine Fair in May for the first time.

② Romania –

Romania has the fifth largest area (after Spain, France, Italy, Portugal) under wine in Europe, with over 470,000 hectares. The climate in Romania is continental but with moderating influences from the Black Sea to the north.

The major wine producing area is Dealul Mare ('Big Hill'). Other areas include Moldova. International varieties of grapes are typically favoured including Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc and Pinot Noir among whites; and Cabernet Sauvignon & Merlot among reds. The most notably notable local variety is a white grape called Feteasca.

Romania is also known for a local wine called Cobnici which is produced in the Moldova area and is sweet in nature.

The majority of ~~the~~ Romanian wine is for lower-end, mass-market exports.

③ Morocco –

Among the north African countries, Morocco has the best potential to develop quality wines. Although the climate is warm/

Lat at 32° latitude roughly, Morocco benefits from the moderating factors of the Atlantic to the west and the Atlas Mountains. The country follows a French AC-regulation style system with 14 designated wine-growing areas, the best being in the Tidjanes Mountains.

Grape varieties (especially Carignan, Grenache, and some Semillon) reflect a French legacy, as do wine-making practices. The big challenge for the country is to manage to grow its wine industry against a Muslim (hence anti-alcohol) administration / culture. Most wine is for local (ie tourist) consumption or for export to Spain / France.

Describe the method of production and resulting style of wine for each of the following:

- a) Rheingau Riesling Beerenauslese
- b) Clare Valley Riesling
- c) Niagara Peninsula Riesling Icewine.

Answers: 358

Passes: 153 (43%)

This was a surprisingly poor result for what appeared to be a straight-forward question, and like many of the questions on this paper, contained some extremely good responses along with some truly atrocious ones. This was clearly a question that candidates felt they could answer well as it was the most popular question on the paper (along with question 7). However, as the low pass rate shows, many of those answering this failed to meet the standard required for a pass grade. In far too many instances, responses were superficial and very narrow in terms of scope for each wine – for example, in the case of the Beerenauslese, many only wrote about botrytis in the vineyard without considering the implications of this in the winery as well. Even more surprising was the lack of detail in terms of the icewine where many candidates went no further than mentioning the use of frozen grapes. Far too many scripts were presented in bullet point format. It is important that candidates understand that this is not acceptable in a qualification of this level. It is impossible to discuss this, or any

other question, in sufficient detail in this format, which does little more than make statements of fact with no evidence of understanding of the significance or implications of these facts.

It is also important to read questions carefully, and think about what is being asked, and this was particularly so in the case of this question. The exact wording is "describe the method of production" The key word here is METHOD. It did not ask candidates to "describe the production of the wines". There is a subtle difference between these two options and the majority of candidates failed to appreciate this. To answer this properly candidates needed to explain how these wines are made. This meant the examiner was not interested in information relating to the region such as climate, topography etc, which is what far too many candidates concentrated on. Those who gave little more than this information invariably failed, whilst it was those candidates who focussed on the specifics of grape growing and winemaking who achieved pass grades or higher.

<i>From the point of view of the consumer, what are the strengths (50% weighting) and weaknesses (50% weighting) of the wines of Alsace?</i>	
Answers: 359	Passes: 200 (56%)

This was one of the most popular questions on the paper, along with question 6, - answered by 94% of candidates sitting the exam in June. However, unlike the previous question, responses were better on the whole, although as in all the questions, there were some extremely weak scripts as well.

There were inevitably candidates who failed to read the question carefully enough and wrote about strengths and weaknesses of these wines in general terms, or from the point of view of the producer, rather than the consumer.

Many candidates placed a disproportionate emphasis on the problems associated with the Grand Cru system, which is simply not an issue for the vast majority of consumers. There were far more relevant weaknesses that were overlooked in favour of this, such as the following:

- Wine style – being very distinctive, you either love it or hate it.
- The wines are relatively unknown and are misunderstood by many consumers who struggle to appreciate the "uniqueness" of Gewurztraminer for example.
- There is no widely-known Alsace "style" due to the range of wines/grapes compared to other French regions such as Bordeaux, Rhône etc.
- Most producers don't take red wine production very seriously, so there is a lack of red wine "champions" in the region which means they miss out on this segment of the market as consumers tend to look elsewhere for red wines. In addition, many of the reds that are produced are very disappointing in terms of quality.

- The better quality wines can be too characterful for mass market appeal.
- The lower level wines can be bland, with lots of mediocre wines produced although largely consumed on the domestic market.
- They don't grow many of the popular "international" varieties such as Cabernet Sauvignon / Chardonnay / Merlot etc which are still popular with the majority of consumers.
- They grow many unfashionable or unknown varieties such as Sylvaner, Pinot Blanc, dry Muscat etc.
- The use of Germanic flute style bottles and Germanic labels can put some consumers off.
- Labels can be overly decorated with medals or "badges" which can confuse the consumer.
- They have been slow to embrace alternative closures, even though many of the wines are ideally suited to screw cap.
- Levels of sweetness in the wines can be very variable, so the consumer does not always know what to expect, apart from those wines labelled as VT or SGN, (although the kind of consumer prepared to pay premium prices for these wines is likely to already understand the significance of these terms).
- Availability of the wines is still relatively limited (due to the size of the region), so listings are not widespread.
- Generic marketing is not very prominent (for example compared to the Rhône), so it is not easy to get the message across to consumers.
- Pricing of entry level wines tends to be higher than wines of similar quality from most other French regions, discouraging experimentation amongst consumers.

This is obviously not a definitive list, but just the most obvious points that candidates should have considered, however very few responses were as wide reaching as this.

The following candidate achieved a fail (unclassified) grade. The whole of the first page is superfluous and irrelevant from the point of view of the question as set. It is not until the last sentence on this page that the candidate actually gets to the question, but of course by this stage they have left themselves very little time to answer it and the amount of relevant information is very sparse as a result.

In Alsace wines are normally sold as ~~auxiliary wine~~ wine. For consumers that is clear, but for the producer not always that easy.

The alsace area is in the north-east of France. It is a long area north-south on the east side of the Vosges mountains. It is existed because of pushing up land thousands of years ago by eruption of the earth under the sea.

For this the area is very different in soils and ~~climate~~ microclimates. Calcareous because of the fossils of the sea but also alluvial and with some limestone and clay. Therefore it is very important to choose the right grape/wine for the right site. That is somewhat the basis of the law for the alsace wines. The alsace wines are only made from four noble grapes and only grown on specified sites.

~~But the case~~ Now several producers believe they make a great wine of e.g. Silvanergrape on a Grand Cru site and so they cannot sell it a grand cru although it is better than the Riesling wine from that ~~site~~ side.

One of those is Marcel Deiss, who believes in grapes all grown together is better and he succeeded in his work → laws are changed and still goes on.

But now for the consumer: a lot of wine used to be sold as cheap, easy-drinking wine in

example is "Eederal Suisse", made from several grapes. For a lot of consumers this is still their favorite wine. ~~but~~ It is good that Alsace set this as a kind of "Brand": consumers know what they buy. ↗ In any case: What type of wine. Also when the grape is mentioned on the label it is obvious what you can expect. That ~~is~~ is ~~be~~ the strength of Alsace for the consumer. Also the wines are not too expensive, except for the "grand crus".

A weakness can be the fact that by global warming, the wines became too sweet and dull. ↗ Also is a fact that the "New World" and recently the Langue d'Oc area (Vins de pays d'Oc) sell a lot of varietal wines so are competitive with Alsace. Consumers can have more choice in the style of wine they like.

Now, with the new laws, it has not become more ~~obvious~~ ^{easy} for the consumer to know what is in the bottle. the consumer must know now the names of the grand cru sites if the varietal is not mentioned.

In contrast, the following script immediately gets to grips with the question and makes a number of valid points, both in terms of strengths and weaknesses, although the style of writing is rather simplistic.

⑦ From the point of view of the consumer, Alsace has many strengths but some weaknesses that perhaps make it one of the wines of today that is greatly appreciated by many, but misunderstood as well.

- Strengths:

① Labelling style of Alsatian Wines: For the most part, Alsatian wines are labelled by their variety, and this makes consumers feel comfortable. Many European wines use only their region of origin, and consumers must know and memorize what grows where in the world. Varieties on the label make it easier for some consumers to know what they are buying. Quality is another positive for labeling, though a bit more subtle – there are not many different tiers of quality in Alsace legally as there are in other regions. Alsace AOC and Alsace Grand Cru AOC make it easier, in some ways, for customers to understand what they are buying.

② The range of grapes grown in Alsace: Pinot Gris, Pinot Blanc, Riesling, Muscat, Gewürztraminer, and Pinot Noir all thrive in Alsace. The consumer has a lot to choose from in terms of grapes (though some might say the "style" is all similar – more on that in weaknesses).

③ Range of styles in Alsace: whether the consumer wants a bone dry, lighter style, a bone dry concentrated style, a sweet style, or a very sweet style, Alsace has a lot to offer. There are everyday, off-dry blends like Edelzwicker that can be inexpensive, or there are moderately priced

Varietal wines like Pinot Gris, or Gewürztraminer that, depending on the producer, can be sweeter or drier. There are premium, top quality Vendages Tardives that are late harvested and delicious, as well as Selection Grains Nobles that are sure to be sweet and stand as one of the world's best examples of botrytis-affected wines.

- Weaknesses:

- ① As nice: Determining whether a wine will be sweet or dry: As nice as it is for producers to make sweeter or drier styles, it's not easy to tell even year by year with the same producer what exactly the style will be. While most Alsatian wines tend on the dry side for table wines, there are producers (Reiss for example) who range and tend sweet. This can make decisions hard for the customer, as they really have to be familiar with the wine or the producer to be sure of style.
- ② Affordability: Many of the great Alsatian wines that will make consumers love Alsace are pricey. Zind-Humbrecht wines start at around \$20 (dollar) and only go up. Some of the basic Alsace AC wine is lower quality, and consumers might feel that they get more for their money elsewhere in the world. The styles in Alsace ~~are quite~~ can be costly to produce, and many won't spend money on a sweet wine like they would on a high-end red (in the US, at least). Many consumers don't understand how expensive it is to hand-harvest on steep slopes ^{or}, wait for wines to be affected by botrytis.

- (3) Lack of understanding about the region or style: Many consumers don't understand the value of getting a higher end, botrytis affected sweet Alsatian wine age, nor do they "get" Alsace as a region. With its German influence (and sometimes government), many might associate it or its wines with Germany, and for some consumers who still associate Germany with only sweet wines, this can be a bad thing. Additionally, Alsace Pinot Noirs from Alsace are not big and heavy by any means, and some consumers either don't understand that and are disappointed, or forget about Alsace all together when it comes to red wines because they associate it only with whites.
- (4) A language barrier when it comes to vineyard-name Alsace in particular Alsacian Grand Crus: Some consumers are intimidated by languages they don't understand. Though varietally labelled, vineyard-named Grand Crus like "Sporen" or "Steinkort", as well as village names like "Guebwiller" or "Turckheim" can seem intimidating to new consumers.

Overall, Alsace has a lot to offer. With more consumer education, perhaps the strong points of Alsace, easy labelling, and delicious, wines will outweigh the negatives, and more will enjoy!

Unit 4, Spirits of the World

The examination for Units 4, 5 and 6 demands 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 candidates to pass the paper as a whole with good responses in two sections even if they are weak in a third, 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 evidence to suggest that some candidates do not add water to their samples when assessing them. This is foolish, as they inevitably “blast” their tastebuds to the point that they are unable to assess the samples properly.

The examination for Unit 4 was run on three separate occasions in the academic year 2010/11, in November, March and June. The overall pass rate for the unit as a whole for all these dates combined was 63%

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

November 2010

Question 1 – Courvoisier VSOP Cognac, Three Barrels VSOP Cognac, Gran Control de Guarda Pisco	
Answers: 225	Passes: 116 (52%)

Results for this question were rather disappointing. A number of candidates lost marks because they did not read the question carefully enough and missed the wording that specified all three spirits were “made from the same raw material”. This meant they could not possibly be “Cognac, Whisky and Tequila” as one candidate proposed or two Cognacs and a rum as identified by another.

In addition, many candidates were confused by the Pisco, and being unable to identify this, resorted to guesswork, often deciding it was rum, whiskey or Tequila and then found they had to make the other two spirits fit this category as well, which led to inaccurate tasting notes for all three samples. It would have been far better to base

any decision on the easier spirits (the Cognacs) thereby arriving at the logical conclusion that the third sample also had to be derived from grapes, which would have narrowed the field down considerably. This is what better candidates did, even if some of them ultimately identified the Pisco as Grappa which was by no means illogical and lost them very few marks.

The concluding sections of this question focussed on the issue of quality, in the hope that candidates would be able to recognize the difference in quality between the two Cognacs specifically, and also asked about the maturation process.

It is worth pointing out that there are still a large number of candidates using the wrong terminology to assess spirits and this is losing them unnecessary marks. The following candidate uses the correct terms and has given good descriptions of all three samples, despite concluding that the Pisco was Tequila. This was actually illogical based on the description given, since they identified none of the usual characteristics associated with Tequila, instead picking up the floral, aromatic notes that this spirit did have. The accuracy of their description worked in their favour however, as they gained far more marks for this than the one mark they lost for identifying the country of origin as Mexico, and they even managed to get some marks in the concluding sections as well.

SPIRIT No 1

Appearance: (3 marks)

bright, clear, medium intensity of amber color, legs observed

Nose: (7 marks)

clean, medium minu intensity, matured spirit

Note of orange peel, caramel, honey, peach, yellow flower, floral note, and some hazelnut.

After adding water, no significant change.

Palate: (10 marks)

dry, ~~warm~~ integrated alcohol, medium body, medium intensity, flavor &

Note of orange peel, honey, peach, almond, citrus, some hazelnut and yellow flower, floral.

Balance and clean finish. ~~not~~ not enough concentration, medium length.

Country of origin: (1 mark)

France

Assessment of quality: (2 marks)

Acceptable VSOP ~~cognac~~ Cognac. Concentration was not enough; but with complexity and well integration of alcohol. Length was long enough.

Comment briefly on the maturation of this spirit: (2 marks)

Mature in ~~oak~~ ~~case~~ ~~400-600~~ ^{of} limousin case, ~~oak~~ for ~~a~~ 4 years.

SPIRIT No 2

Appearance: (3 marks)

bright, clear, medium intensity of amber color, legs observed.

Nose: (7 marks)

clean, medium intensity, ^{short ageing} ~~not aged~~ spirit

Note of ~~peach~~ perfume, yellow flower, floral, orange peel, honey, some hazelnut.

After adding water, ~~gave~~ no significant change.

Palate: (10 marks)

dry, integrated alcohol, medium body, medium flavor of intensity,

Note of floral, yellow flower, peach, caramel, almond.

Balance and clean finish, ~~gave~~ not enough concentration
medium length.

Country of origin: (1 mark)

France

Assessment of quality: (2 marks)

Acceptable. VS Armagnac

Lack of concentration and complexity. good integration of alcohol.
Length was good enough.

Comment briefly on the maturation of this spirit: (2 marks)

Mature in 400 - 600 L of limousin oak cask for 2 years.

SPIRIT No 3

Appearance: (3 marks)

bright, clear, medium ^{intensity of} lemon color, with legs.

Nose: (7 marks)

clean, medium intensity, ~~relying~~ spirit.

Note of yellow flower, floral, citrus, perfume, candy, ~~so~~ small hint of honey, peach, ~~violet~~, violet.

After adding water, peach and honey note stands out.

Palate: (10 marks)

dry, ^{warming} ~~integrated~~ alcohol, medium body, medium intensity,

Note of grassy, lemon, citrus peel, perfume, floral, peach, violet medium length. Balance and clean finish. High concentration

Country of origin: (1 mark)

Mexico

Assessment of quality: (2 marks)

Acceptable quality of gold ~~Fogata~~ Tequila. With fresh and floral note, have complexity and concentration. ~~But~~ alcohol was not so integrated.

Comment briefly on the maturation of this spirit: (2 marks)

~~No~~ Natural less than 6 month in cask

Question 2 – In relation to spirits, write about each of the following:

- a) Rhum Agricole
- b) Malt whisky production prior to distillation
- c) Gin botanicals

Answers: 291

Passes: 186 (64%)

This was a good pass rate, but was offset by a complete absence of any distinction grades. This was almost certainly due to the inclusion of Rhum Agricole which candidates struggled to answer competently. Whilst the other two sections of this question were very mainstream, there were weaknesses even here. For example, when writing about Malt whisky production prior to distillation, many candidates forgot to actually describe the malting process itself, going directly from "steeping" to "kilning".

A good response on Rhum Agricole would have specified what it is and where it is produced and specifically explained how production of this differs from rums produced from molasses. Good candidates increased their marks with reference to details exclusive to this type of rum such as "bagasse" and "vesou". They also pointed out that fermentation is short, although some producers prolong it to increase complexity, and explained how different flavours can be obtained by varying the length of fermentation, sugar levels in the wash, strength of distillate or shape of the still. It was also important to mention the ageing requirements, linking this to the various styles, which also needed to be discussed in their own right. Another differential was the resulting style of these rhums. Good candidates were aware that the use of sugar cane juice can result in style variations from year to year, (which is why some single vintage Rhums are sold) but that generally these rhums are not only pungent and vegetal, but also have aromas of grass, apple and can have a floral note.

March 2011

Question 1 – Mount Gay Eclipse Rum, Martell VS Cognac, The Macallan 10 year old

Answers: 172

Passes: 144 (84%)

This was an excellent pass rate with an equal split between pass and merit grade bands and an impressive number of distinctions.

There were the inevitable problems caused by those who did not follow the Systematic Approach for Spirits. This differs considerably from that used for assessing wine, and this is an easy way to lose marks. Some candidates also appeared to not understand what was required under "style within the category".

Answers here needed to be as precise as possible, for example, in the case of the Rum, this needed to be specified as a Golden Rum rather than just "rum", but for the Cognac, it was more important to get the quality level correct than distinguish specifically between Armagnac and Cognac.

Question 2 – In relation to spirits, write about each of the following:

- a) Grappa
- b) Scotch Grain Whisky
- c) Bacardi Rum

Answers: 172

Passes: 120 (70%)

This was a good pass rate, with some extremely high marks amongst the 25 candidates who achieved a distinction grade.

Responses on Grappa were generally very good, but responses for the section on Bacardi Rum tended to be too generic, with many candidates writing in general terms about the production of rum rather than specifically writing about the Bacardi brand.

Compare the following two scripts, one which simply describes how rum is made and the other, which also does this very briefly but focuses more on the Bacardi portfolio.

Example of weak script:

Bacardi rum is a spirit produced in Bermuda, Caribbean from distilling a wash obtained from molasses. Molasses are a by-product of heating sugar-cane juice after the sugar crystals have been removed. Bacardi rum is the best selling rum in the world, it generally comes in the form of white rum. The product consists of mixing the molasses with water after which the wash will be fermented. The amount of water & starches will affect the style & flavor of the rum. Fermentation will be short for a light rum, distillation is continuous still and if a light rum is desired, it is often unaged.

Example of good script:

Bacardi Rum

What is it - Bacardi is a long-standing producer of mass-market, specialty & premium rums from the Caribbean, originally based in Cuba, but now primarily from Puerto Rico. Bacardi is one of the leading spirits companies of the world, also, owning & producing brands throughout the world.

Rum is a distilled beverage produced from sugar cane and/or its by-products. Typically, mass-market rum will be distilled from fermented molasses, the byproduct of making crystallized sugar from sugar cane. Bacardi rum most often found is the "silver" which is actually fermented, aged in wood to smooth it, and then filtered & charcoal to remove the color. This rum is best for mixing in cocktails, such as a mojito. This rum is one of the leading spirits brands in the world - surprisingly as the quality compared to other rums is exceptionally low, but mass-market's dollars do drive sales.

Bacardi also makes a selection of other aged rums, or rums that appear to be of higher quality with dark colour & flavours. There are other producers making high quality products that can compete though.

Bacardi rum also come in a variety of flavoured styles (lemon being, the most popular) These are used as cocktail additives & mixers

June 2011

Question 1 – Stolichnaya Vodka, Jose Cuervo Especial Tequila Plata, Plymouth Gin

Answers: 138

Passes: 102 (74%)

This was a very good set of results and not surprisingly it was the Gin that generated the best tasting notes. The Tequila tripped up many candidates, with this spirit often identified as Rum, Grappa and even Gin.

As with some previous Unit 4 tasting papers, the emphasis in the concluding section of this paper was on production, asking candidates to describe how the method of production accounts for the intensity and character of the aromas. However, a large percentage of candidates failed to understand what was required here and simply stated how the spirit was made without explaining how this affects the aromas. With five marks available in this section, responses needed to be reasonably detailed and analytical. For example, for the Vodka the following points should have been made:

- Distilled in a column still to a minimum of 96% abv so that very little flavour of the base material remains.
- No ageing, so very youthful aromas.
- Filtered through quartz, sand and activated charcoal to remove impurities and colour and also retain neutrality.
- Reduced to bottling strength with purified water to soften the alcohol.

There of two things that needed to be addressed in this section – a brief comment on the process AND an indication of the effect this has on the intensity and character of the aromas of the spirit.

Question 2 – In relation to spirits, write about each of the following:

- a) Bourbon
- b) Cognac labelling
- c) Diageo PLC

Answers: 137

Passes: 79 (58%)

Although this generated a reasonably good pass rate, there were very few merit grades (only nine candidates from 137) and no distinction grades at all.

In general, the section on Bourbon was fairly good, but the other sections caused a number of problems. Whilst most candidates wrote competently about the Compte system in respect of Cognac, explaining how this is expressed on labels as VS, VSOP etc, very few mentioned any other labelling issues. These should have included those that are mandatory (appellation, name and address of producer or

identification of bottler if different from producer, alcohol content by volume, content, lot number) and other optional information such as ageing designations (i.e. the Compte system), vintage, regional appellation (eg Cru), other appellation designations such as "Fine Champagne", brand name, grower's name, other designations such as "estate bottled" or those used as a marketing term such as "Grand Cru". The section on Diageo showed a general lack of commercial awareness, such as the candidate who claimed Diageo is "*a group of Tequila producers in Mexico.*"

Unit 5, Sparkling Wines

The examination for Unit 5 was run on three separate occasions in the academic year 2010/11, in November, March and June. The overall pass rate for the unit as a whole for all these dates combined was 70%.

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

November 2010

Question 1 – Prosecco NV, Champagne Ayala Brut Majeur NV, Asti DOCG 2009	
Answers: 244	Passes: 213 (87%)

Of the three smaller units, it is the sparkling wine unit that tends to generate the best results for tasting, and this was no exception. Not only was the pass rate high, but 41% of candidates passed with a merit grade.

The Champagne was assessed well in the majority of cases, both in terms of detecting the autolytic character on the nose and palate, and also in carrying this through to the assessment of quality. The youthful, aromatic quality of the Asti also made this easy to identify and assess.

The following candidate has correctly identified all three wines, the tasting notes themselves are accurate, with some minor misjudgements and the assessment of quality is very good for the Prosecco, slightly overestimated in the case of the Champagne but certainly on the right lines, and slightly weaker in the case of the Asti, but once again takes the right approach. This candidate ended up with a sound merit grade.

WINE No 1

Appearance: (3 marks) the wine is clear. The intensity of the colour is pale and the colour is ~~yellow~~ old.
the mousse has small bubbles and the persistence is medium

Nose: (7 marks)

On the nose the wine is clean, has a medium ~~medium~~ intensity, is youthful and has aromas of white fruit citrus and minerals, there are floral ~~to~~ notes of ~~watercress~~ ~~sea~~ ~~is some~~

Palate: (10 marks)

On the palate the wine is off-dry, has medium ^{minum} acidity, the mousse is smooth the alcohol level is medium (12%), the body is light and the intensity of flavour is medium ~~+~~. The flavour has hints of citrus, minerals, grapefruit and the length is medium ~~all~~.

Country and region of origin: (2 marks)

~~Cool climate because of acidity~~
~~prosecco Italy~~

Assessment of quality: (3 marks)

The wine has a good quality. There is balance between ~~intensity~~ acidity and mousse. The wine lacks complexity ~~and~~ has a ~~moderately~~ good body. The wine is a well-made fruit-driven sparkling wine with some bitter aftertaste.

The wine can be drunk now, cannot age
There is no development

WINE No 2

Appearance: (3 marks) The wine is clear, has a medium intens ~~gold~~ light golden colour. The size of the bubbles is small and the persistence is long.

Nose: (7 marks)

On the nose the wine is clear, the intensity is pronounced and the wine is developed. There are aromas of ~~eg~~ autolyse like yeast and bread and floral notes.

Palate: (10 marks)

On the palate the wine is dry, has medium acidity the mouth is smooth, ^{creamy} and the body is tight medium. The intensity is medium + and the age notes of yeast like ~~soil~~ ^{baked bread} ~~biscuits~~ but also some fruit like citrus, creamy ripe fruit. The wine has medium + bright minerals. The alcohol is medium.

Country and region of origin: (2 marks)

Champagne (vintage) France

Assessment of quality: (3 marks)

The wine has a good to outstanding quality because of the elegance ^{of yeasty elements}, ~~smooth~~ of the fruit and the smoothness. There is ^{lot of} complexity, length and intensity of flavour. The wine is rich of aroma! There is a very good balance between Sweetness, ~~sweet~~ flavour, acidity and alcohol. The wine can age.

WINE No 3

Appearance: (3 marks) The wine is clear and has a pale lemongold colour. The size of the bubbles is small and the persistence is ~~long~~ ~~short~~, medium.

Nose: (7 marks) On the nose the wine is clean, the intensity is pronounced and the wine is youthful. The aromas are ^{there are ripe} fruity like grapes and ~~too sweet~~ fruits like peach and citrus.

Palate: (10 marks) The wine is sweet, has an medium acidity. The ~~too~~ wine is smooth and the body is light. The alcohol is low. The flavours are ~~intense~~ pronounced and medium + intense and the have tones of grapes, tropical fruit, and a hint of ripe apple. The length is medium +.

Country and region of origin: (2 marks)

Haley, ash

The wine can be drunk now there is no development possible

Assessment of quality: (3 marks)

The quality of the wine is good because there is a lot of flavour ^{and acidity}, the length is medium +, there is balance between fruit acidity, sweetness and alcohol. ~~the wine is not because of the style the wine lacks complexity~~

Question 2 – In relation to sparkling wine, write about each of the following:

- a) Champagne village classification
- b) Sparkling red wines
- c) USA

Answers: 243

Passes: 132 (54%)

In contrast to the results for the tasting question, this was very disappointing. Low marks were often the result of candidates not paying enough attention to the specific wording of the question. For example, there was no point in describing the "traditional method" of Champagne production when examiners were looking for an explanation of the village classification, which should have included how it works, why it was originally introduced, how it has changed in recent times, whether it is a good system or not, etc. The section on sparkling red wines should only have discussed wines which are fully red. This meant rosé fell outside the scope of the question, yet this is what the majority of candidates wrote about. Had the wording of the question been "the use of red grapes in sparkling wine", they would have been correct to include it, but this was not the case. Within the scope of the Diploma syllabus, "sparkling red wines" should have encompassed:

- Australian wines such as Sparkling Shiraz and those made from other black grapes such as Cabernet Sauvignon, Malbec etc
- Italian wines – primarily Lambrusco, but good candidates included others such as Brachetto d'Acqui
- French wines such as Bourgogne Mousseux Rouge.

Marks were also lost in the section on the USA by candidates who only wrote about Champagne "lookalikes" from the Napa.

The following candidate gave sound responses in all three sections and gained a basic merit grade. More specific detail would have been required to tip this into the distinction banding.

Champagne Village Classification

Known as Echelle des Crus

All vineyards in Champagne are rated by this system.

The ~~process~~ The system rates the village and all demarcated vineyards of that village have the same rating.

There are 3 levels in the system.

The Grand Cru level is 96 - 100%

The Premier Cru level is 90 - 95%

And last, the rest, which receive a rating of 80 to 89%

The rating can be different for the different varieties in the same village

Till the go's this was also used for the price the grower would receive for its grapes.

A grand cru village could receive 100% of the price. A grower from a low rated village only 80%. This system is not used anymore caused by EU-regulations.

There are 17 Grand Cru Village. Nine in ~~the~~ Montagne de Reims, 2 in Vallée de la Marne and 6 in Côte de Blancs.

41 villages have a Premier cru rating. None of them are in Côte Sézanne or Aube

Sparkling Red Wines

Most Sparkling red wines are made in Australia known as Sparkling Shiraz.

Sparkling Shiraz is made of shiraz but can also be a blend with Cabernet Sauvignon and/or Merlot.

The best ones are coming from the Great Western (Victoria). ~~Other~~ areas are McLaren Vale, Clare Valley and bought in grapes from Barossa zone.

The cheaper ones are aged on lees for less than a year, but the best age up to 8½ years on the lees. The best used Traditional method for production. But transfer and tank also cost. The wine contains a lot ~~of~~ of dark fruit, high alcohol and flavours of old leather and have tannins. The wine is full bodied.

Other red sparkling wine in the world are made in South Africa from Pinotage (tank method) and also in Italy, where they make Lambrusco.

Lambrusco is made in Emilia-Romagna from Lambrusco grape. There are 6 varieties. Most common is Lambrusco Salamino.

The production method is in an autoclave (fombe). Most are dry to off dry, little sparkle and low alcohol and low tannin. The taste is strawberry, raspberry like. As a closure they use normal corks. Production about 500.000 ha.

U.S.A

Most sparkling wines are made ~~with~~ in California (90%)
The production areas are Anderson Valley, Napa Valley, Sonoma and Carneros. Some production in Oregon.

The grape varieties used in the U.S.A are Chardonnay and Pinot Noir. But there is some Pinot Meunier, Pinot blanc and Pinot gris used as well. They also make a pink sparkling wine of Zinfandel.

Most production methods used are Traditional Method for the best wines, Transfer Method and Tank method.

Most sparkling wines are Champagne like and use same styles.

There are a lot of French and Spanish wine houses present with own domains or joint ventures.

French examples are Domaine Chandon (Moët et Chandon), Faillouez Domaine Carneros (Faillouez).

Gloria Ferrer is owned by the Spanish company Freixenet.

cool maritime but
The climate is warmer than in Champagne. ~~but~~ The vineyards are cooled by Atlantic currents and incoming fogs. So they have enough acidity.

Sonoma is the most important area. It's in the north of California. In the south of Napa Valley and Carneros down to San Francisco Bay.

March 2011

Question 1 – Champagne Deutz Brut 2005, Champagne Brut NV (The Wine Society), Louis Roederer Carte Blanche Demi-sec NV	
Answers: 200	Passes: 124 (62%)

Although a good number of candidates achieved a pass grade in this paper, the majority of these were basic passes with most marks achieved in the tasting note itself, often boosted by the candidate's ability to spot autolytic character, - something most find easy to detect and describe. However, the key reason results are weaker on this paper is because of the emphasis is on the ability to assess quality. These were three Champagnes. They all exhibited autolytic character to some extent – some clearly more so than others. Examiners were less impressed by candidates who wrote very similar tasting notes for all three samples than they were by those who showed an ability in identifying which of these were the premium products. A large percentage of candidates were unable to do this convincingly and this is why there were so few distinction grades awarded. Apart from an inability to distinguish between the quality of three samples, there are also still far too many candidates who do not understand HOW to assess quality. Often they simply repeat observations made under the nose and palate, or state what they think the wine is or how it has been produced.

The following candidate wrote an excellent assessment of the Deutz Vintage Champagne.

"A very good quality sparkling wine. It has a fine bubble texture giving a smooth, rich creamy mouthfeel and an excellent balance of components. There is a combination of developed, tertiary flavours along with well defined, pure, expressive fruit, giving

good complexity. The high acidity and ripeness level give the wine balance and vibrancy. The intensity, richness, complexity and level of autolysis together with the long finish point to the quality found in a vintage Champagne, however a slight bitterness on the finish prevents this from being outstanding.”

Compare this to the following assessments which are weak in comparison:

“The wine is good quality and the balance between acid and fruit is not as good as it could be with acid dominating, the wine has a medium length and has medium minus complexity.”

“This sparkling wine is good but without many complexities. It shows typicity of a fresh, fruit wine made by the tank method.”

“This is a good example of a Crémant method sparkling from France, specifically Vouvray. The texture integration of fruit versus acidity is very harmonious. Good complexity of flavours.”

Question 2 – In relation to sparkling wine, write about each of the following:

- a) Crémant
- b) NM (Négociant-manipulant)
- c) Cava DO

Answers: 200

Passes: 154 (77%)

Compared to the tasting question, this was a much better result with a good number of merit and distinction grades. However, a number of candidates struggled to explain the term “NM”. Whilst most knew that this refers to the “big” Champagne Houses such as Moet & Chandon who buy in grapes and make Champagne, there was very little else in terms of detail about how the system of NM works or why it exists. There were a number of issues that candidates should have been considering in order to answer this section well. For example, why do they buy in grapes? Do they own vineyards of their own and, if so, why do they still buy in grapes? What sort of contract do they have with their suppliers/growers? Why would they want to have any sort of contract, what are the advantages of this for them? What are the disadvantages of being an NM?

It is only by considering issues such as these that candidates could give the examiner a detailed picture of the system and how it works, which would then have answered the question in the correct manner.

June 2011

Question 1 – Crémant de Limoux NV, Ayala Brut Majeur Champagne NV, Sparkling Shiraz 2006

Answers: 210

Passes: 176 (84%)

This was an excellent set of results, with a good distribution of merit and distinction grades. This was because it was relatively easy to pick up marks on the Sparkling Shiraz which is very distinctive. Candidates were generally less good at differentiating between the clear Champagne character of the Ayala and the more fruit forward character of the Crémant.

As with most of the tasting questions, the assessment of quality is still an area of considerable weakness for many candidates, with comments being brief, simplistic, often just repeating comments made in the tasting note itself, without explaining how or why these indicate quality (or lack of it), or including irrelevant observations relating to the wine's "readiness for drinking" or provenance. The following are examples of poor assessments of quality :

Wine 1

"I believe this to be an entry level to mid level quality wine, approx retail price \$12-25 CDN (£8-18 GBP)"

Wine 2

"High quality, \$50-75 CDN at retail, £35+ GBP"

Wine 3

"Medium quality for its type. Medium complexity overall. Retail price approx \$20 – 30 CDN or £15–25 GBP"

None of these is an assessment of the quality of the wine and the price ranges are so broad that they contribute nothing to the assessment.

In contrast, the following assessments, whilst not perfect, indicate the quality level the candidate feels is appropriate and offers some explanation as to why this is:

Wine 1

"Good quality, primary fruit driven, easy to drink, good fruit concentration but the lack of balance and a fairly short finish point it to this quality level"

Wine 2

"Very good quality, with good fruit concentration integrating well with autolytic flavours, balance and expressive with good intensity, with a fairly long finish"

Wine 3

"Good quality sparkling shiraz, fruit driven and easy to drink, good fruit concentration with a balance between the slight sweetness and acidity. The slightly bitter finish limit it to this quality"

However, the following assessments are excellent – extensive and analytical:

Wine 1

"Acceptable quality sparkling wine aimed at the lower end of the mid-market. Simple and clean but lacks depth and character. Fruit is clean but neutral and the earthy, rubbery notes give an impression of rusticity. There is a slight note of autolysis so it is likely to be made by the traditional method. Acid doesn't give lift or elegance but just seems rather sour and the fruit fades quickly on the finish. Overall the wine lacks vibrancy, seeming rather flat despite tartness."

Wine 2

"Very good. It has ripe, expressive fruit and complexity from distinct autolytic flavours. The intensity and richness of flavour are balanced by refreshing acidity. The wine has a harmonious profile which is well structured and vibrant. A traditional method wine showing characteristics typical of a well-made Champagner. A little more depth and length would have rated an outstanding quality assessment."

Wine 3

"Good quality sparkling Shiraz, juicy and fruit driven. Very ripe and a little jammy indicating a warm to hot climate. It has quite a lot of residual sugar but this balances the tannins which are a little hard. There is complexity and depth due to age and autolysis which gives a savoury note to balance the ripeness. The fruit holds well throughout the length but the tannin gives a slight bitterness to the finish and the alcohol is a little hot."

Question 2 – In relation to sparkling wine, write about each of the following:

- a) Pinot Meunier
- b) Asti DOCG
- c) Champagne Bollinger S.A.

Answers: 209

Passes: 119 (57%)

This was an uninspiring set of scripts. In general, where candidates failed it was due to lack of detail. There is a considerable percentage of candidates consistently achieving fail (unclassified) grades whose level of knowledge has not progressed beyond Level 3. These candidates would do well to read the section of this report that explains the different levels of assessment and how these progress throughout the various WSET qualifications (see page 5).

With the paragraph sections in Units 4, 5 and 6 it is a good idea to think in terms of trigger words. For example, who, what, where, why, how? All of these would have generated relevant information in response to these questions. Taking Pinot Meunier as an example:

- What is it?
- Where is it planted?
- Why is it planted in these locations?
- How is it used in sparkling wine?
- Why is it used in sparkling wine?

This is not going to provide all the information relating to this section, but will certainly go a long way to achieving this. The section on Asti DOCG would work well using the six factors as the basis for the answer, (grape variety, climate, soil, weather, viticulture, vinification, maturation) along with a description of the wine style.

The following candidate achieved high marks in all three sections because the factual content is excellent. Stylistically, the prose is a little clumsy in places, and there are some errors, but it is nevertheless an example of a very good all round submission. It is duplicated here exactly as submitted:

Section a)

"Pinot Meunier (PM) is a mutation of Pinot Noir. It plays a vital role in the production of Champagne. In the New World, it is also becoming more important with most of the New World producers trying to produce sparkling wine in the same way as Champagne.

In the Champagne AOC, pinot meunier's home is at Vallee de la Marne, one of the 5 regions in Champagne (it represents 63% of all the 4 vines in Vallee de la Marne). Overall in the entire Champagne area, it represents approx 37% of the total vines (37% PM, 37% Pinot Noir and 26% Chardonnay).

It is a late budding varietal but early ripening. Therefore it is very suited to be planted in Vallee de la Marne as this area has flatter vineyards and is more prone to spring frost (PM is better at resisting spring frost because of late budding). Pinot Meunier plays a vital role especially in non-vintage cuvee as it provides the fruitiness character to the blend. It balances with pinot noir which takes longer to age. PM does not age well and when a Champagne NV is drunk young, PM's varietal characteristics can be noticed straight away.

Not many producers are proud to use PM as it is in general considered as a lesser grape. However, Krug is a strong supporter of PM and use up to approx 15% in its blended Grand Cuvee. Krug sources their PM with a high quality site, Leuvrigny, south of Marne.

In general, PM is liked by its hardiness and is very important in a blend (NV) Cuvee. In the New World, California, Tasmania, Australia are also exploring the use of PM and they would like to imitate Champagne using traditional method and the varietals that Champagne uses".

Section b)

"Asti is both the name of an Italian sparkling wine and the name of a town in Piemonte, North west of Italy.

Asti (the place) has continental climate with calcareous soils and mountainous topography. Asti (as the wine) was elevated to DOCG in 1993 with the word Spumante dropped at the same time. It is a white sparkling wine made from Moscato Bianco. It is made using the Asti Method (variation of the tank method). The must is kept at 0°C until use. Then it is fermented in a sealed tank and when alcohol gets to approx 7.5% abv, the valves are closed to trap the carbon dioxide inside the tank. Fermentation continues until alcohol level reaches around 9.5% and the fermentation

is then arrested by chilling it and the fermented wine is clarified and bottled under pressure. Clarification must also remove the yeast nitrogenous nutrients so that the fermentation does not restart inside the bottle.

Asti is produced in the town/province of Asti, Cuneo and Alessandria and it is an industry pretty much controlled by large houses. Annual production of Asti is around 80 million bottles p.a. 18 large merchant houses are responsible for approx 80% of the wine production. There are many small growers and many different plots of vineyards but the merchants (headquartered normally in Canelli) is not interested in zoning the vineyards to separate out the better performing plots (unlike Champagne).

The grape Moscato Bianco (also called Muscat Blanc a petits grains) have a chemical compound called Geraniol which is very pleasant when young but turns into unpleasant smell after a while. Therefore Asti are meant to be youthful and should be drunk young. It has an aroma of peach, hint of orange, white peach, grapey, perfumed, honey. An example of an Asti producer is Martini & Rossi.

Asti should not be mistaken with Moscato d'Asti (3 million bottles a year produced). It is also a DOCG but with only 5.5% abv and uses more ripe grapes than Asti".

Section c)

"Bollinger is a negociant manipulant (NM) based in Ay. It was founded in 1829 by Jacques Bollinger. It owns approx 163 hectare of vineyard which supply approximately 60% of what the house needs. It is still family owned business.

It has a number of products namely the NV cuvee, vintage cuvee, RD (recently disgorged), prestige cuvee and the famous vielle vignes Francaises (Blanc de Noir).

It is a house which focus a lot on quality. For example, it has policies not to undergo malolactic fermentation, it uses cork instead of crown cap for 2nd fermentation, it uses both stainless steel vat and oak casks to undergo 1st fermentation (approx half of each). It has a disgorgement to order policy which state that the wine is disgorged 3 months (12 weeks) before shipment/delivery.

The house style is very much Pinot Noir bases with pinot noir in the largest % in its blend which give rise to more structure, depth and complexity to its wine. For its NV cuvee, it uses approx 55% of reserve wines comprising of approximately 30 crus from different villages and the ageing on lees for its NV is 36 months. Ageing on lees for its vintage cuvee is 5 years and for the RD (recently disgorged) is 8 years. Its signature Blanc de Noir is 100% Pinot noir from 3 very unique vineyards (2 are clos) in the village of Ay and Bouzy. These are ungrafted vines (not affected by phylloxera) and the level of concentration in the wine is intense. Density planting of 30,000 vines per hectare for this Blanc de Noir (average Champagne is 7000 vines per hectare). Bollinger produces only 173 cases of this vieilles vignes Francaises every year. It is a wine that can be drunk with the main meal. It needs to be aged.

Bollinger also have investment outside of Champagne, eg Petaluma in Southern Australia (Piccadilly) and Langlois Chateau in Loire Valley (cremant de Loire). The annual sales of its NV is approx 1.9 million bottles. Of the 163 hectares of vineyard Bollinger own, most are on grand cru sites other than 30% which is Premier crus".

Unit 6, Fortified Liqueur Wines

The examination for Unit 6 was run on three separate occasions in the academic year 2010/11, in November, March and June. The overall pass rate for the unit as a whole for all these dates combined was 60%.

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

November 2010

Question 1 – Valdespino Inocente Fino NV, Valdivia Amontillado Secco “Dorius” NV, Croft Original Pale Cream Sherry NV	
Answers: 205	Passes: 105 (51%)

This was not a great pass rate, and I suspect this is evidence of the fact that Sherry is not the most popular fortified wine on the Diploma syllabus. In a number of instances candidates did not read the question carefully enough and therefore missed that these were all from the same region, so wines were identified as Sherry and Madeira, or Sherry and VDN for example. It was usually the Pale Cream Sherry that caused these anomalies, but even taking into consideration that these candidates did not read the question properly, this wine was certainly not sweet or aromatic enough for a VDN. Although most candidates spotted the Fino Sherry, a large number of them incorrectly described it as “deliberately oxidised”. Similarly, the Pale Cream was also often described as “deliberately oxidised”, which seems to suggest that there is a misconception that ALL Sherry is oxidised. Candidates also seemed to find it difficult to assess the levels of sweetness and acidity on this wine.

There continues to be use of vague tasting terms such as describing the wines as “yellow” or giving a range of options for the structural components. Many candidates are also imprecise in their assessment of development, referring to “signs of development” or “showing development”. The problem here is that the examiner has to make a judgement on whether this implies that the wine is developing or fully developed, which they are not permitted to do.

Question 2 – In relation to fortified wine, write about each of the following:	
a) The Muscat grape b) Influence of climate on Port production c) 10 year old Malmsey	
Answers: 204	Passes: 107 (52%)

Like the tasting question, this was also poor, with an equal number of fail and fail (unclassified) candidates, accounting for half of those sitting. The large number of candidates achieving these very low marks, suggests that many of them either did not prepare sufficiently for this exam, or simply are not yet ready for a qualification of this level.

The section on the Muscat grape was fairly straightforward. Having identified the various forms of this grape used in the production of fortified wines, candidates needed to discuss the characteristics of the grape itself and follow this with some details relating of its use in the various wines in which it features. The section on the influence of climate on Port production required more thought. It was not simply a case of describing the climate, candidates needed to explain how this influences production from the growing of the grapes in the vineyard through to maturation of the finished wine. Too many candidates took a very narrow approach to this section of the question. The final section on 10 year old Malmsey was simple to answer well. A good approach here would have been to consider the “six factors” (climate, grape variety, soil, vinification, maturation), along with some comments on the resulting style and quality level.

The following candidate submitted strong answers for all three sections. They wrote extensively about the wines produced from Muscat, but said relatively little about the characteristics of the grape itself – this would have earned them more marks in this section. The second section was also sound, covering all aspects of production, but needed more detail. For example, there is no mention of the risk of hail in summer and autumn which can damage crops, or the sudden heavy rain that weakens terraces and causes erosion, they have not mentioned the effect of hydric stress on the grape or what producers can do to minimise this. Finally, the section on Madeira covers the key points the examiner was looking for with a reasonable amount of detail. Those who achieved higher marks did so by being more precise in terms of production, specifically focussing on how production of this wine differs from the other styles, for example by pointing out that the level of fortification differs according to the quality of the wine, so better wines such as this would be fortified to a higher level. They also described the relevant methods of estufagem in more detail.

Section a)

The Muscat grape is used widely in the production of fortified wines, throughout many regions of the world and in many diverse climates and soils, it produces a variety of styles, depending on the stage of fortification and the aging process, but always with a distinct Muscat nose.

The Muscat grape has a number of clones, including the most revered of which is Muscat Blanc à Petits Grains (which is also known as Brown Muscat in Australia's Rutherglen). The lesser clone, Muscat of Alexandria, is also widely planted but produces wines of less nose.

The most well known fortified Muscat wines must be those from the Languedoc region in France. Here they grow in a warm, Mediterranean climate to produce the aromatic Vin doux naturel wines including Muscat de Frontignan and Muscat St Jean de Minervois. The equally well known are the Muscats of the Rhône Valley, Muscat de Beaumes de Venise. The latter are slightly lighter than the former, with a lower minimum sugar content at harvest.

Also in the south of France are the Muscat de Rivesaltes wines, produced with the Muscat of Alexandria variety and fortified during the ferment to produce a sweet style of fortified wine.

Greece has its own version of fortified Muscat with its Muscat of Samos. This can be made in three styles, a vin de liqueur, vin doux naturel and finally a sun-dried version which is oak aged.

The final style would be the Muscat grown in Jerez. While not producing a varietal wine, this grape contributes to many sherry styles, although minimally. It is often used as a sweetener.

Muscat will always, regardless of region or style, be very apparent on the nose with grapey, floral notes.

Muscat is also produced in Australia's Rutherglen region in a rancio-style of wine which is aged in a cross between a solera system and an estufa. Here the grapes are left to shrivel on the vine and achieve extremely high sugar levels.

Section b)

The vines of The Douro Valley in Portugal evolve from a very unique climate. Located inland and protected from the ocean by a large mountain range, Serra do Mendo, the climate is hot, dry and very harsh. This mountain range creates a rain shadow, such that the 1500mm of rain received annually over the Serra do Mendo drops to a mere 700mm in the Cima-Corgo, the heart of the Douro. Summers are extremely hot and temperatures can reach 45°C.

The effects this has on port production are many. First, specific varieties must be cultivated to withstand this harsh climate, including Tinta Franca, Tinta Nacional and Tinta Roriz. These vines must root deeply to locate scarce water & escape summer heat. The vineyards are trained so as to minimise sunburn, traditionally with the Guyot method, but more recently with vertical shoot positioning and cordon trained, and varieties must be matched to site to avoid overripe, jammy-flavours.

Winemaking itself has evolved to ~~so~~ make the most of this harsh climate also. The high temperatures see the grapes attain high sugar levels, thus the wines are able to be fortified during ferment, leaving a substantial quantity of residual sugar integral to the style.

Finally, maturation of the Port wines takes place in Vila Nova de Gaia, a cooler location much further to the west, closer to the moderating influence of the ocean. Here the wines mature slowly, developing finesse and elegance, rather than the famed 'Duoro Bâke' which can result from aging ports in the warmer location of the Duoro, closer to the Cima Corgo.

Section c)

A 10-year-old Malmsey is a distinct style of wine from the island of Madeira off the coast of Portugal. These wines are typically Amber in colour with notes of fig and prune, often tobacco, and distinct nutty aromas. Gifted with often piercing acidity, the palate is typically sweet with similar dried fruit notes and rancio aromas. These are some of the longest lived wines in the world.

Given that this wine is labelled 'Malmsey', it must consist of at least 85% of the Malvasia grape. It will have been fortified during fermentation, leaving a residual sugar of somewhere between 3.5 and 6.5° Be. After fermentation, this wine will have been aged in one or both of the following systems: armazen de calor (heated in cask for 6-12 months, 30-40°C), or canteiro (aged in cask in a warm location in Funchal).

The age classification on this wine is an indication of average

age only, thus the average age of the blend is 10 yrs. This is typical for many styles of Madeira, being a blend of vintages rather than vintage production.

Finally, this specific grape is typically grown in the warmer locations of the island of Madeira, at lower altitudes (near Funchal), on the southern side of the island.

March 2011

Question 1 – Sainsbury's Finest Ruby Port, Taylor's Vargellas Vintage Port 2001, Taylor's 20 year old Tawny Port

Answers: 127

Passes: 86 (68%)

This was a rather disappointing pass rate with most candidates achieving basic pass grades and very few distinction grades and an equal split between those who failed with a basic fail grade and the weaker fail (unclassified) grade.

The following candidate achieved a fail grade. The tasting notes themselves are short, not always accurate and adopt a simplistic "bullet point" style rather than a full written tasting note. None of the samples have been identified correctly and the assessment of quality is largely a statement of what the candidate believes the wine to be.

WINE No 1

Appearance: (3 marks)

CLEAR MEDIUM + INTENSITY LEGS
RUBY LIGHT RIM

Nose: (7 marks)

CLEAN MEDIUM + INTENSITY PLUMS
BLACKCURRANT HERBAL AROMATIC

Palate: (10 marks)

MEDIUM ALCOHOL
MEDIUM + INTENSITY
LOW TANNINS
MEDIUM - LENGTH
HERBAL - SPICED - MEDICINAL PLUMS
MEDIUM BODY
NO OXIDATION

DARK CERRIES
CHOCOLATE

Style within the category: (2 marks)

MID PRICED VD NATUREL

Assessment of quality: (3 marks)

good BALANCE PROBABLY A GRENACHE
BASED WINE IT COULD BY A MAURY
FOR LOW TANNINS AND MEDIUM BODY

WINE No 2

Appearance: (3 marks)

CLEAR ~~AND~~ OPAQUE LEGS
DARK RUBY

Nose: (7 marks)

CLEAN MEDIUM-INTENSITY PLUMS
BLACK CERRIES
SOME OXIDATION

Palate: (10 marks)

~~HIGH ALCOHOL~~
MEDIUM BODY
MEDIUM TANNINS
MEDIUM INTENSITY
MEDIUM LENGTH
BLACKCURRANT
HINTS OF PLUMS BLACK CERRIES TOFFEE
LIQUIRISH COFFEE
NUTTY AROMAS WALNUTS
MEDICINAL

Style within the category: (2 marks)

MID PRICED VD NATUREL

Assessment of quality: (3 marks)

PROBABLY ~~MADE~~ A COMMANDARIA
OR A BANYULS RIMASÉ
GOOD BALANCE, MAYBE MISSING
SOME INTENSITY ON THE NOSE AND
A BIT TOO HIGH ON ALCOHOL

WINE No 3

Appearance: (3 marks)

CLEAR TAWNY MEDIUM INTENSITY
ORANGE RIM SOME LEGS

Nose: (7 marks)

CLEAN MEDIUM + INTENSITY
NUTTY AROMAS HAZELNUTS - WALNUTS - ALMONDS
DRIED APRICOTS TOFFEE
DEFINITIVELY OXIDISED

Palate: (10 marks)

MEDIUM - TANNINS
MEDIUM ALCOHOL
MEDIUM BODY
MEDIUM INTENSITY
MEDIUM LENGTH
TOasted ALMONDS TOFFEE CARAMEL
WALNUTS, DRIED FRUITS APRICOT
SMOKY CHARACTERS

Style within the category: (2 marks)

PROBABLY PREMIUM AKEONTILLA DO WITH
INDICATION OF AGE

Assessment of quality: (3 marks)

GOOD BALANCE - GOOD LENGTH
AND INTENSITY

Compare this to the following script where all three samples are identified correctly, but also described more extensively and a good attempt has been made to assess the quality level of each wine, although the comments relating to the "readiness for drinking" have not specifically been asked for and would have been better replaced with more analysis of the quality assessment.

WINE No 1

Appearance: (3 marks)

THIS IS A CLEAR WINE WITH MEDIUM INTENSITY AND IS RUBY IN COLOUR. IT HAS LONG LEGS AND A RUBY RIM.

Nose: (7 marks)

THIS IS A CLEAN WINE WITH MEDIUM INTENSITY. IT IS YOUTHFUL AND HAS AROMAS OF BLACKBERRY, BLACK CHERRY, BLACK Currant, AND RASPBERRIES.

Palate: (10 marks)

THIS IS A SWEET WINE WITH MEDIUM ACIDITY. IT HAS MED(-) MEDIUM (-) SOFT TANNINS AND HAS BEEN FORTIFIED TO HIGH ALCOHOL. IT HAS MEDIUM BODY AND MEDIUM FLAVOR INTENSITY. IT HAS FLAVORS OF BLACK CHERRY, BLACK BERRY, BLACK CURRENT, PLUM, PLUW AND RASPBERRIES. IT HAS A LACK OF COMPLEXITY ~~AND~~ BUT A SMOOTH TEXTURE. IT HAS A MED (-) LENGTH AND ~~AND~~ A SIMPLE FRUIT DRIVEN FINISH.

Style within the category: (2 marks)

RUBY PORT, PORT

Assessment of quality: (3 marks)

THIS IS AN ACCEPTABLE WINE WITH ~~GOOD~~ CONCENTRATION AND TYPICALLY FOR A RUBY PORT. IT HAS ~~COMPLICATED AND~~ FRUIT DRIVEN PALETTE ARE BALANCED BUT NO COMPLEX. THIS WINE IS READY TO DRINK AND WILL NOT IMPROVE

WINE No 2

Appearance: (3 marks)

THIS IS A CLEAR WINE WITH A DEEP INTENSITY AND A RUBY COLOUR. IT HAS LONG LEGS AND A THIN RUBY RIM

Nose: (7 marks)

THIS IS A CLEAN WINE WITH A MEDIUM(+) INTENSITY. IT IS A DEVELOPED WINE WITH AROMAS OF BLACK BAILED BLACK CHERRY, BLACK Currant, BAKED BLACK BERRIES AND DRIED SPICES SPECIFICALLY CLOVE

Palate: (10 marks)

THIS IS A MEDIUM-SWEET WINE WITH MEDIUM ACIDITY AND MEDIUM(+) BUT SOFT TANNINS. IT HAS BEEN FORTIFIED TO HIGH AND HAS A MEDIUM(+) BODY. IT HAS MEDIUM FLAVOR INTENSITY AND FLAVORS OF BAKED BLACK CHERRY, BAKED BLACK Currant, BLACK BERRY, SPICES, RASPBERRIES AND STRAWBERRIES. IT HAS GOOD BALANCE, GOOD INTEGRATION AND A LOT OF MOUTH FEEL. IT HAS A MEDIUM(+) LENGTH AND A COMPLEX FINISH

Style within the category: (2 marks)

PORT - Vintage Port

Assessment of quality: (3 marks)

THIS IS A VERY CLOUD WINE WITH VERY GOOD EXTRACTION, WELL BALANCED AND A SMOOTH TEXTURE. IT HAS A LOT OF COMPLEXITY AND FRUIT. IT WILL DEVELOP ITS SAUCY NOTE WITH AGE. THIS WINE IS READY TO DRINK BUT CAN IMPROVE WITH 5-10-20 YEARS OF ADDITIONAL AGE.

WINE No 3

Appearance: (3 marks)

THIS IS A CLEAR WINE WITH MEDIUM (+) INTENSITY AND IS TAWNY IN COLOUR. IT HAS LONG LEGS AND AN ORANGE-BRICK RIM

Nose: (7 marks)

THIS IS A CLEAT WINE WITH MEDIUM (+) INTENSITY. IT IS A FULLY DEVELOPED WINE WITH AROMAS OF BAKED CHERRY, BAKED BLACK BERRY, BAKED RASPBERRY, DRIED SPICES, PRUNES AND RAISINS

Palate: (10 marks)

THIS IS A SWEET WINE WITH MEDIUM ACIDITY, ~~SHARP~~ LOW SOFT TANNINS AND HAS BEEN FORTIFIED TO HIGH ALCOHOL. IT HAS A MEDIUM (+) BODY AND MEDIUM (+) FLAVOR INTENSITY. IT HAS FLAVORS OF DRIED SPICE, BAKED BLACK BERRY, PRUNES, RAISINS, ~~BANANA~~ DRIED CHERRIES, SMOKE, ALMONDS, ~~PEPPERS~~, WALNUTS AND BAKED PLUM. IT HAS A MEDIUM (+) FINISH AND A COMPLEX FINISH. IT HAS A SILKY TEXTURE AND WELL INTEGRATED FLAVORS

Style within the category: (2 marks)

PORT - TAWNY PORT WITH INDICATION OF AGE 20 YRS.

Assessment of quality: (3 marks)

~~VERY GOOD~~ A VERY GOOD WINE WITH VERY GOOD INTEGRATION OF SECONDARY AND TERTIARY FLAVORS, GOOD BALANCE AND GOOD TYPICITY FOR A TAWNY PORT WITH INDICATION OF AGE. THIS WINE IS READY TO DRINK AND WILL NOT IMPROVE,

Question 2 – In relation to fortified wine, write about each of the following:

- a) Manzanilla
- b) Production of Colheita Port
- c) Fortified wines of the Rhône Valley

Answers: 127

Passes: 93 (72%)

Despite the good pass rate for this question, there was a very clear divide between those candidates who had prepared well for this examination and those who clearly underestimate what is required, with more fail (unclassified) grades than narrow fails. A number of these weaker candidates still confuse Port with Sherry – something that should not be happening at this level. An example of this was the candidate whose response on section a) started with the statement “*a style of Sherry wine made based on fino grape sourced from Douro Valley in Portugal.*”

The section on Manzanilla was generally the best, and most candidates wrote well about the VDN wines of the Rhône Valley, with many including some reference to Rasteau even though this is no longer included in the syllabus for this unit. Where it was mentioned, and the information was relevant and correct, they were given an allocation of marks. However, it was the section on Colheita Port where most marks were lost. This was invariably because candidates wrote in general terms about Port, listing the grape varieties used, topography of the region etc, or simply described the production of a generic Port, i.e. an explanation of the “Port method” rather than limiting their answer to the differences in production of this particular style of Port compared to others.

Good candidates pointed out that this is a Tawny Port from a single vintage or “Colheita”. They explained how the ageing of this Port differs from that of a Vintage or other styles of Tawny. They also explained how these wines from a single vintage could be bottled in different years, depending on demand and that this can result in subtle differences in style of the same wine. The best were aware that the label carries two dates, the year of harvest and the year of bottling. Those with sound commercial knowledge went on to explain that the second date therefore indicates how long the wine has been “on the shelf” and, subsequently, how fresh it is.

The following script is a classic example of someone who wrote well in sections a) and c) but gained low marks for the section of Colheita. Fortunately for them, the combined marks for the other sections carried them through with a good aggregate mark.

Section a)

Manzanilla

Manzanilla is a fortified wine produced in the autonomous province of Andalucia in the DO area of Jerez - Sanlúcar de Barrameda.

Manzanilla is a fino sherry, but has its own unique characteristics due to it being aged in the coastal town of Sanlúcar de Barrameda, which is slightly cooler than the town of Jerez. Due to the cooler conditions in Sanlúcar, the flor which develops on the wine is thicker, and gives Manzanilla a slightly more delicate character to Fino's which have been aged in Jerez.

Fino and Manzanilla are grapes (Palomino) are chosen from the best vines and sites for the most delicate wine. Only free run juice is used for Manzanilla and the wine is fermented to dryness, before fortification then occurs with 50% wine with 50% fortified grape spirit at 95.5% taking the resulting wine to between $15-15.5^{\circ}\text{ alc/vol}$. Any higher than 16% and the flor will be unable to grow/develop.

The fortified wine is then transferred to a Solera system in the top criadera where it is aged under flor and slowly moves through the solera system via fractional blending. The addition of new wine into the solera keeps the flor alive with continuous addition of nutrients. The Manzanilla must be aged for a minimum of 3 years in solera before it is bottled, however it can be in Solera for longer (up to 8 yrs) before the flor dies.

	Typical tasting note for Manzanilla
App.	Bright, clear, pale, lemon, legs/tears on glass.
Nose.	Clean, light intensity, fully developed, Savoury, Salted almonds, bread,
Palate	Dry, low Acidity, Fortified to ^{low} sweet, light body, light flavor intensity, Tuds' Salted almonds, Savoury, Autolytic - Bready.

Section b)

<u>Colheita Port</u> -
Is a tawny port from a single year or harvest.
The port is fermented . After the grapes are crushed and fermented for 2-3 days they are transferred to barrel and shipped down to Vila Nova de Gaia for aging. The tawny Colheita ports must be aged for a minimum of 7 years before being bottled and often are aged further in bottle before being released onto the market

	Tasting Notes:
App.	Bright, clear, medium, tawny, legs/tears.
Nose.	Clean, Medium intensity, Fully developed, Raisin, Spice, Dried fruit
Palate.	Medium dry , Medium Acid, Medium tannin, Fortified to high level, Medium Dosey, Medium intensity, Dried fruit - raisin, sweet spice.

Section c)

Fortified wines of the Rhone.

- Vin doux Natural produced in the Rhone from Muscat Blanc A Petits Grains and Grenache (usually Grenache Noir).
- Muscat Beumes de Venise is a Vin doux Natural AC made from Muscat Blanc A Petits Grains only.
- Rasteau AC and Rasteau Rancio AC are made from Grenache Noir.
Rasteau Rancio AC is aged oxidatively, losing its primary fruit flavours to develop Tertiary / tertiary aromas. The aging process can take place in many ways, including CASK / tonneaux and in many different temperatures - cool, hot, humid. A minimum of 2 yrs aging for a Rasteau is required.
- Vin doux naturals are made by fortifying the fermenting must during fermentation, enabling the wine to retain its fruity character and ensuring some of the sugar remains to make a sweet wine. In the Southern Rhone (Continental Climate) Vin doux naturals are the main fortified wines.

Muscat Beumes de Venise is more delicate than Languedoc Muscat Blanc Petit Grains vin doux naturals due to it being fortified at a lower sugar level 110g/l as opposed to 125g/l. The Muscat Beumes de Venise displays all the characteristics of a Muscat with grape and orange blossom notes on both the palate + nose.

June 2011

Question 1 – La Gitana Manzanilla, Dow's Fine White Port, Carte d'Or Muscat Beaumes de Venise

Answers: 360

Passes: 256 (71%)

This was a good result but with very few distinction grades.

Common criticisms from the examiner were that some candidates are too "generic" in terms of their tasting note, for example, simply writing "*nuts*" on the nose or palate without specifying which type of nut. After all, the taste and aroma of an almond is very different from a walnut. Candidates often adopt a similar approach for characteristics such as "citrus", "floral", "spice". All of these would result in much more accurate tasting notes if specific examples were given rather than these generic category headings. Another area of weakness was in respect of describing how the wine had been matured. Here there was a tendency to describe the whole process of production rather than specifically the maturity of the wine as specified in the question. Finally, the White Port was often mistaken for something else – in many instances the identity was particularly illogical, such as identifying it as Oloroso Sherry or Rutherglen Muscat (it was completely the wrong colour for this).

Question 2 – In relation to fortified wine, write about each of the following:

- a) Use of PX in Jerez
- b) Single Quinta Vintage Port
- c) The Madeira Wine Company

Answers: 359

Passes: 212 (59%)

This was a fairly mediocre set of scripts with a clear divide between those candidates with sound knowledge and those who have a lot more work to do as evidenced by more than 20% of candidates achieving a fail (unclassified) grade. Each of the three sections had its own pitfalls, but by far the weakest section was on the Madeira Wine Company with many candidates clearly having no idea what this was.

The best responses were on PX. To answer this section well, candidates needed to consider the characteristics of the PX grape variety as well as its use in the specific styles of wine in which it is found in the Jerez region – this means not just in the production of Sherry but also its use in other areas of Jerez where it is grown. Far too many candidates said nothing at all about Montilla Moriles which is where the vast majority of this variety is grown.

When it came to the section on Single Quinta Vintage Port, too many candidates wrote about Port or the Douro in broad terms, such as listing the different varieties or describing the “Port method” of fortification, in the same way that many did in the March examination in respect of Colheita Port. Good candidates who really understood the production process for Single Quinta Vintage Port explained how this style is made in the same way as “true” Vintage, but from the fruit of a single vineyard. They described how producers of Vintage Port often have a top vineyard (Quinta) which forms the basis of their vintage blend, but which is also capable of producing wine of similar quality and style in an undeclared year. They explained how some producers only produce these wines in undeclared years, preferring to use the fruit in their Vintage Port in declared years, while others such as Quinta do Vesuvio release a Single Quinta Port every year, irrespective of the official “declaration”. They specified how these wines are aged and how this differs from other styles of Port (including Vintage) and also how the style of the wine differs from Vintage Port, with the best candidates knowing that whilst most of these wines are more approachable, faster maturing and less expensive than true Vintage Port, there are top quality exceptions such as Quinta do Noval Nacional – a Single Quinta Port which is generally regarded as the best vintage Port of all.