



**WSET® Level 4 Diploma in Wines and Spirits**

**Examiners' Report for 2014-15**

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## Introduction

This report is designed to assist students and those involved in the teaching of the Diploma by giving feedback on examination performance in the 2014-15 academic year. Where appropriate examiner observations on how well each question was answered are accompanied by excerpts from candidates' scripts. Statistical data on the pass rates for Diploma examinations for the past six years, together with general information on grade bands, appears in the Appendices.

**For detailed guidance on the type of questions set in the Diploma examinations and examination technique in general students should refer to the Candidate Assessment Guide.**

*Please note: Extracts from candidates' scripts in this report are anonymous and are reproduced here for information only, as submitted to the examiners. They have been included to illustrate the standard of answer required to pass or excel in the Diploma examinations. They may contain errors or omissions and should not be considered definitive answers to the question concerned. They may not be relied upon with reference to individual examination papers.*

*The information provided in this report relates to examinations held during the 2014-15 academic year and reflects assessment procedures in force at that time. You are advised to read this report in conjunction with the latest editions of the Specification and Candidate Assessment Guide.*

# Unit 1 – The Global Business of Alcoholic Beverages

Assessment for Unit 1 takes two forms: the open-book coursework assignment and the case study which is researched in advance but completed in a closed-book examination. The pass rate for both assessment types is high.

## Coursework assignments

Coursework assignments are marked out of 100. 80 marks are allocated to the content of the assignment, as set out in the assignment brief. The remaining 20 marks are available for the candidate's bibliography, presentation (including spelling, grammar and legibility) and the structure and style of the assignment (including overall coherence, flair, fluency and use of examples).

Key observations from this year's coursework assignment examiners are as follows:

- Candidates must address **every section of the assignment brief**. Failure to do so results in an automatic fail grade.
- Marks will be withheld where work is presented with **spelling and/or grammatical errors**; with computer spellcheck functions there is no excuse for mistakes of this kind. Candidates are advised to check their work carefully.
- The **bibliography** is an essential part of the coursework assignment. It should list a variety of sources (books, trade journals, internet articles, interviews, etc.).

As is to be expected, internet sources feature strongly in most candidates' bibliographies, but these should be used in conjunction with other types of source material such as text books, personal contact with subject experts and the trade press. Sources should have a strong commercial focus. Publications such as The Drinks Business or Just Drinks are useful for identifying current trends and topical issues; Wikipedia and amateur wine blogs should generally be avoided as these are less reliable. Candidates should refer to the Coursework Assignment Guidelines in the Candidate Assessment Guide for further guidance on how to present and reference bibliographies in their assignments, and the correct use of footnotes and appendices.

- Candidates are reminded that work submitted for assessment purposes **must not include any means by which they may be identified other than their candidate number**. Candidate names should not appear on the assignment in any form except the signature on the cover sheet.
- Candidates' attention is drawn to the **Collusion and Plagiarism** section of the Coursework Assignment Guidelines in the Candidate Assessment Guide. It is obvious to the examiners when sections of work have been copied from papers on the internet or when the assignment is otherwise not the sole work of the candidate. This is a serious disciplinary matter and such candidates receive an automatic fail grade. They may also be barred from completing the qualification.

## Case studies

The importance of using a diverse selection of credible research sources was also highlighted by the examiners of this year's case studies.

Comments on specific coursework assignment and case study questions follow.

### November 2014: Coursework Assignment

**Assignment title: Opportunities in the Chinese wines and spirits market.**

The emergence of China as a global political and economic force has been one of the defining developments of the last quarter of a century. In China itself there has been rapid industrialisation and urbanisation. An aspirational middle class has emerged. Producers of consumer goods elsewhere in the world have not been slow to realise the opportunities that exist to sell their products in China. Many parts of the drinks industry have been active in this regard. However, there are challenges to marketing, selling and distributing wines and spirits in China.

**a) Presentation and structure: 20%**

Assignments should include a declared word count and a bibliography correctly referenced throughout the body of the text.

**b) Introduction: 10%**

The candidate should present a summary of the key events since 1972 that have led to China opening up as a market for consumer goods.

**c) The Chinese drinks market: 15%**

The candidate should present an overview of the current market for wines and spirits in China, commenting on any major trends.

**d) Opportunities in China: 20%**

The candidate should describe the reasons why opportunities exist to expand sales of wines and spirits in China. The candidate should indicate particular product categories that could grow strongly in the Chinese market.

**e) Challenges in China: 25%**

The candidate should describe the major challenges that remain to companies importing and distributing, selling and marketing wines and spirits in China.

As in past years, the pass rate for the coursework assignments was high in both November and April. Failure is usually the result of the candidate not adhering to the assignment brief. For example, in the introduction to this assignment candidates were instructed to “present a summary of the key events since 1972 that have led to China opening up as a market for consumer goods”. With the use of the word “summary” and only 10 marks allocated, it was clear that a simple timeline such as the following was all that was required:

- 1972 President Nixon’s visit to China
- 1976 Death of Mao. Gang of Four purged. Cultural Revolution ends.
- 1977 Beijing Spring
- 1978 The beginning of the process of economic change under Deng Xiaoping
- 1979 Diplomatic relations established with the USA
- 1980 Creation of the first Special Economic Zone at Shenzhen (near Hong Kong). External investment and technology were brought in. The command economy was relaxed and markets were allowed to develop.

- 1986-1990 Open Door Policy to foreign investment further encouraging the development of a market economy.
- 1989 The Tiananmen Square Massacre that might have de-railed the economic progress
- 1989 Stock markets open in China
- 1992 Deng's trip to the south to endorse the reforms and encourage his successor, Jiang Zemin
- 1997 Hong Kong peacefully reverts to Chinese rule
- 2001 China joins the World Trade Organisation (WTO)
- 2004 China signs a free trade agreement with ten other south east Asian countries
- 2008 Beijing Olympics
- 2012 China's urban population overtakes its rural population for the first time

In this instance, the examiners were looking for breadth rather than depth. Many candidates failed to identify many of these key dates or spent far too long writing at length about some of them.

The overview of the Chinese drinks market was another area where a number of candidates came unstuck. Some wrote only about wines, ignoring the spirits category completely, or only commented on international brands, seemingly unaware of the dominance of domestically produced grain spirit "baijiu". Far too often statistics were presented with no meaningful analysis.

Whilst there were some very good assignments submitted, many were simplistic in their execution with little analysis or discussion of the market.

### November 2014: Case Study

#### **Wine in the on-trade**

Wine range selection can be a crucial factor in the success of an on-trade outlet (e.g. restaurant, bistro, bar, pub, etc.). It should be instrumental in making a significant contribution to the profitability of the business. Practicalities such as stockholding and profit margins are arguably more important than the aesthetics of which producers' wines are listed.

Creating a range of wines appropriate for the type of business is only the starting point. The range of wines available should suit the clientele and enhance the customer experience. Successful outlets will also look for ways to maximize sales. This could include initiatives as diverse as promotional activities and staff training.

The price of wine in on-trade outlets is a source of annoyance to consumers who are aware of the price that similar wines are sold for in supermarkets and other retail outlets. However, many of them fail to appreciate the reasons behind this price differential.

*All references to "on-trade" in this case study are interchangeable with "on-premise", "HORECA" and other similar terms.*

- a) What are the key commercial criteria that should determine the selection of a wine range for an on-trade outlet? (40% weighting)
- b) What can on-trade outlets do to maximise wine sales? (40% weighting)

c) How can on-trade outlets justify their mark up on wine? (20% weighting)

The pass rate for this topic was disappointing. Section (a) seemed to pose a challenge for some candidates although sections (b) and (c) generated better responses with some very interesting strategies described for maximising sales.

As in past examinations, some candidates did not structure their response to reflect either the weighting of marks or the specific content of the questions set. It is never a good idea to deviate from the format proposed by the question. A short essay plan is a good idea for any closed-book examination and helps to eliminate the danger of straying off-topic or omitting important aspects. It also allows the candidate to collect their thoughts and organise these under the headings presented in the question. An example of such an essay plan submitted by one candidate is given below.

If candidates run out of time, the essay plan can provide valuable evidence that they were considering key points for those sections they were not able to complete. This could generate one or two marks which could make the difference between a pass or fail grade.

QUESTION  
NUMBER

(Units 1, 4, 5 and 6 ONLY)

(Unit 3 ONLY)

Unit 

CANDIDATE No.

REG No.

Planning page

## Commercial criteria -

- Pricing to fit with the style
- Stock holdings + margin.
- Inventory.
- Supplier selection.
- Competitors in neighbourhood.
- Appropriate for cuisine.
- Too trendy, local cuisine.

WINSPID

## Maximise wine sales:

- Suggestion pairing
- Training
- Strategic (under priced wines)
- glassware choice
- Price to move
- Wine list segregation

- BYO night

## Mark ups:

- Break even on food.
- Glass breakages.
- Overheads (staff, rent,
- ~~Time~~ Time spent by sommelier choosing the list.



## March 2015: Case Study

### Sweet Wines

Sweet, unfortified wines made by the classic methods using botrytised, passito and frozen grapes are often highly regarded by those who work in the wine industry. Sadly, that enthusiasm is not reflected in the overall sales of wines in this category. Many people like sweet beverages; there does not appear to be an issue with soft drinks such as Coca-Cola which sell in enormous quantities. However, consumers seem to be resistant to the charms of many sweet wines although this is not always the case as shown by the current fashion for Moscato.

Sweet wines can vary hugely in style, quality and price. This is largely dependent on the method of production. At one end of the scale are ultra-expensive, fine wines and at the other are far more modestly priced examples which target a completely different market.

Sweet wines present unique challenges both for those who make them and those who sell them. They have been in and out of fashion over the years and it remains to be seen if their popularity can be enhanced or whether they will remain in relative obscurity.

- a) Why are unfortified sweet wines made by the classic methods using botrytised, passito and frozen grapes so expensive to produce? (30% weighting)
- b) What reasons do you believe exist to explain the unpopularity of these classic sweet wines with some consumer groups? (35% weighting)
- c) What can be done to increase the sales of these sweet wines? (35% weighting)

Many of those who passed this question did so with a basic pass rather than the higher merit and distinction grades. With a few exceptions, responses were basic and competent rather than engaging and imaginative.

Many candidates failed to bring the necessary analysis and application of knowledge to their essay, simply describing production processes in section (a) without relating these to costs. A significant number forgot to consider passito wines and there was very little discussion of the costs associated with vinification and maturation with many just focusing on the picking of noble rot grapes. This led to superficial answers that failed to address the topic in full.

## April 2015: Coursework Assignment

### Assignment title: Aggressive discounting in the wine market.

The aggressive discounting of price to promote wine in some key national retail environments has become common practice. It is controversial, and whilst it has apparent financial benefits for the consumer there are implications for others in the supply chain. It has been damaging for the long term commercial sustainability of some wines (e.g. Liebfraumilch, Sherry and certain branded New World wines) whilst, so far, Champagne appears to be immune.

#### a) Presentation and structure: 20%

Assignments should include a declared word count and a bibliography correctly referenced throughout the body of the text.

**b) Introduction – the purpose of aggressive discounting: 10%**

The candidate should describe the various reasons why price cutting is used in the retailing of wine. What are the various forms that this discounting can take?

**c) The positive and negative effects of aggressive price discounting: 20%**

The candidate should evaluate the positive and negative effects of aggressive price discounting of wine from the point of view of all those involved in the supply chain from producer to consumer via wholesaler and retailer.

**d) The effect of price promotion in the Champagne market: 25%**

The candidate should explain how Champagne manages to retain its prestigious image in spite of some producers using aggressive price discounting in some markets.

**e) The effect of price promotion on other categories of wine: 25%**

The candidate should select a product category (such as Liebfraumilch, Sherry and certain branded New World wines), where they think price discounting has had a significant negative impact on image and profitability in some markets. For their chosen category, they should describe what impact aggressive price discounting has had. What remedial action has, or could be, taken to address this?

The majority of candidates achieved a merit grade in this assignment. Those who failed often did so because they did not pay sufficient attention to the information made available to them in the assignment brief, such as the weighting attached to each section or the requirement to submit a minimum of 2500 words. There are always a number of candidates who ignore the various sections of the brief and write an essay that largely just expands on the “context” set out therein. As a result, they invariably fail to address the specific points the examiner is looking for or only include material of limited relevance.

The case studies in sections (d) and (e) were the key parts of this assignment. There was a disappointing lack of imagination on the part of candidates in this respect with most failing to look beyond the examples given in the brief (Liebfraumilch, Sherry and New World brands). The following example script was no exception in this respect, but is nevertheless well executed with evidence of very good research and sound critical thinking. The bibliography is not only extensive but varied and balanced. It is also well referenced in the body of the assignment.

# AGGRESSIVE DISCOUNTING IN THE WINE MARKET

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## Introduction

The aggressive discounting of wine is a far-reaching topic. To provide some focus I have limited much of my analysis to the UK off-trade.

The Guardian, in a 2013 article, stated that *"if you are a typical supermarket shopper, chances are this weekend you will pop a bottle of wine into your trolley – and it will almost certainly be on discount and quite likely even half price. Nine in 10 of the bottles of wine we drink in the UK are bought from the major supermarket chains, and 60% of those are on discount."*<sup>1</sup>.

In recent years wine discounting has become such a phenomenon that consumers can now find advice on-line and via "app" to search out the best value (supermarketwine.com<sup>2</sup>) or simply the lowest cost wines (moneysavingexpert.com<sup>3</sup>; winesdirect.co.uk<sup>4</sup>). Retailers, and other parts of the supply chain, will use discounting to increase brand awareness, increase sales, generate loyalty and sometimes simply to clear over-stocking. The typical styles of promotion seen in the off-trade are:

- Brand promotion – generating brand loyalty in the hope of increasing sales through focussed price promotion<sup>5</sup>.
- Loss leaders – putting a desirable product, such as champagne, on offer to attract customers in store on the basis that they will spend more on other wine or groceries<sup>6</sup>.
- Bulk discounting – discounting multiple bottles on the basis that more wine will be sold than normal<sup>7</sup>. The average transaction value at Majestic, for example, is a significant £129<sup>8</sup>.
- Stock clearance – bin ends and overstocked wines are discounted (potentially to a loss) to clear stocks and release capital<sup>9</sup>.
- Store loyalty – using loyalty schemes to reward regular customers with special discounts or gifts (either as Nectar/Clubcard or the old Oddbins style "Buy 5 cases get a free bottle of Champagne" approach<sup>10</sup>).
- Meal Deals – typically a main meal for two plus wine and a desert for £10 - £20<sup>11</sup>.

So how does this practice affect the supply chain and ultimately the consumer? Why are some wines able to withstand the practice and others not? What does history show us about ill-considered discounting practices?

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<sup>1</sup> The Guardian – Supermarket wine sales: wine rack or wine racket?

<sup>2</sup> <http://supermarketwine.com>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.moneysavingexpert.com/deals/cheap-wine-deals/>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.winesdirect.co.uk>

<sup>5</sup> Isaacs, Lee AIWS – Personal Interview

<sup>6</sup> Bampffield, Richard MW – Personal Interview

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.tesco.com> - wine by the case

<sup>8</sup> Majestic 2014 Report and Accounts: page 10

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.thewinesociety.com> - bin end sales

<sup>10</sup> Isaacs, Lee AIWS – Personal Interview

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.marksandspencer.com/s/food-and-wine/dine-in>

### The positive and negative effects of aggressive price discounting

During 2014 the average UK consumer spent just over £5 per bottle<sup>12</sup>; not much considering over £2 is duty<sup>13</sup>. In addition a discounting culture now seems deep-rooted, as does a trend of price over quality<sup>14</sup>.

Consumers seem aware of inflated costs and many only buy wine on discount<sup>15</sup>, but is this the full picture? There is increasing evidence that supermarket pricing is 'falsely' inflated to allow for discounting. Oz Clarke's damning analysis of the two for £10 'BOGOF' bottle was that the wine wasn't even worth £5 to start with, let alone £10<sup>16</sup>. This dangerous discounting spiral seems to be hitting some producers and retailers badly<sup>17</sup> and that fairly priced wine is left on the shelf<sup>18</sup>.

Discounting does however have some benefit for trade and volumes. After the banning of multi-buy discounts in Scotland sales fell at a significantly greater rate than in neighbouring England and Wales<sup>19</sup>. Supermarkets also seem to love discounting – it gives consumers what they want<sup>20</sup>. Discounting provides volume for mass producers where quality is perhaps not the driving force.

But how does this impact the smaller retailer and those with a desire for quality? Smaller retailers feel that the discounting culture restricts quality and reduces consumer interest and choice<sup>21</sup>. The Oxford Wine Company targets a 35% margin, which after bulk discounting and in-store promotions is reduced to 24%: a volume discount model, but more restrained. They are focussed on quality, smaller producers, variety and education: not available at your local supermarket.

Lidl was recently voted Wine Supermarket of the Year and also best value for money<sup>22</sup> - their goal is to prove low price does not equal low quality. They offer value wines from smaller brands<sup>23</sup> and attract premium shoppers with own labels whilst encouraging 'trading-up'<sup>24</sup>. Aldi and Lidl continue to take market share<sup>25</sup> but considering their pricing the margins can't be great. However you look at this the playing field isn't even. Supermarkets can offset wine discounts with profits elsewhere, with little regard to the impact on the wine industry. Wine-only retailers have no such ability, hence perhaps the failure of so many (e.g. Oddbins) in recent years.

Mass producers, such as Diageo and Treasury Wine Estates (TWE) do make profits, however volume pressure as well as oversupply seem real issues. TWE are undergoing significant restructuring to improve productivity and profitability<sup>26</sup>. Smaller producers that have a loyal following are probably

<sup>12</sup> Majestic 2014 Annual Report & Accounts: page 7

<sup>13</sup> Majestic 2014 Annual Report & Accounts: page 8

<sup>14</sup> The Drinks Business: Deep Discounting has "Muddied Water" in UK; Isaacs, Lee AIWS: Personal Interview; Ford, Ruth AIWS: Personal Interview.

<sup>15</sup> Isaacs, Lee AIWS: Personal Interview

<sup>16</sup> Harpers: Independents back Oz Clarke's exposure of supermarket half-price wine deals on BBC Watchdog

<sup>17</sup> Decanter: Heavy discounts blamed for sluggish wine sales say Constellation and Majestic

<sup>18</sup> Isaacs, Lee AIWS: Personal Interview

<sup>19</sup> McKenna, Gemma: Wine sales hit hardest by Scottish multi-buy ban

<sup>20</sup> Harpers: Wine Vision Live News Blog: Tesco's Dan Jago vision of being a world class wine business

<sup>21</sup> Isaacs, Lee AIWS: Personal Interview; Ford, Ruth AIWS: Personal Interview

<sup>22</sup> This Is Money: Experts crown Lidl best Supermarket wine

<sup>23</sup> Bampfield, Richard MW: Personal Interview

<sup>24</sup> The Drinks Business: Deep Discounting has "Muddied Water" in UK

<sup>25</sup> Decanter: Heavy discounts blamed for sluggish wine sales say Constellation and Majestic

<sup>26</sup> Treasury Wine Estates Annual Report 2014: pages 8 and 14 – 16

fine, but may not be there for the money in any case<sup>27</sup>. Wine making is not generally seen as a highly profitable business<sup>28</sup> and the price pressure forced on producers will not improve things. Mid-tier producers unless sufficiently differentiated from the competition may well fold or be acquired. It would seem more consolidation is inevitable to extract economies of scale in an increasingly competitive landscape<sup>29</sup>; choice and quality may suffer.

Sitting between retailers and producers are the distributors and wholesalers. They play a key role and can provide a buffer between supply and demand as well as market access for small/new producers whilst also reducing administration for the retailer<sup>30</sup>. However they also take profit from the system<sup>31</sup>. The modern short supply chain, favoured by the likes of Lidl, dispenses with this structure in favour of a more direct producer/retailer relationship executed via a broker for a fee<sup>32</sup>.

Distributors are typically independent or producer owned, such as Fells<sup>33</sup>. In a highly price competitive landscape the distributor will face pressure from both sides of the chain<sup>34</sup>. For those that are producer owned I am sure that sufficient support/margin is provided; their function is too important to the producers. For the independent distributors it is a volume game – a few pence per bottle, but on millions of bottles<sup>35</sup>. Consolidation again seems inevitable.

Aggressive discounting carries a lot of bad press, and rightly so. A 2013 article by Tim Atkin says it all: *“As one wine supplier told me: “It’s give and take. We give and they take.” You only have to look at what happens with annual alcohol duty increases – as often as not, producers and agents are told to swallow them or be delisted – to see what he means.”*<sup>36</sup>

Discounting has created a culture of over-inflated, potentially misleading, prices and put undue pressure on the supply chain. The result? The loss of choice and quality for the consumer. Discounting has reset price expectations and smaller, quality focussed, retailers find it hard to compete. It seems that the bulk wine world will be driven to further consolidation. At the other end will be boutique retailers and producers. The key is not to fall in-between.

### The effect of price promotion in the Champagne market

Champagne is considered to be *the* drink of celebration and success: associated with exclusivity, fashion and elite sports. Over centuries the consistency of image and quality has secured the Champagne brand an almost unassailable position and instant recognition.

However it would seem that Champagne is as vulnerable to discounting as other wines. Richard Bampfield stated, *“I am only aware of a supermarket intentionally making a loss on one style of wine, and that is Champagne.”*<sup>37</sup> Champagne is expensive to manufacture; the production cost of

<sup>27</sup> The New York Times: Winemaking Lures the Wealthy, but Not With Profits

<sup>28</sup> SVB on Wine: How Much Do Wineries Really Make?

<sup>29</sup> Practical Winery & Vineyard: Perfect storm forming

<sup>30</sup> Ford, Ruth AIWS: Personal Interview

<sup>31</sup> WEST: An Introduction to the UK Drinks Business page 9

<sup>32</sup> WEST: An Introduction to the UK Drinks Business page 9

<sup>33</sup> <http://www.fells.co.uk>

<sup>34</sup> Ford, Ruth AIWS: Personal Interview

<sup>35</sup> Ford, Ruth AIWS: Personal Interview

<sup>36</sup> OFL: Flogging a dead horse

<sup>37</sup> Bampfield, Richard MW: Personal Interview

basic Champagne is probably around £11 - £12<sup>38</sup> a bottle and thus the popular £10 deals seem to represent a true bargain for the consumer<sup>39</sup>.

*"We're very happy with selling our champagne to Aldi. Yes, £9.99 is a very low price but that is marketing by the supermarket. It has nothing to do with us. It doesn't affect how much they pay us for our champagne. We still make a good profit on our sales to them."*<sup>40</sup>

Discounting is increasingly criticised by Champagne itself, and there is concern that it could eventually damage the brand<sup>41</sup>. The supermarkets seem less bothered and strategically use discounted champagnes to get customers in the door and spending<sup>42</sup>. The producers must take some responsibility, although it is arguably harder for them to control<sup>43</sup>. Softening sales due to the economic downturn has inevitably led to some producer discounting<sup>44</sup>.

Current pricing seems to include a margin for discounting and savvy consumers will wait for bargains<sup>45</sup>. Whilst aggressive discounting has historically proved hard to reverse, does champagne remain mostly immune? Does brand image suffer?

Champagne has a long history and has consistently dealt with threats to brand and pricing. Originally a still sweet wine, champagne was introduced to the Court of Charles II by Charles de Saint-Évremond<sup>46</sup>. The drink became popular in C.17<sup>th</sup> high society where the accidental in-bottle second fermentation became a desirable feature<sup>47</sup>. The combination of stronger English glass and cork closures enabled this result without the bottle failure seen by the French<sup>48</sup>. Interestingly the first recording of *Methode Traditionnelle* was by Englishman Christopher Merret in 1662<sup>49</sup> whereas the infamous Dom Perignon<sup>50</sup> actually spent most of his career trying to eliminate the bubbles<sup>51</sup>. His famous quote, "Come quickly, I am drinking the stars!" was nothing more than brilliant marketing<sup>52</sup>.

Throughout the C.18<sup>th</sup> sparkling champagne became more popular and was associated with the fashionable courts of Europe. Many of the major houses, still known to this day, were founded in this period<sup>53</sup>. Always aware of market pressures wine-making modernisation ensured Champagne

<sup>38</sup> Bampfield, Richard MW: Personal Interview; Daily Mail: How do they sell Xmas Champagne for £9.99

<sup>39</sup> The Drinks Business: Champagne deals push prices below cost

<sup>40</sup> Daily Mail: How do they sell Xmas Champagne for £9.99

<sup>41</sup> Daily Mail: Lovely bubbly! Champagne price war as supermarkets slash the price of a bottle to as little as £8 in run-up to Christmas

<sup>42</sup> Daily Mail: How do they sell Xmas Champagne for £9.99

<sup>43</sup> Drinks International: Champagne discounting a bilateral challenge; Glass of Bubbly: Cut Price Champagne? – Bargain Bonanza or Brand Damaging?

<sup>44</sup> The Drinks Business: Champagne deals push prices below cost

<sup>45</sup> Bampfield, Richard MW: Personal Interview

<sup>46</sup> Graham Harding AIWS: Personal Interview and Wikipedia History of Champagne

<sup>47</sup> Champagne & Sparkling Wine, Tom Stevenson – page 9

<sup>48</sup> Champagne & Sparkling Wine, Tom Stevenson – page 9

<sup>49</sup> Champagne & Sparkling Wine, Tom Stevenson – page 10 and Wikipedia – Dom Perignon

<sup>50</sup> Wikipedia – Dom Perignon (monk)

<sup>51</sup> Champagne & Sparkling Wine, Tom Stevenson – page 10

<sup>52</sup> A short history of wine, Rodney Phillips – page 138

<sup>53</sup> The Oxford Companion to Wine, Jancis Robinson – page 151

was firmly established<sup>54</sup> by the end of C.19<sup>th</sup>. Advertising appeared in popular press, songs and plays<sup>55</sup>. Champagne Charlie hit the music halls<sup>56</sup>.

However Champagne faced many new pressures. The low price/quality of *faux champagnes* were highly damaging to the brand<sup>57</sup>. There was competition from other sparkling wines along with the additional pressures applied by Phylloxera<sup>58</sup>. By 1911 the Champagne Riots caused a near civil war and legislation was needed to protect the growers and the wine's reputation: demarcation zones for grape growing began. The foundations for the AOC were passed in law in 1919<sup>59</sup>. Regulations continued to be tightened in the 1980s to ensure that both quality and differentiation were preserved<sup>60</sup>. Protection of the Champagne name, fundamental to brand value, started with the Madrid system of 1891<sup>61</sup> and was reinforced in the Treaty of Versailles in 1919. Now EU agreements restrict the use of the name of Champagne (apart from some US exceptions) to wines from the AOC<sup>62</sup> ensuring that consumers develop trust and understand provenance. It seems that Champagne was always fast to act on any major threats to the 'brand'.

To further reinforce provenance the CIVC<sup>63</sup> was established in 1941<sup>64</sup>. This government directed cooperative remains highly effective and represents Champagne production and trade, growers, cooperatives and merchants. It is also responsible for the global promotion of the 'brand' and is key to champagne's continued success.

The global 'brand' of champagne and that of the champagne houses were carefully built and vigorously defended over many decades. They have been purposefully associated with socially desirable pursuits and elite sports. You can go back to 1910 and see the familiar name of Ruinart sponsoring Bleriot's Channel Crossing<sup>65</sup>. There is sponsorship of polo, sailing, The Boat Race, Wimbledon and F1<sup>66</sup>. The purchase of Armand de Brignac in 2014<sup>67</sup> by Jay-Z demonstrates that Champagne crosses all strata of society whether Sovereign or hip-hop royalty; it also shows that brilliant marketing and brand strength ensures \$300 for a bottle that cost relatively little to produce<sup>68</sup>.

Champagne still demands an average price roughly double of other sparkling wines<sup>69</sup>. Competition could still come from the increasing threat of Prosecco<sup>70</sup>; Champagne will undoubtedly react as quickly and decisively as it has before to defend its position. In fact a recent industry initiative

<sup>54</sup> The Oxford Companion to Wine, Jancis Robinson – page 151

<sup>55</sup> Harding, Graham AIWS: Personal Interview

<sup>56</sup> Wikipedia: George Leybourne

<sup>57</sup> Wikipedia: History of Champagne and Harding, Graham AIWS – Personal Interview

<sup>58</sup> The Oxford Companion to Wine, Jancis Robinson – page 151

<sup>59</sup> Wikipedia: History of Champagne

<sup>60</sup> The Oxford Companion to Wine, Jancis Robinson – page 150 - 151

<sup>61</sup> Wikipedia: Champagne

<sup>62</sup> Wikipedia: Champagne

<sup>63</sup> Le Comité Interprofessionnel du vin de Champagne

<sup>64</sup> The Oxford Companion to Wine, Jancis Robinson – page 171

<sup>65</sup> See Appendix

<sup>66</sup> Glass of Bubbly: Champagne Sponsorship and Awards

<sup>67</sup> Daily Mail: Jay-Z buys Armand de Brignac

<sup>68</sup> Quartz: How a racist remark led to Jay Z's newest investment—champagne

<sup>69</sup> WSET: An Introduction to the Global Drinks Business

<sup>70</sup> Bampffield, Richard MW: Personal Interview

dubbed Project 2030<sup>71</sup> has been established to counter falling profit margins along with other issues specific to the Champagne region.

Whilst aggressive discounting does impact profits, perhaps permanently, it does not yet seem to have dented the brand: focus must be given to this to ensure that this remains so. Champagne is perhaps simply more immune to discounting rather than completely so.

### The effect of price promotion on Sherry

Sherry has a poor image. Most people will instantly identify with Pale or Bristol Cream, grandparents, Christmas and little else: none of which, in my opinion, show sherry's true character and potential. So how did a drink like sherry that was once on par with champagne in both social standing<sup>72</sup> and price<sup>73</sup> end up at such a low ebb and passing from one calamity to another? Can we simply put this down to poor brand management and uncontrolled discounting? Quite possibly.

Sherry has much in common with Champagne. It can be dry or sweet, and drunk with all types of food. It is costly in both time and capital. However where they differ is in how the 'brand' managed threats, modernisation, fashion, cooperative brand management and ultimately price.

During the C.16<sup>th</sup> the established wine trade between England and Spain was interrupted by war. Drakes plunder of 2,900 pipes of wine in 1587 established sherry or 'sack' as a popular drink in England; sherry was enjoyed by the English courts. By the C.17<sup>th</sup> Century sherry was well established across a wider society and appeared, like Champagne, in much influential writing of the time<sup>74</sup>.

The C.18<sup>th</sup> saw further war and a divide appeared between England and Spain, impacting sherry export. The start of the C.19<sup>th</sup> and the Peninsular Wars did not help matters, but by the 1830s a few key names start to appear – Pedro Domecq and Manuel Maria Gonzalez Angel (the founder of Gonzales Byass) and a sherry boom, which reached its peak in 1870, started. Sparkling Champagne and Matured Sherry were pretty much on an equivalent price level<sup>75</sup>.

Phylloxera and economic depression then wiped out many producers<sup>76</sup> although wine reserves supported the more resilient through replanting<sup>77</sup>. However nobody sufficiently defended the sherry brand from the now prevalent '*bogus sherries*'<sup>78</sup>. The quality was abysmal in many cases and the brand, along with demand, in Victorian England was greatly damaged. With no coordinated actions or funding (unlike the efforts in Champagne) there was little to be done. In fact the geographical protection achieved by Champagne following the 1911 Riots was not repeated in Jerez until the 1990s<sup>79</sup> and thus the region lost out on the ability to secure a 'sense of place' and protect the brand and its pricing.

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<sup>71</sup> The Drinks Business: Champagne project promotes cooperation

<sup>72</sup> Jeffs, Julian, Sherry – page 28

<sup>73</sup> Oxford Wine Company Pricelist 1883

<sup>74</sup> The Oxford Companion to Wine, Jancis Robinson – page 624

<sup>75</sup> Oxford Wine Company Pricelist 1883

<sup>76</sup> The Oxford Companion to Wine, Jancis Robinson – page 624

<sup>77</sup> The Oxford Companion to Wine, Jancis Robinson – page 624

<sup>78</sup> Jeffs, Julian, Sherry – page 66

<sup>79</sup> The Oxford Companion to Wine, Jancis Robinson – page 623



To compound this changes in fashion were ignored. At the height of the boom 40% of the wine imported to England was sherry. However this was rich, sweet sherry and fashions and opinions (notably on health) changed and sherry was replaced by claret during the meal. The shippers did not respond other than a few selling highly discounted, inferior wines thus damaging the position further<sup>80</sup>.

Sherry needed to restore its image. Traders finally united under the Sherry Shipper Association, founded in 1910. There was a focus on quality. The Consejo Regulador was formed in 1933 to protect and control the industry and bring back quality standards<sup>81</sup>.

The 'villain' of the C.20<sup>th</sup> was Jose Maria Ruiz-Mateos<sup>82</sup>. Having secured a 99-year contract with Harveys of Bristol his growing Rumasa conglomerate commenced on a spiral of aggressive discounting<sup>83</sup> with little focus on quality<sup>84</sup>. The vital brand rebuilding at the start of the century was again set back. Julian Jeffs was personally involved with a number of producers at the time and felt quality was the way forward. He recommended a strategy of withholding wines from Rumasa combined with sweeping up poor-quality wines when they came on the market. This wasn't acted on<sup>85</sup>.

Further discounting mistakes were made during the latter part of the century. Low quality, unspecified Sherrys were shipped unquestioned to major markets such as the Netherlands, the only important factor being price<sup>86</sup>. With a reputation such as this and pricing on the floor, how does an industry recover?

Firstly Rumasa delivered one significant and lasting benefit to the region – the modernisation of sherry production that until that time had remained unchanged for a century<sup>87</sup>. This was an essential foundation for the survival of the remaining bodegas. Secondly the industry badly needed a return to quality and a loyal customer following. A few key people spotted this need. A great example was Lustau with the commencement of the *almacenistas* range in 1982; in fact all major shippers now have a quality range firmly aimed at the connoisseur<sup>88</sup> and the new ageing categories and labelling information<sup>89</sup> can only help with differentiation. Thirdly Jerez is seeing both a consolidation of major shippers to drive economies of scale for the value market combined with a rise in boutique bodegas focussed in small volume and high quality for the upper end of the market<sup>90</sup>. The final point here is pricing, ironically a result of the discounting that has plagued sherry for centuries. When you consider that a quality sherry aged for 30 years can be purchased for £19<sup>91</sup> whereas good

<sup>80</sup> Jeffs, Julian, Sherry – pages 73 – 74

<sup>81</sup> The Oxford Companion to Wine, Jancis Robinson – page 624

<sup>82</sup> Jeffs, Julian: Personal Interview

<sup>83</sup> The Oxford Companion to Wine, Jancis Robinson – page 624

<sup>84</sup> Jeffs, Julian: Personal Interview

<sup>85</sup> Jeffs, Julian: Personal Interview

<sup>86</sup> Jeffs, Julian, Sherry – page 85

<sup>87</sup> Jeffs, Julian, Sherry – pages 82-83

<sup>88</sup> Jeffs, Julian, Sherry – page 88

<sup>89</sup> Hugh Johnson, Jancis Robinson: The World Atlas of Wine – page 199

<sup>90</sup> Jeffs, Julian, Sherry – page 89

<sup>91</sup> Waitrose Cellar: Gonzalez Byass Matusalem Oloroso Dulce Muy Viejo Sherry

champagne is over £40<sup>92</sup>, sherry offers a genuine bargain as the least expensive fine wine in the world<sup>93</sup>.

In my opinion the sherry industry needs to continue with a two-pronged approach; canny marketing backed with a focus on quality. Sherry must distance itself from the sins of the past to stem the current slide in volumes<sup>94</sup>. An effective Consejo Regulador for coordinated promotion and quality control remains key. Sherry is once more being drunk throughout a meal; the tapas bar fashion<sup>95</sup> is, and will continue to be, highly instrumental in this; it is introducing a new generation of drinkers to sherry and dispelling the old 'fuddy' image. These current advantages must not be squandered.

**[Word count: 2,959]**

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<sup>92</sup> Waitrose Cellar: Pol Roger Pure Brut Nature NV

<sup>93</sup> Hugh Johnson, Jancis Robinson: The World Atlas of Wine – page 199

<sup>94</sup> Jeffs, Julian, Sherry – page 79

<sup>95</sup> Harpers: Anthony Rose on the story behind his new Tapas Bar Guide

Appendix

"Elite" sponsorship: Bleriot's Channel Crossing, 1910

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## June 2015: Case Study

### Négociants in Burgundy

*“A négociant is the French term for a wine merchant who assembles the produce of smaller growers and winemakers and sells the result under its own name.”* Wikipedia Definition.

The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries saw the emergence in Burgundy of several family owned companies that traded in wine. These ultimately became the major négociants that dominated the commerce in Burgundy for much of the twentieth century.

Over the last thirty years the Burgundy wine scene has changed markedly. It seemed that the traditional role of a négociant was unsustainable and several firms got into financial difficulties and underwent changes of ownership. Some commentators went so far as to signal the demise of the négociant.

However, a number of Burgundian négociants are very much alive and active today, both in the Côte d’Or and further afield. They vary in size from large, multi-brand, conglomerates to small domaine owners who now blend and bottle a little of their neighbours’ wines. Challenges remain, but today’s négociants have managed to be successful by evolving and diversifying their businesses.

- a) Describe the traditional role of Burgundian négociants. (25% weighting)
- b) How has the Burgundian négociant model evolved and diversified over the last thirty years? (50% weighting)
- c) Going forward, what are the main challenges facing négociants in Burgundy? (25% weighting)

Most candidates had no problem covering enough of the valid points to ensure a pass in this examination. The information required to do so was readily available and there was frequent reference in candidates’ scripts to the same articles, found via a Google search. However, as is often the case, there were few examples of original thought (especially in section (c)) with most candidates simply duplicating facts they had absorbed during their research.

The following script is reproduced here to show what can be achieved in the time available **if** the candidate has researched the topic thoroughly **and** absorbed this information ahead of the examination. This candidate submitted an impressive 13 pages of text when many struggled to produce 2 or 3.

The traditional role of the negociant in Burgundy has been largely shaped by the highly fragmented ownership of the region's land area. While other large quality areas such as Bordeaux have been characterised by external investment and large estates, Burgundy land ownership has meant there are many small land owners and growers without the means to vinify their own grapes. The route of this was the fact that while viticulture has existed since 300 AD in the region, it was the Monks, particularly Benedictine & Cistercian who were the land owners until the French revolution. ~~After~~ After the French Revolution, land was confiscated from Monks & sold. Due to Napoleonic inheritance laws, unique in Burgundy - the land was divided equally among the family upon inheritance. This means that over time the land ownership became highly fragmented, and individual owners may only own 1-2 vines over a vineyard. A single grand cru appellation for example, may have up to 80 owners. Therefore in 1700s, negociants or merchants began buying either grapes, must or wine, and vinifying it to sell under their name. Some sites, however remain monoplot - single ownership of one vineyard such as Clos de la Rancee Cotees famous La Tache vineyard.



This style of winemaking didn't evolve in the parts of France until later when co-operatives unified wine from several growers - although this is more a situation where growers are members and pool resources to unify vines together.

For example, the first negociants were companies like Bouchard Pere et Fils - based in Beaune.

Began by Michel Bouchard a textile merchant in ~~1731~~ 1731 - began by buying grapes and must or finished wine from many growers - from Grand Cru to Regional appellations level, blending the wines in Beaune faults and selling under the negociant name. Other early companies were Champy - which began in 1720 - and produced wines of varying quality, until taken over from the Meunier family in the 90s, when quality improved. Chanson, another early negociant, again produced wines from purchased grapes throughout Burgundy, in the 1990s there were many reports of varying quality produced by negociants. Tim Atkin reported in the Guardian back in 2001 about varying quality - saying some - such as Bouchard (whose quality improved in the late 90s) and Joseph Drouhin produce good quality wine, other are questionable. The area has even been speculative of blending and breaking appellations rules. The AC system in Burgundy was established in 1930, and various systems have allowed improved adherence, although en-recently one producer in Chablis was reported in the Drinks Business to have blended wine from outside the region into their wine.

Chanson has had quality improve since being purchased by Billinger in 1999, and improvements

made to their wineries.

Part of the reason why historically negociants were so important in Burgundy is because there were not large co-operatives in the ~~Côte de Beaune~~ Côte d'Or (more have evolved in Beaujolais, Mâconnais and Chablis since 1930s such as large Le Chablisienne co-op in Chablis), is because while vineyard plots were so small that each grower only grew a small amount of wine, even if a grower could vinify into wine - ~~it~~ it could only be sold in barrel. ~~as~~ The process of 'Estate bottling' (USA) or 'Chateau bottling' (Bordeaux) came late to Burgundy. American Frank Schoonmaker and Russian Alexis Lichner did not introduce 'domain bottling' as called in Burgundy until 1950s.

By 1963 - only 15% of wines in Burgundy were domain bottled, compared to around 50% in 1990s. These negociants were needed to purchase grapes/must/wine and sell as they had facilities to vinify and bottle. There was also the concept of the 'negociant-cleveur' - who 'brought' up the wine by blending and ageing in their cellars, therefore influencing the style of the wine. Negociants were criticised for not showing 'terroir' of wines important in Burgundy as each lieu dit or climat has own soil and microclimate giving character to the wine. - this was the basis of the Grand and Premier Cru system.

a) first described term by monks and haded down. While many top quality negociants do show terroir in the wines, many large negociants were criticised until late 90s for simply blending without much care to the wines.

Historically, high land prices and inheritance laws, with the absence of a crop in Côte d'Or, meant negociants were vital for the production of most of the region's wines, while "Domaines" who produced wines produced a smaller, ~~but~~ share of the region's production. Historically, domain wines were often considered better quality, but this situation is changing.

There has been a large structural shift in Burgundy in the last 30 years. The advent of Domain Bittling since the 1960s, in particular, as introduced by Frank Schramm and Alex Lichner, meant for the first time, domains could, especially through mobile bottling plants, unify, bottle and sell their own wines. But the problem remains that besides the large, quality domains with large land holdings, such as Domaine Romanée Contée, Lafleur etc, smaller producers did not have the means to do that. There have been several ways that Burgundy negotiant model has changed in the last 30 years. These are predominantly:

- 1) - through acquisition of negotiant companies by other negotiant companies to grow large businesses
- 2) acquisition from outside the area.
- 3) Current negociants diversifying their business into other regions and products
- 4) Increased investment by negociants in quality production, such as emphasis on terroir, and increased organic and biodynamic production.
- 5) The biggest impact since late 90s and 2000s has been the so called "rise of the micro-negotiant" - negociants acting more like domains in that they produce small quantities of quality wines.

The biggest shift in the words of Olivier Bernstein, speaking to Benjamin Lerner MW in Decanter recently, is that "the lines between the negociant and the domain are becoming increasingly blurred" - where negociants may own land, and domains are buying their own negociant companies.

Some examples:

1) acquisitions - traditional negociants have diversified into other areas eg. Beaulieu negociant bought Penet & Fils ~~but~~ began buying more Chablis and Burgundy vines.

Bejt vic c Terni recently in 2014 purchased large domain ~~with~~ Chateau hadne and included many Grand cru + 1<sup>st</sup> cru lands associated.

Faiveley's current family leader Erwin Faiveley bought Barland-Simon negociant in Chablis

2) Outside acquisitions occurred especially in troubled period of the 80s and 90s.

Jadot was purchased by Rudy Kief + driven over by USA Kiebrand. Drouhin

~~This~~ Drouhin, which was in family hands until was purchased privately by Japanese Snob brand, until the family bought back majority share.

Chanson was bought by Billinger, and Bouchard was bought by other Champagne Joseph Heintz in 1998. d. Veuve Clicquot.

3) Oversaturation of the business - some regions such as Bissett - began early in 60s but has had major success by acquiring many other regions and also going into other business like vodka. It has also developed markets in Canada, Uruguay and Chile.

Drouhin, ironically as Joseph Drouhin only wanted to trade in Burgundy, was first region to trade outside area, by buying estate in Oregon in 1988. Now back in Family hands, the estate - which is biodynamic - is run by Veronique Drouhin.

4) Increased focus on quality production.

Many such as Chanson under Billinger's control, Drouhin, Leflanc have gone biodynamic. Lalou Bize-Leroy - who was ousted by Domaine Romanee Cotee after she set up a competing negociant in Domaine Leroy in 1988 - has invested quality region she runs Leroy to biodynamic, with focus on tiny yields and minimal intervention.

5) The biggest change has been the so-called  
era of the micro-regiment.

There has been a shift by many producers  
to go back to what makes Burgundy great -  
the evidence of terroir in the wine.

With land prices so expensive, many  
producers can't afford to buy land, but  
can buy grapes or vines and make their  
own wines. Many, such as Rupert Millier,  
DNK's Business have commented on the quality.

The 'vines to watch' are -

Olivier Bernstein - began negociant business in 2007  
and focuses on Grand Cru. Now owns 2 small  
estate sites 2012 - Grand Cru + 1 vine

Cru Grand Cru Les Champagnes. He has commented  
on increased prices and how it forces  
quality producers to buy grapes -

domain in Grand Cru + premiere  
cru will always need to sell some  
grapes for cash flow, meaning this  
micro-negociant business on France.

- Other such as Alix de Montille set up  
her negociant business deaux Montille as  
family domain in Volnay - and she wanted  
to make white wines. After poor

harvests due to hail (the biggest  
hazard in Burgundy) in 2000-13 vintages,  
she set up negociant business and  
makes small parcels of high quality  
wines, including top whites.

Benjamin Lemerx left Comte Arnaud in Pomerol to set up his micro-négociant with UK backing - pushing high quality wines.

Likewise ex-pastor chef Dominique Laurent set up his business Dom. Laurent and buys wines which he blends in Gory-Nuit St-Céaire. Some, such as America Alex Gamble - another new micro-négociant committed the focus on small, quality production is something the larger négociants can't do. He began buying wine and blending, now buys grapes and says he is able to have more control on quality of grapes and showcase terroir.

Others - such as négociant Laurent de Meunier prefer to let the "grows du terroir" and he makes the wine - more of a traditional role. Not all of these micro-négociants have been commercially viable - such as Nicolas Potel - who makes quality wine for Berg Brothers - who was taken over by another négociant Laurent Rei - but still makes the wine.

As Andre Leflaive puts it "he doesn't see myself as a wine maker, not a négociant" as I see everything through from grape going to bottling" he set up Maison Leflaive to make niche terroir-clones wines separately from Domaine Leflaive - together with influence of cousin Anne-Claude, a big advocate of



brodynami pashutu who sadly died this year.

So there has been a big shift where negociants are more likely to influence and be influenced from outside Burgundy - with investments and ventures in other countries. There is bigger likelihood of outside ownership in the last 30 years - such as Kobro's purchase of Louis Jadot.

Emphasis on quantity, smaller production by micro-negociants or "terroir negociants" as Jean's Robinson but it is Decanter 2011.

There are increasingly blurred lines where negociants are likely to own large areas of land - Dujac for example began as a ~~negociant~~ domaine before son Pierre began Dujac Père et Fils negociant business recently. - So negociants may act more like domaines, while domaines may purchase grapes or wine to produce other styles of wine - this was especially important during the frost damaged vintages of 2010-13.

The main challenges facing Burgundy will be:

- 1) Increased cost of land, and increased cost of grapes in the face of increased global demand
- 2) Challenges due to struggles within Burgundy caused by outside influences
- 3) Competing in an increasingly complex global market.

1) Land costs - due to the Napoleonic inheritance laws the land areas and complexity of huge numbers of ACs especially at premier cru level - mean it is increasingly impossible for domains to expand by purchasing land - one of the reasons why so many have diversified into the negot trade as grapes used will always be sold by domain for cashflow - especially when needed after.

Olivier Bernier commented after his 2012 purchases of Grand premier Cru - Les Champagnes and Grand Cru Maris-Champagne - only tiny areas - that prices have got so expensive he would never be able to do that now.

In fact some purchases from outside Burgundy have caused great concern for Burgundians: LVMH purchased Chateau de Clos de Lambray in 2014 for reportedly hundreds of millions of euro.

American IT mogul Michel Sarni purchased land in 2012, and a Chinese Billionaire who bought the crumbling down Chateau Chambeartin in 2012 caused outcry as these estates are now too expensive for Burgundians to purchase.

The other challenge is the competition globally - The BNB reported in 2014 - 50% of Burgundy wine is exported - great for companies like LVMH and Ro who export up to 80% of wine or for companies like J. & F. Cochet with K. Brandt backing - especially as USA overtook UK as leading export of Burgundy in 2014. Sales by volume are down in 2014 as regional lines quality regional AOC wines in particular now have to compete with the likes of Chile - now producing Pinot Noir. In France - 50% of the Burgundy market - half market is restaurants - affected by recession in 2009, but showing improvement now.

The greatest challenge will be to continue to put emphasis on what makes Burgundy great - emphasis on quality, longevity and terroir - as the microproducers do - to make Burgundy unique and occupy a distinctive place in the market in the future.

With high land costs, cut of production and small ownership of domains, producers and negociants can't afford to focus on poor quality areas or areas that are not unique.

Half of the market is France, within that 50% is restaurants and off-trade the other off-trade is mostly supermarkets. The BVB reported that French consumers are ~~more~~ more likely to spend over €20 on a bottle of Burgundy (28%) than other French regions (<5%) - therefore emphasis on quality will be important.

As the US is becoming such a big export market, many are focusing on the USA - Jodet has a huge 'Love Jodet' campaign in the USA - others such as Labonne Reu and Beje in 'Terroir' have U.S. Distributors and firms in those markets. The other markets for the

microproducers in particular will be the emerging markets of China.

## Unit 2 – Wine Production

The multiple-choice questions used on the Unit 2 papers for 2014-15 are still live and so are not reproduced here.

The pass rate for this paper is high and candidates should feel confident of success provided they have studied the Unit 2 course materials in depth. **As in previous reports, the examiners would remind candidates that viticulture and vinification are pervasive topics which are relevant for all Units of the Diploma examination.** Many seem to forget to revise viticulture and vinification when it comes to studying for subsequent Units, particularly the Unit 3 theory examination where questions often require candidates to apply their knowledge of these topics to specific wine regions.

## Unit 3 – Light Wines of the World

Unit 3 tasting and theory examinations were held in January and June 2015.

### General Comments

As usual, candidates who performed poorly on the **Unit 3 tasting papers** tended to be let down by a failure to follow the Level 4 Systematic Approach to Tasting Wine® (SAT) or an apparent lack of tasting experience which meant that they misread the structural components of the wines. Full guidance on how to use the SAT in Diploma tasting examinations appears in the Candidate Assessment Guide.

A consistent theme of examiner feedback is that candidates underestimate what is required to pass the **Level 3 theory examination**. Units 4, 5 and 6 are much narrower in scope and require less study and preparation time. Perhaps because of this, the examiners have the impression that candidates assume the Unit 3 theory paper to be less challenging than it is. Success in the Unit 3 theory examination requires commitment and application over an extended period, together with a clear understanding of examination technique.

The examiners noted broadly the same issues with the Unit 3 theory scripts as in previous years:

1. **Time management.** Many candidates seem not to plan their answers before they start to write meaning they veer off-topic and/or run out of time. Candidates should read the Candidate Assessment Guide which contains essential guidance on how to approach the different types of question in the examination. They should also practise writing answers to exam-style questions in timed conditions. Students who participate in exam preparation/question-marking schemes tend to perform better in the examinations than those who do not. Many Diploma Programme Providers run marking schemes for their students or candidates can apply to join the WSET Diploma Assessment Preparation scheme ('DAPs').
2. **Answering the question set.** There are two interrelated issues here, one concerning examination preparation and the other concerning examination technique:
  - There is evidence that candidates are not preparing sufficiently, either by failing to cover the Unit 3 syllabus in the necessary detail or by omitting to revise the basic principles of viticulture and vinification studied for Unit 2 which are often the basis for questions in this examination.

All Unit 3 theory questions carry an equal weighting of marks such that two or three good or very good answers are unlikely to compensate for one or two poor ones. Candidates must ensure that they have studied and revised all the relevant topics for the examination, as set out in the Specification.

- Diploma examination questions are carefully worded to encourage candidates to engage with the topic in the right way. More often than not, this means a candidate going beyond simple description in their answers to explain not just 'what' something is but 'how' and 'why'. Too many candidates fail to read the question carefully and launch into writing all they know about a given topic without applying their knowledge to answer the question set. Marks are not available for irrelevant information, no matter how correct.

## Unit 3 Tasting Papers

### Unit 3 Tasting Paper 1, Question 1

The first three wines are always from the same, or predominantly the same, grape variety, as indicated on the question paper. In the pressure of the exam situation, some candidates still seem to find a different grape for each wine or fail to identify the grape at all. Others seem to identify one wine as a 'banker' and then reverse-engineer their answers to the other two accordingly. It is important that candidates do not jump to conclusions but taste all three samples with an open mind before giving logical reasons for their conclusions by reference to each of the three wines.

<b>January 2015: Unit 3 - TASTING PAPER 1, Question 1</b>	
<b><i>Wines from a single, unspecified grape variety</i></b>	
<b>Wine 1</b>	Country: Chile Region: Central Valley Wine: Casillero del Diablo Cabernet Sauvignon 2013 Producer: Viña Concha y Toro
<b>Wine 2</b>	Country: France Region: Bordeaux, St-Estèphe Wine: Château Beau-Site 2005 Producer: Borie-Manoux
<b>Wine 3</b>	Country: USA Region: California, Napa Valley Wine: Frog's Leap Cabernet Sauvignon 2011 Producer: Frog's Leap
<p>Cabernet Sauvignon was correctly identified by the majority of candidates but many were let down by poor explanations in the assessment of quality and readiness for drinking/potential for ageing sections. Guidance on how to answer these conclusion sections is available in the Candidate Assessment Guide.</p> <p>Candidates are reminded that specific descriptors are required for aroma and flavour characteristics. It is not sufficient to rely on generic terms or cluster headings, e.g. 'black fruit' or 'spice'. The examiners are looking for evidence of detailed engagement with the wine evidenced by the use of specific descriptors to describe aroma and flavour characteristics.</p>	

**June 2015: Unit 3 - TASTING PAPER 1, Question 1**

***Wines from a single, unspecified grape variety***

<b>Wine 1</b>	Country: France Region: Burgundy Wine: Domaine William Fèvre Chablis 2013 Producer: Domaine William Fèvre
<b>Wine 2</b>	Country: Australia Region: Pemberton / Yarra Valley Wine: Hardys HRB D652 Chardonnay 2011 Producer: Thomas Hardy & Sons
<b>Wine 3</b>	Country: USA Region: California Wine: Wild Boy Chardonnay 2012 Producer: Au Bon Climat

The majority of candidates identified the grape as Chardonnay and gave sound reasons why, namely the evident lees, MLF and oak characters. Some assumed that the identification of the variety applied only to the last wine on the paper when the question made it clear that all three wines were from the same grape and reasons had to be drawn from across the set.

The following conclusion achieved full marks:

*“Chardonnay – The 3 wines are very different, which is indicative of a versatile variety that responds well to a winemaker’s influences. Wine 2 is clearly oaked and necessitates a varietal that takes well to oak, as well as lees ageing, as in wine 3. Additionally they lack heavily aromatic fruit that precludes them from being aromatic varieties”.*

Many underestimated the Chablis, overlooking the complexity afforded by lees and the subtle minerality on this wine. The pronounced oak character of the second wine was also missed by some candidates with others citing it as evidence of ageing potential, which is inaccurate.

The following answer on Wine 1 is of a very good standard. The candidate identified the origin and quality level of this wine successfully and described the structure of the wine accurately. When describing the aroma and flavour characteristics of the wine the candidate does well to give the cluster heading followed by a more specific descriptor (e.g. *“green fruit (apple)”*). As noted in the previous section, it is the descriptor that gets the mark so this is a good habit to get into. For additional credit, the candidate should have mentioned the secondary characteristics in evidence on this wine, notably the dough and biscuit character from extended lees contact and the creamy lees flavour.



## WINE No. 1

### Appearance:

the wine is clear and bright with pale intensity and lemon-green color. The wine shows legs

### Nose:

the nose is clean with medium(+) intensity and shows aromas of ~~also~~ white flowers such as camomille, citrus fruit as lemon, green fruit as <sup>yellow</sup> apple and pear, some stone fruit like peach

the wine is youthful ✓

### Palate:

the wine is dry with high acidity. The alcohol is medium and the body is medium. The wine ~~shows~~ has medium(+) intensity and shows flavors of: green fruit (apple), citrus (lemon) minerality ✓

The finish is medium(+) ✓

### Country and region of origin: (2 marks)

FRANCE · CHABLIS

### Assessment of quality: (6 marks)

Very Good Quality: the wine shows bright acidity balanced by fruit ~~flavor~~ (green fruit and citrus). There is an attractive minerality that gives more depth to the fruit.

The finish shows a lingering apple & lemon accompanied by minerality. It lacks more complexity to be outstanding.

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

Can drink now but has potential for ageing. The acidity and the fruit can sustain ageing for at least 3-5 years.

### Unit 3 Tasting Paper 1, Question 2

Question 2 involves three wines linked by origin or which share another common feature. For 2014-15, the wines in the January flight were from the same region and the wines in the June flight were from the same country. Despite this being explicit in the question for each exam, some candidates overlooked the common link connection and were consequently at a disadvantage.

The examiners would again stress the importance of reading the question carefully. Knowing that three wines are from the same origin is a key advantage in a blind tasting scenario as it allows the taster to think laterally about likely grape varieties.

#### January 2015: Unit 3 - TASTING PAPER 1, Question 2

##### *Wines from the same, unspecified country of origin*

<b>Wine 4</b>	Country: France Region: Alsace Wine: Trimbach Muscat Réserve 2013 Producer: F.E. Trimbach
<b>Wine 5</b>	Country: France Region: Alsace Wine: Trimbach Pinot Gris Réserve 2011 Producer: F.E. Trimbach
<b>Wine 6</b>	Country: France Region: Alsace Wine: Trimbach Riesling Réserve 2011 Producer: F.E. Trimbach

A disappointing set of scripts. Many candidates mistook the Muscat for Gewurztraminer and described it as off-dry when this was in fact a dry wine. Body was also overstated. These two elements – together with the characteristic floral and grape aromatics – should have been enough to take candidates to Muscat.

The Pinot Gris was the least well answered wine with many again failing to read the sweetness level accurately. Wine 6 was identified as a Riesling by many candidates but the reasoning was often insufficient. Pale colour, high acidity, high extract and petrol-like aromas, together with a lack of oak and MLF indicators are all markers for this grape.

The common link – Alsace as the region of origin for all three wines - was correctly identified in some cases, but again explanation was lacking. With five marks for identifying the country and a further five for reasons why, comprehensive answers were required. The examiners expected candidates to note that the grape varieties represented were unlikely to be found anywhere other than Alsace with the levels of acidity, alcohol and the green fruit character typical of this cool climate region.

**June 2015: Unit 3 - TASTING PAPER 1, Question 2*****Wines from the same, unspecified country of origin***

<b>Wine 4</b>	Country: Region: Wine: Producer:	New Zealand Martinborough Te Kairanga Martinborough Estate Riesling 2011 Te Kairanga Wines Ltd
<b>Wine 5</b>	Country: Region: Wine: Producer:	New Zealand Central Otago Yealands Estate Winemakers Reserve Pinot Noir 2013 Yealands Family Wines
<b>Wine 6</b>	Country: Region: Wine: Producer:	New Zealand Hawke's Bay Villa Maria Reserve Gimblett Gravels Cabernet /Merlot 2010 Villa Maria Estate Ltd

Many candidates struggled with this flight by not giving complete answers, missing elements of the SAT and giving poor reasons for their choice of country. The best candidates noted the high acidity in all three wines together with the purity of fruit as markers for New Zealand. The combination of varieties represented was also a pointer. Many candidates plumped for Australia which was given some credit but the sweetness and low alcohol of the Riesling is more common in New Zealand.

**Unit 3 Tasting Paper 2, Question 3**

This question is designed to test candidates' ability to distinguish between three wines of differing quality levels from the same region. Candidates are not asked to identify the wines but to give detailed quality assessments instead.

As with other quality assessment questions, candidates often fail to maximise marks by not explaining in detail why a wine is 'acceptable', 'good', 'very good' or 'outstanding', as the case may be. With up to 10 marks available for a 'detailed assessment of quality' (depending on the wines shown), the examiners are not only looking for a correct statement of the quality of the wine using SAT terminology but well-argued reasoning and analysis that demonstrates an understanding of the elements of the wine that contribute to that quality level.

The 'B-L-I-C' acronym is a helpful starting point here, and candidates should always aim to comment on the wine's balance, length, intensity and complexity. Many seem to be familiar with this framework but fail to apply it in a meaningful way to the wine in front of them. It is not sufficient to describe a wine as 'balanced' or 'complex' without explaining how or why. More guidance on writing assessment of quality answers in the exams appears in the Candidate Assessment Guide.

**January 2015: Unit 3 - TASTING PAPER 2, Question 3*****Part-specified wines***

<b>Wine 7</b>	Country: Spain Region: Rioja Wine: Viña Pomal Gran Reserva 2006 Producer: Bodegas Bilbaínas
<b>Wine 8</b>	Country: Spain Region: Rioja Wine: Viña Pomal Reserva 2009 Producer: Bodegas Bilbaínas
<b>Wine 9</b>	Country: Spain Region: Rioja Wine: Ederra Crianza 2011 Producer: Bodegas Bilbaínas

Wine 7 was clearly of very high quality and was well answered by many. The Crianza proved more difficult for the majority, however, leading to low marks overall. Candidates that misread quality on two of the three wines struggled to gain enough marks to pass.

**June 2015: Unit 3 - TASTING PAPER 2, Question 3*****Part-specified wines***

<b>Wine 7</b>	Country: France Region: Rhône Valley Wine: Domaine Le Couroulu Vacqueyras Cuvée Classique 2011 Producer: Domaine Le Couroulu
<b>Wine 8</b>	Country: France Region: Rhône Valley Wine: Val de Garrigue 'Cuvée du Pape Jean XX' Châteauneuf-du-Pape Vieilles Vignes 2012 Producer: Bouchard Père et Fils
<b>Wine 9</b>	Country: France Region: Rhône Valley Wine: 'Les Galets' Côtes du Rhône 2012 Producer: Domaine de Grandes Serres

The question was answered poorly with candidates typically performing well on Wine 8 but struggling to give accurate assessments of the other two. As with the January paper, few candidates gave sufficient reasoning for their conclusions as to quality level or misread quality level entirely.

### Unit 3 Tasting Paper 2, Question 4

This is the 'mixed bag' question where candidates are typically asked to identify the grape variety / (ies) and origin of three unspecified wines.

Candidates are reminded that relatively few marks are available for identifying the wines in this flight; as with the other tasting questions the emphasis is still on describing the wine comprehensively and accurately. It is possible to identify all three wines correctly but fail this question, just as it is possible to misidentify them having given otherwise sound tasting notes and pass. Candidates should focus on writing full tasting notes in accordance with the SAT.

<b>January 2015: Unit 3 - TASTING PAPER 2, Question 4</b>	
<b><i>Unspecified wines</i></b>	
<b>Wine 10</b>	Country: France Region: Loire Valley Wine: Les Hauts Pémions Muscadet Sèvre et Maine Sur Lie 2013 Producer: SCEA Christophe Drouard
<b>Wine 11</b>	Country: Germany Region: Mosel Wine: Sybille Kuntz Estate Riesling Dry 2010 Producer: Weingut Sybille Kuntz
<b>Wine 12</b>	Country: New Zealand Region: Marlborough Wine: Tinpot Hut Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc 2014 Producer: Tinpot Hut Wines
<p>This flight was well-answered in the main and the examiners were pleased to see that many candidates identified the New Zealand Sauvignon and Mosel Riesling correctly. The Muscadet caused more problems, with many overlooking the simplicity of this wine.</p> <p>Some candidates still seem to struggle with readiness for drinking/potential for ageing. As with quality assessments, explanation is required. For Wine 11, <i>“Can drink now but has potential for ageing due to ripe fruit flavours with bright acidity – 3-5 years to develop honeyed, toastier flavours”</i> is an example of a good response. The best answers always consider whether a wine will hold, improve over time or develop further to display a different taste and aroma profile.</p>	

**June 2015: Unit 3 - TASTING PAPER 2, Question 4*****Unspecified wines***

<b>Wine 10</b>	Country: France Region: Loire Valley Wine: Baumard Côte d'Or Coteaux du Layon 2013 Producer: Domaine des Baumard
<b>Wine 11</b>	Country: Spain Region: Rias Baixas Wine: Fillaboia Albariño Producer: Bodegas Fillaboia SA
<b>Wine 12</b>	Country: Argentina Region: Mendoza Wine: Trapiche Gran Medalla Malbec 2011 Producer: Bodegas Trapiche

The usual gripes with this question, chief amongst them the fact that many candidates missed out on potential marks by omitting to mention the structural components of the wine in accordance with the SAT. The examiner also noted that many candidates simply did not write a sufficient number of descriptors for aroma and flavour characteristics. Candidates should try to be as comprehensive in their descriptions of aroma and flavour profile as possible.

## Unit 3 Theory Papers

### January 2015: Section A – Compulsory Question

**The Syrah based wines of the Northern Rhône vary significantly in quality and price. Why is this? (60% weighting)**

**Comment on the use of this variety in each of the following (20% weighting for each location):**

**Version 1: Hunter Valley & Hawke's Bay**

**Version 2: Hunter Valley & California**

**Version 3: California & Hawke's Bay**

The pass rate for this question was disappointing, largely due to superficial responses on the New World regions. Most candidates were able to complete the section on the Northern Rhône to the standard required for a pass grade although there were some who wrote in general terms about the Rhône as a whole or failed to cover the relevant Northern Rhône ACs. When considering the issues that affect quality and price in the Northern Rhône candidates were better on those relating to production (soils, topography, production costs, yield management, vintage variation, harvesting techniques) but there were some key omissions such as age of vines or vinification techniques. Very few thought beyond production to other factors such as market forces, economies of scale, supply and demand, cost of land, etc.

### January 2015: Section B

**Discuss the progress that has been made in Sicily in moving from bulk wine production to making quality wines with distinct varietal and geographical character.**

***(An essay format is COMPULSORY for this question)***

Just over half of the candidates who answered this question demonstrated sufficient understanding of this important region and its transition from bulk to quality wine production. The best answers contained sound personal commentary in a coherent essay format, linking facts to the question. Most candidates seemed aware of the need to present their answer as an essay but there were too many token introductions and conclusions, with the former simply re-stating the question without further enquiry and the latter offering little in the way of insight or analysis. Many failed to conclude at all.

Implicit in the question was the need to address the history of Sicilian wine production (focused on bulk) together with more recent, positive developments. To pass candidates needed to address both elements. Weaker answers relied on two or three scant facts and lots of padding, with generic descriptions of improvements in winemaking technology over the past 30 years and little reference to Sicily. There was also a tendency for less well-prepared candidates to list Sicilian grape varieties and their characteristics without linking them to the question. Often these were misspelt, which is unacceptable at Diploma level; candidates must be able to spell grape varieties and wine regions accurately.

**January 2015: Section B**

**Your business is planning to launch two new premium quality wines from South America: a Torrontés from Argentina and a Pinot Noir from Chile.**

**Describe the wines you would be looking to buy. In each case, which winemaking region would you select and why?**

***(Each wine carries equal weighting)***

This question was not answered particularly well with many simplistic responses. A surprising number of candidates confused key regions in the two countries, for example locating Salta in Chile, and some even described Torrontés as a red wine – serious errors the examiners would not expect from a Diploma candidate. Some candidates missed out on easy marks by failing to describe the wines, or doing so only in very generic terms rather than demonstrating an understanding that these were to be premium wines. In terms of winemaking regions, the majority of candidates wrote in general terms about where these varieties are grown rather than selecting regions on the basis of quality potential.

The following script acknowledges the quality theme, writing about different clones of Torrontés and Pinot Noir. The candidate has written about multiple locations for each wine rather than suggesting one prime region in each case, but they have focused only on regions that would deliver quality fruit rather than simply regions where these varieties are grown.



To launch premium wine from South America, one need to consider the <sup>climate</sup> terrain, range, quality of these <sup>regions and the products</sup> ~~wines~~, to it would discuss them at below in details.

For Torrontes from Argentina, it's the most planted white grape in the country. There are three clones available such as Torrontes de Rioja, Sanjuan and Medicina. Torrontes de Rioja is the most premium variety, it is aromatic, acidic and can be full body. ~~if you want~~ it can be an elegant wine with good acidity, balanced with alcohol. Most version are easy drinking style but there are premium products available in area such as ~~the~~ Cafayette and Patagonia's ~~Rio Negro~~ <sup>Nequen</sup> and Rio Negro area, also in Uco Valley in Mendoza.

In terms of Cafayette, it is located at the northern most wine growing regions in the Salta province. The area is renowned for fragrant, elegant Torrontes. It is at high altitude, rely on meltwater from the Andes, dry and four season defined. The highest vineyard is at close to ~~2000m~~ over 2000 metre called Colama which is the highest vineyard in the world. This can be a good marketing tool addressing the altitude and the terrain and the associated purity. It is renowned for making full body Torrontes.

At Uco Valley in Mendoza, it is also in the rain shadow of Andes at an altitude of 1200m. It is also renowned for producing some aromatic white variety. Given the larger production volume here and the more brands available. These wines can be readily available in various price points and target different strata base.

In Patagonia, the area is ~~the~~ <sup>twice the</sup> size of California and there are some areas such as Rio Negro and Nequen.

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They are up and coming regions and thus provide a different marketing gimmick to promote Torrontes from this area. The area is at a much lower altitude vs. the previous two (at around 2000-3000m altitude). But given the more southerly location and cooler environment, it is also a perfect location for white varieties.

Overall, there are different angles or niches at the different location but given the well defined four seasons, and <sup>down</sup> <sup>away</sup> <sup>in</sup> shadow of Andes, Argentina has a diverse range of Torrontes from the various regions. Certainly there are threats to the viticulture such as frost and summer hail, and Zonda (hurricane). But these can be mitigated by various training and use of netting firing rockets (for the hail). Given the sandy soil, most of the region is free of Phylloxera which ensure dormancy of the vine in winter too. The Andes effect (quality/methuselah) can be also used as a marketing tool.

In terms of Pinot Noir, Chile has been famed for producing this wine in areas like Casablanca Valley, San Antonio, Leyda, and the more southern Biobio and Itata region.

Oak? The ~~same~~ Pinot Noir to be launched ~~in~~ contain good acidity, good red fruit flavour, medium alcohol, medium body but can have good concentration of maturing characters such as savoury, meaty component and long finish. The clone shall be the more premium Dijon clone which is same as the one used in Burgundy.

With regard to the region, the obvious choice would be from Aconcagua which consists of Casablanca, San Antonio and Leyda. This area is exposed to fogs from the Pacific coast together with the Humboldt current ~~providing~~ providing the cooling effect, which allow the

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grapes to retain acidity. The soil is alluvial mainly but with outcrop of limestone, thus suit the Pinot Noir grape providing well drain, and <sup>nutrient</sup> minerality. Most of the valleys here are east-west direction giving exposure to Pacific influence. Overall, the region is cool mediterranean ~~but with~~.

In terms of viticulture and wine, they are also exposed to Pacific influence ~~but~~ and attract more rain. Due to the more southern location, the cooler climate enables Pinot Noir to grow here. Pinot Noir is early bud and early ripening. With the river valleys influence, Pinot Noir here can escape the impact of frost. These two areas are also up and coming regions in Chile. The product has a niche ~~being~~ given the ~~more~~ southern location and provide a diversity range for the products offered. With the flying winemakers' help, these regions are certainly not to be ignored and should be ~~in~~ <sup>under</sup> everyone's radar screen. Many French wine giants have invested in Chile already with established products such as the Rothschild's Lar Vascos and Almarva. Mondavi's <sup>is in Lortoupa Bordeaux</sup> ju here are established here too. Therefore when launching new products, these competitive landscape cannot be ignored.

**January 2015: Section B**

**Describe the regions of Priorat and Navarra with reference to:**

- a) **Climate**
- b) **Soil**
- c) **Grape varieties**
- d) **Viticulture**
- e) **Wine styles.**

***(Each section carries equal weighting)***

With the exception of the small number of candidates achieving the higher grades, responses here were rather superficial and simplistic with very few candidates able to cover both wine regions and/or all sections of the question well. Responses on Priorat tended to be better than those on Navarra where it was felt some candidates resorted to guesswork or wrote in very generic terms about wine production in Spain. There was evidence of fairly widespread confusion over the difference between a Mediterranean and a continental climate, with some candidates incorrectly assuming that any region located close to the Mediterranean sea must have a Mediterranean climate.

**January 2015: Section B**

**Describe the wines below under the following headings:**

- a) **Viticulture (30% weighting)**
- b) **Vinification (30% weighting)**
- c) **Resulting style of wine (20% weighting)**
- d) **Target market (20% weighting)**

**Wine 1: Opus One 2004**

**Wine 2: [yellow tail] Chardonnay**

**Wine 3: Klein Constantia Sauvignon Blanc 2013**

This was a very popular question requiring candidates to identify key differences between three well-known styles of wine. While candidates were not expected to describe the exact viti/vini processes for each wine (though some did and were rewarded), they were expected to make logical deductions from the quality level and market position to draw out possible differences in winemaking/grape growing. Most candidates made well informed assessments of the three wine styles; those that came unstuck did not recognise the wines and failed to think laterally about how they might differ.

The Opus One and the [yellow tail] were generally well answered; Klein Constantia Sauvignon Blanc was more problematic. The latter was chosen as a mid-market example of a high quality New World varietal wine from an historic estate. Sauvignon Blanc on the label should have guided candidates to the key winemaking processes for an aromatic variety but many failed to make the connection between cool temperature fermentation in stainless steel and the preservation of

primary fruit/aromatic character. Some assumed the fact that it was from Klein Constantia meant that it was Vin de Constance, despite clear varietal labelling to the contrary.

Candidates must heed the mark allocations when working out how much to write/how much time to devote to a particular section. Section (a) (*Viticulture*) carried 30% of the marks – a one sentence answer here made a pass highly unlikely. Few candidates talked about climate and soil types, important for all three wines.

Many candidates missed out one section by not taking each in turn. There were several unsuccessful essay-style answers in which candidates seemed to lose track of the question and veer off into irrelevant detail. Where a question is broken down into sections as it was here there is no reason not to address each part separately.

The best answers to Section (c) (*Resulting style of wine*) gave detailed tasting notes with flavour and aroma descriptors and an accurate assessment of structural components and ageing potential. Generic descriptions e.g. “*simple*” and “*fruit-forward*” for Yellow Tail were rarely sufficient. At Diploma level we expect candidates to demonstrate an understanding of how these wines would taste and why. Quality was also often overlooked in the ‘resulting style’ answers, an important omission.

To do well in Section (d) (*Target market*), answers had to give an approximation of the wine’s price point in a relevant market and address distribution channel as well as the type of consumer the wine is aimed at. Simply identifying Opus One as “*Premium*” or Yellow Tail as “*entry-level*” was insufficient.

### January 2015: Section B

Write about wine production in Hungary under the following headings:

- a) **Strengths**
- b) **Weaknesses**
- c) **Opportunities**
- d) **Threats**

***(Each section carries equal weighting)***

This was not a popular question. Many candidates seemed to assume it was more difficult than it in fact was. The result was a low pass rate from a small number of candidates and very few scripts achieving merit or distinction grades. Many scripts were incomplete suggesting candidates had selected this question as their least preferred option and answered it last.

A pass should have been possible with basic knowledge of Hungarian wine production and lateral thinking. Many of Hungary’s strengths relate to universal viti/vini themes such as the climate being ideal for viticulture and the variety of soil types and topography (suited to so many different varieties and styles of wine). Too many candidates focused almost exclusively on the sweet wines of Tokaj, writing nothing (or very little) about other indigenous grapes or the many international varieties grown in Hungary.

Beyond production issues, other strengths include the low production costs that enable the production of competitively priced wines, Hungary's adaptability and openness to innovation in the vineyard and cellar and interest from outside the country, both in the form of 'flying winemakers' or investment from companies such as AXA and Vega Sicilia.

The other sections of the SWOT analysis required a similar approach using a combination of factual knowledge and lateral thinking.

### January 2015: Section B

With reference to the wines of the Loire, write about FIVE of the following:

- a) Rosé d'Anjou
- b) Cabernet Franc
- c) Savennières
- d) Soils in Touraine
- e) Botrytis
- f) Menetou Salon
- g) Fungal Diseases
- h) Quincy
- i) Soils in the Nantais
- j) Reuilly

*(Each section carries equal weighting)*

The topics for this question varied according to examination location.

Results were extremely poor for such a well-known region. The weakness of responses and the number of fundamental errors seem to suggest that this is an area of the syllabus that candidates overlook in their exam preparation.

There were some very short and superficial answers with many candidates struggling to fill one side of paper when three to four sides is the norm for these short-form questions.

The sections that generated the best responses were 'Rosé d'Anjou', 'Cabernet Franc' and 'Botrytis' with the sections on soils generally weak. Responses on Savennières ranged from generic descriptions of Chenin Blanc and incorrect descriptions of botrytised wine to more accomplished answers which distinguished between the traditional and more modern styles of wine produced here. The best candidates wrote knowledgeably about the two sub-appellations of Coulée de Serrant and La Roche-aux-Moines and about key producers such as the Joly family.

## June 2015: Section A – Compulsory Question

**Account for the differences in wine style, quality and price between the following appellations:**

**Version 1: Pauillac, Barsac & Entre-Deux-Mers**

**Version 2: Pauillac, Barsac & Blaye Côtes de Bordeaux**

**Version 3: Pomerol, Barsac & Entre-Deux-Mers**

***(Each section carries equal weighting)***

There were many short, simplistic and superficial answers to this question. Many weaker candidates treated this as a short-form question, which it was not; with 100 marks split across the three appellations comprehensive answers were required. By “Account for the differences” candidates were expected not simply to describe how the appellations differ but to *explain* these differences by reference to key grape growing and winemaking practices in each region. Some candidates failed to grasp this and simply wrote all they knew about e.g. Pauillac, without acknowledging the question at all.

Others launched into discussions of Bordeaux pricing in markets around the world which again failed to address the question. Overall, there was a disappointing lack of application and critical thinking. Many candidates were satisfied that high quality and reputation alone guaranteed the high prices of the top wines from Pauillac without further explanation. The examiner was expecting candidates to make connections between the cost of viti/vini techniques, resulting quality level and price. For the Barsac question, most candidates noted how multiple *tries* are required to harvest botrytised grapes but few explained why and even fewer went on to make the point that the wines are expensive as a result.

In terms of answer structure, some candidates came unstuck by discussing style, quality and price for all three appellations rather than taking each appellation in turn. Many of the differentiating factors that the examiners were looking for were relevant for style, quality and price so discussing all three appellations under each heading tended to result in long-winded, repetitive answers which overlooked key details. Some adopted a compare and contrast approach which was not required by the question and in some cases led to confused, rambling answers. Candidates should be guided by the structure of the question; it is rarely a good idea to deviate from this.

The best answers synthesised information to cover a lot of ground succinctly and sought to explain why the styles, quality levels and price points associated with the three appellations differ. Weaker candidates either gave very basic descriptions of wine styles (in some cases no more advanced than those expected at Level 3) or reeled off facts with no context.

More than a few candidates thought Barsac produced red wine, a mistake which cost them 1/3 of the available marks and made a pass impossible for this question. Many struggled with the spelling of *en primeur* and Sauternes, disappointing at this level.

June 2015: Section B

**“Riesling ... could claim to be the finest white grape variety in the world” (Oxford Wine Companion).**

**Why is this the case? (60% weighting)**

**Why has Riesling been unfashionable in some markets? (40% weighting)**

**(An essay format is *COMPULSORY* for this question)**

This question was well answered with many candidates showing enthusiasm for the topic and demonstrating sound critical thinking, particularly on Riesling’s (un)fashionability. Factual accuracy was generally very good.

The majority of candidates recognised the need for an essay format and styled their answers accordingly. The best candidates applied their knowledge by deploying facts selectively to support their argument that Riesling could be considered the finest white grape variety. This involved outlining important grape characteristics and their impact on the style and quality of Rieslings produced around the world before considering consumer perceptions/fashionability. Many candidates listed sound reasons why Riesling has quality potential and could describe where it is grown successfully, but few used these reasons and origins to justify why it could be considered the finest grape. Those that did were rewarded with high marks.

Weak candidates tended to focus exclusively on Germany, ‘brain-dumping’ information about *prädikats* and *terroir*/vineyard practices without engaging with the question. Others launched into a general discussion of Riesling’s advantages and disadvantages or got bogged down in comparing and contrasting Riesling with other leading white varieties, neither of which was required.

A few candidates seemed to misinterpret the word ‘markets’ and discussed why Riesling is not planted in some regions and is in others. The second part of the question was clearly directed at the point of sale and consumer perceptions. Many candidates who were awarded a fail grade gave comprehensive answers to the first part of the question but struggled with the second. This was disappointing as it was a clear opportunity for personal commentary with credit available for logical deductions/sensible observations about the obstacles Riesling faces.

The longevity of Riesling is an important quality factor and one which most candidates picked in their answers. Few, however, explained *why* Riesling is ageworthy, i.e. because of its high natural acidity and extract. Some candidates wrote of Riesling’s ‘*ability to retain acidity*’ during ageing which missed the point altogether.

Candidates should avoid the use of casual or colloquial language in their work. Statements such as “*great fruit aromatics*” and “*beautiful acidity*” serve little purpose as they fail to convey to the examiner that the candidate understands the wine being described.

The following script is an example of an excellent response to this question:



Riesling enjoys a fine, if not unrivalled, reputation amongst the wine trade and wine conisseurs worldwide, but it has failed to turn that level of appreciation into high sales or popularity across markets. The reasons for its reputation for quality are many and are discussed in turn below, followed by a discussion as to why it seems to be perennially unfashionable.

The qualities of Riesling as a grape, even without any consideration of planting location put it into the top category of white grapes. It produces wines with naturally high acidity which are refreshing, but that can support high levels of extract or residual sugar. The natural acidity also acts as a preservative so as well as ensuring that the wine has a refreshing character, it gives the wine the potential to age - potentially for decades. The grape can reflect terroir, but its natural fruit flavours of green apple, citrus fruit and floral notes can at once be fresh and vibrant whilst being complex and understated. Resulting wines can vary markedly from one site to the next as Riesling has a natural ability to reflect terroir - especially the soils that it is planted in. In the Mosel Valley for example, the expression of Riesling from one vineyard to another can be

acute, even on adjoining sites with the same exposure. This expressiveness is a critical factor for a grape to be considered truly great and for the wine lover it means an endless number of possibilities to explore the grape's potential.

From a viticultural point of view, the grape has a number of qualities. Despite being late-ripening, it is hardy so can grow in cool marginal climates without great risk of the crop being lost to inclement weather or fungal disease. The fact that it is late-ripening and hardy gives grape growers options in terms of harvest time. The grape can be left on the vine in order to produce a late-harvest wine which can be high in extract, possibly with residual sugar. This versatility is appealing to winemakers who wish to produce a range of styles.

Riesling can grow on a range of sites, from flat alluvial land (with high yields but at the risk of dilution) or on some of the world's most inhospitable vineyards, such as the steep slate vineyards of the Mosel. Riesling has demonstrated over the years that it can produce fine, complex, age-worthy wine in classic regions such as the Mosel and Rheingau in Germany and Wachau in Austria, whilst also showing great promise in cooler regions in the new world, such as Clare + Eden Valleys in Australia.

The reality is though, that Riesling is

unfashionable and arguably misunderstood in the majority of markets.

It is most closely associated with Germany, whose long, flute-shaped bottles and intricate Germanic script or old-fashioned labels have struggled against more consumer-friendly bottles, especially from the New World. Rieslings that are from Germany (and Austria) are often labelled under the Prädikatswein classification - which can be confusing for consumers and offers no obvious insight into the sweetness levels.

Although a lot of dry Riesling is produced, it is associated with residual sugar and styles from off-dry to sweet. In many markets (the UK for example), these styles are out of fashion with dry wines preferred for both drinking with and without food.

Although there have been recent trends towards lower alcohol, the low levels of some Rieslings has counted against them in the past, especially in the USA, where higher alcohols have been in vogue for sometime.

Other stylistic considerations that have counted against Riesling has been the trend (especially in the 1990s) to drink <sup>white</sup> wines that are full-bodied and have oak influence from barrel fermentation or ageing - especially Chardonnays. Riesling is not suited to under-

going MLF and barrel fermentation.

Riedling has also been grown in available sites in both the Old and New World and combined with high yields, this has meant that some have been dilute and neutral.

In conclusion, Riedling is a quality variety that could be more successful without problems with consumer perception and poor winemaking. It can be said that it is due a resurgence but this has been said by many for a number of years so it may be destined to be underappreciated for some time to come.

**June 2015: Section B**

**Describe the following wines and discuss how factors in the vineyard and winery determine their character. (70% weighting)**

- a) Premium Stellenbosch Pinotage
- b) Bulk Worcester Chenin Blanc

**What advantages and disadvantages might the producers of these wines face in the marketplace? (30% weighting)**

Most candidates interpreted the question as intended and offered, with varying levels of success, the kind of information examiners were looking for. It was possible to gain marks by applying general viticulture, vinification and commercial principles to South Africa, but the best responses targeted the issue of quality (premium versus bulk) to explore specific production factors in the two regions (Stellenbosch and Worcester).

Many candidates identified relevant grape growing and winemaking factors but failed to explain how they determine wine style. Some candidates overlooked style entirely, despite being instructed to describe the wines. Without demonstrating an understanding of the two styles at the outset, it was impossible to answer the question convincingly. Some candidates forgot to address advantages or disadvantage at all or seemed unable to answer this part of the question as it required commercial awareness, application and original thought.

**June 2015: Section B**

**Discuss the following red wines from the south of France.**

- a) IGP / Vins de Pays
- b) Corbières
- c) Bandol

***(Each section carries equal weighting)***

Responses here were very weak indeed with over half the candidates graded fail (unclassified) and no distinctions awarded. This suggests that the south of France is a part of the syllabus candidates overlook in their revision plans.

Answers to sections (a) and (b) were particularly vague and imprecise, often just listing grape varieties grown throughout Southern France with no discussion of their role in the wines listed. This was a particular issue for 'Corbières'. While answers on 'Bandol' were generally better some confused this appellation with Banyuls (a fortified wine not on the Unit 3 syllabus).

**June 2015: Section B**

**Discuss the climate and choice of grape variety in FIVE of the following:**

- a) Aconcagua
- b) Central Otago
- c) Okanagan Valley
- d) Salta
- e) Clare Valley
- f) Central Valley USA

***(Each section carries equal weighting)***

This was a disappointing set of scripts with many simplistic and overly descriptive answers reliant on waffle or padding. Although this was a short-form question (generally thought to be easier by candidates), it was very specific and generic statements about the regions concerned were not sufficient. Examiners expected candidates to go beyond identifying climate and grape varieties for each region to discuss *why* the climate there is the way it is and *how/why* certain grape varieties are suited to it. An understanding of cause and effect is expected at Diploma level.

There were the inevitable geographical errors, locating areas in the wrong country or identifying incorrect topographical factors. Several candidates wrote about the effect of Chile's proximity to the Atlantic Ocean which did not inspire confidence. Often candidates appeared to try to hedge their bets when unsure of the specific climatic conditions in a particular region, for example describing a climate as "*maritime with continental influences*". This was inadequate.

**June 2015: Section B**

**Write about THREE of the following grape varieties (60% weighting):**

- a) Assyrtiko
- b) Savatiano
- c) Agiorgitiko
- d) Xinomavro

**What are the challenges facing the modern Greek wine industry when selling its wines abroad? (40% weighting)**

It was not anticipated that this would be a popular question or that it would generate a good pass rate and so it proved. It was clear that many who attempted it did so reluctantly. There was plenty of evidence of guesswork with many candidates unaware whether the grape varieties listed were black or white. This first part of the question required hard facts, such as where specifically in Greece these varieties are cultivated, their key characteristics, the style of wine they produce, etc.

There were some excellent answers on the grape varieties from candidates who clearly knew them or had revised the facts well, but many of them wrote nothing at all about the challenges facing the modern Greek wine industry. Similarly, there were others who were able to come up with plenty of

intelligent observations in answer to the second part of the question but lacked factual knowledge of the varieties themselves. It was impossible to gain a pass mark in either scenario.

### June 2015: Section B

With reference to the wines of Italy, write about FIVE of the following:

- a) Gaja
- b) Teroldego
- c) Dolcetto
- d) Bianco di Custoza
- e) Collio (Collio Goriziano)
- f) Gattinara
- g) Arneis
- h) Colli Orientali
- i) Valtellina
- j) Bardolino

*(Each section carries equal weighting)*

The topics for this question varied according to examination location.

Many candidates seem to think that these short-form questions are easier than open-response question or essay questions. They are not. The five-part format of this question requires an in-depth knowledge of each topic. Leaving one or more of these completely blank or resorting to guesswork makes a pass highly unlikely. With all five sections weighted equally, it is impossible to compensate for weak sections by writing more for those which you feel more confident about.

Another common error is answering more than the five required sections. This is a wasted effort; not only do responses tend to be superficial as a result of additional time pressure but examiners will only mark the first five responses.

The worst scripts contained some very disappointing errors with candidates often mistaking regions for grapes or vice versa. One candidate identified all five topics they covered as grape varieties, including Gaja.

A sound approach where short-form responses are required is to think in terms of key questions to help structure your answer. For example, for the grape variety 'Dolcetto' candidates could have considered:

- Where exactly is it grown?
- What are the key DOCs / DOCGs for this variety?
- Is it used in blends or as a varietal wine?
- Which climatic conditions suit this variety and why?
- What particular growing problems is it susceptible to?
- It is early or late budding, maturing, ripening, etc. and what is the significance of this?
- What are the key aroma/flavour characteristics of this variety?
- What style of wine does it produce? Does it have high or low acidity, light or full body, high

or low alcohol, soft or firm tannins, etc.?

- What quality level are the wines from this variety?
- Why is it important from a commercial point of view?

This is not an exhaustive list but answering these questions correctly would have led to a comprehensive answer of the standard expected at Diploma level.



## Unit 4, 5 and 6 Examinations - Overview

The tasting and theory questions for these examinations carry an equal weighting of marks. This means that to excel candidates must demonstrate good all-round knowledge of key theory topics as well as sound tasting ability. However, the short-form question format means that candidates that do well on two of the three theory sections having achieved good marks for their tasting may pass the Unit as a whole.

### Tasting questions

The main issue, as in previous years, is with candidates failing to follow the SAT to the letter. By failing to comment on every aspect of the wine using the SAT accurately, candidates often miss out on marks needlessly. While there is some flexibility with how marks are awarded for descriptors, candidates must identify the structural components of the wine using SAT terminology to be given credit. *“Good finish”, “heady alcohol”* and *“excellent length”* are all examples of candidates disadvantaging themselves by not using SAT terms.

Candidates are also reminded of the need to look for primary, secondary and tertiary characteristics in every wine, using specific descriptors as appropriate.

### Theory questions

Lack of detail continues to be an issue for the Unit 4, 5 and 6 theory questions. Short-form questions allow the examiner to test the breadth of your knowledge across core topics and rely on straightforward factual recall. This means that if you do not have a firm grasp of examinable material, you will not be able to demonstrate the level of understanding required to pass.

Many candidates not only underestimate the amount of information required in their answers - writing just three or four sentences is highly unlikely to result in a pass grade – but also stray off-topic. Candidates are reminded that no marks are available for irrelevant detail, even if it is correct. This means that you have to pay close attention to the wording of the question. For example, ‘Cava styles’ is more specific than ‘Cava’ in isolation; candidates would need to structure their answers accordingly. Many weaker candidates still pick up on a key word and write everything they know about that topic. As already noted in the Unit 3 theory feedback, this is an unsafe strategy.

## Unit 4 – Spirits of the World

The Unit 4 examinations took place in November 2014, March 2015 and June 2015.

*NB: Where theory question topics are separated by the word 'OR', different versions of the question were in circulation.*

<b>November 2014: Unit 4 TASTING</b>	
<b>Wine 1</b>	Country: France Spirit: Château du Breuil Calvados Réserve du Château 8 Ans Producer: Château du Breuil SAS
<b>Wine 2</b>	Country: Scotland Spirit: The Glenlivet 12 Years Producer: The Glenlivet Distillery
<b>Wine 3</b>	Country: France Spirit: Tesseron Lot No.90 XO Cognac Producer: SAS Tesseron Cognac
<p>As is often the case, the main reason for failing this paper was a failure to follow the Spirits SAT or only doing so haphazardly. Some candidates continue to default to the Wine SAT in their answers which is substantively different to the Spirits SAT; needless to say, this results in very low marks.</p> <p>The usual comments on the conclusions section of candidates' answers also applied – too many failed to answer the question 'Comment on how the maturation of this spirit has influenced the aroma and flavour', giving generic comments about quality or production methods instead. This question was designed to encourage students to link evidence in the glass to their theory knowledge of how these spirits are produced.</p>	

<b>November 2014: Unit 4 THEORY</b>
<p><b>In relation to spirits, write about each of the following:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>a) Parts of a continuous still and their role in the distillation process</b></li> <li><b>b) Jamaica Rum OR Malting</b></li> <li><b>c) Grappa OR Malting</b></li> </ul>
<p>Candidates demonstrated sound factual knowledge of these topics. The best responses were on Jamaica Rum and Grappa which involved straightforward descriptions of these spirits and their production methods.</p> <p>Continuous distillation and malting were less well answered. The principle of distillation was well understood but many confused the different methods (column/still/Coffey, etc.). Most candidates who answered on malting went on to discuss post-malting processes such as mashing and</p>

distillation for which no marks were available.

The following candidate gave sound responses on all three sections, despite poor spelling throughout:

~~Continuous~~ <sup>Continuous</sup> stills consist of Analysers and rectifiers and can be run continuously.

An alcoholic wash is added to the bottom of an analyser and is heated by either steam or a direct heat source.

The alcohol boils away at  $73^{\circ}\text{C}$  stripping flavour compounds and leaving behind water.

The alcoholic vapour travels up the analyser and hits rectification plates. These are plates that cool the rising vapour condensing part of it. A pool of condensed liquid sits in the plates and interacts with rising vapour in a process called reflux this allows flavour to be passed to the vapour from condensed liquid in the plates. Different fractions of distillation have ~~lower~~

different boiling points. As the vapour travels across to the rectifier it starts to cool. The ~~rectifier~~ rectifier is the last column in the still and has more rectification plates ~~than~~ the spirit starts to condense at different ~~part~~ plates <sup>in</sup> the rectifier based on the various boiling points. The ~~top~~ heads with the lowest boiling point are discarded as vapour at the top of the rectifier where as ~~these~~ <sup>the heavy tails</sup> are discarded at the bottom.

The distiller is able to accurately make a cut by drawing off the rectifier

a spirit of a desired alcoholic strength and flavour profile.

A continuous still can be made from stainless steel or copper. DDL in Guyana has a wooden coffee still. All stills will have an amount of copper as it absorbs sulphur compounds in the base alcoholic wash.

Some continuous stills will have multiple columns with many rectification plates. As a general rule the more plates the more pure and neutral in flavour the final spirit will be.

**March 2015: Unit 4 TASTING**

<b>Wine 1</b>	Country: Latvia Spirit: Stolichnaya Vodka Producer: JSC Latvijas Balzams
<b>Wine 2</b>	Country: England Spirit: Beefeater London Dry Gin Producer: James Burrough Ltd
<b>Wine 3</b>	Country: Jamaica Spirit: Appleton Estate V/X Jamaica Rum Producer: J. Wray & Nephew Ltd

In this paper candidates were invited to describe how the production of each spirit differed from that of the other two and the implications of this for style.

While many candidates successfully identified the vodka and the gin, descriptions of the production processes involved were weak and few seemed to understand what was required. For the vodka, the examiners were expecting commentary on how the neutrality of this spirit is achieved and maintained during the production process – *“distilled to a minimum of 96% ABV to give a neutral spirit”* and *“kept in inert vessels prior to dilution to avoid oak characters”* would have been sufficient for the five marks available. Instead, some candidates launched into an in-depth description of the production process without linking it to the resulting style of spirit as evidenced in the glass.

**March 2015: Unit 4 THEORY**

**In relation to spirits, write about each of the following:**

- a) **Suntory Holdings Limited**
- b) **Flavoured spirits other than gin OR Ugni Blanc**
- c) **Maturation of Tequila**

Short-form questions such as this can be problematic for candidates where they have not prepared adequately. This question type is designed to test the breadth of a candidate’s knowledge across the Unit so a very poor mark on one section can make a pass difficult to achieve. A good number of candidates made a sound effort with section (a), noting that Suntory Holdings merged to form Beam Suntory in 2014; unfortunately, this was also the section that many left blank.

Section (c) was a straightforward question requiring a summary of the ageing regulations for Tequila. There was, however, some confusion about maturation times and barrel sizes, etc. suggesting that candidates had not revised these sufficiently.

‘Ugni Blanc’ was poorly answered with many candidates writing at length about Cognac and Armagnac which was not required by the question. There was some sensible commentary on grape characteristics but few candidates explained why this makes it a suitable variety for distillation.

Some also discussed Ugni Blanc in relation to still light wines which was irrelevant for the purposes of the Unit 4 examination.

'Flavoured spirits other than gin' was considered a straightforward question by the examiners as it allowed candidates plenty of scope to answer. Unfortunately candidates struggled to structure their responses as a result, with some confusing flavoured spirits with liqueurs and fruit brandies.

#### June 2015: Unit 4 TASTING

<b>Wine 1</b>	Country:	Italy
	Spirit:	Grappa Tradizione Nonino 41°
	Producer:	Nonino Distillatori
<b>Wine 2</b>	Country:	Scotland
	Spirit:	Famous Grouse Whisky
	Producer:	Matthew Gloag & Son Ltd
<b>Wine 3</b>	Country:	Scotland
	Spirit:	Balvenie 12 YO Double Wood Malt Whisky
	Producer:	The Balvenie Distillery Company

Candidates were required to identify the spirit and give reasons for their conclusion but many gave generic quality assessment answers instead of giving reasons why the spirit was what they thought it was. Again, this seemed to be a matter of not reading the question.

Candidates are reminded that whereas five marks are available for aroma descriptors, only three marks are available for flavour descriptors. Many seemed to give many more than three descriptors on the palate, for which credit could not be given. Candidates should prioritise those sections of the SAT which carry the most marks.

#### June 2015: Unit 4 THEORY

**In relation to spirits, write about each of the following:**

- a) **Methods of flavouring gin**
- b) **Jack Daniels OR Distillation of Cognac**
- c) **Distillation of Cognac OR Golden Rum**

A disappointing set of answers, with only six distinction grades out of a total of 301 scripts.

Candidates too often failed to identify relevant information instead writing everything they knew about gin or cognac, rather than the specific processes detailed in the question. Many candidates gave irrelevant detail on fermentation, maturation and labelling terminology for cognac when all that was required was a straightforward explanation of double pot still distillation. Jack Daniels was

poorly answered with little understanding of how this spirit is produced or its importance as a global brand.



## Unit 5 – Sparkling Wines of the World

Unit 5 examinations also took place in November 2014, March 2015 and June 2015.

*NB: Where theory question topics are separated by the word 'OR', different versions of the question were in circulation.*

### November 2014: Unit 5 TASTING

<b>Wine 1</b>	Country:	France
	Region:	Champagne
	Wine:	Legras & Haas Tradition Brut
	Producer:	Maison Legras & Haas
<b>Wine 2</b>	Country:	France
	Region:	Champagne
	Wine:	Henri Chauvet Rosé
	Producer:	Mathilde et Damien Chauvet
<b>Wine 3</b>	Country:	France
	Region:	Champagne
	Wine:	Pol Roger Demi Sec
	Producer:	Champagne Pol Roger

The usual issues here. Candidates were often erratic in their use of the SAT, missing out on potential marks by failing to comment on all of the structural components of the wine. The majority of candidates missed the development on wine 1, failing to give enough descriptors for the nose of this wine. Many candidates deviated from the question and rather than assessing quality attempted identifications of the wines for which no marks were available.

### November 2014: Unit 5 THEORY

**In relation to sparkling wines, write about each of the following:**

- a) **Liqueur de tirage and second fermentation in bottle**
- b) **Lambrusco OR Champagne soils**
- c) **Cava grapes OR Champagne soils OR Asti DOCG**

'Asti DOCG' and 'Cava grapes' were well answered on the whole. Champagne soils less so, with many candidates writing in general terms about the region and grapes grown rather than soil types. 'Liqueur de tirage and second fermentation in bottle' attracted lengthy descriptions of the traditional method from start to finish which were not required. Lambrusco seemed to cause problems with many candidates struggling with the spelling of the various DOCs for this wine.

**March 2015: Unit 5 TASTING**

<b>Wine 1</b>	Country: Spain Region: Penedès Wine: Vilarnau Gran Reserva Cava 2007 Producer: Castell de Vilarnau
<b>Wine 2</b>	Country: Italy Region: Piedmont Wine: Asti Sansilvestro N/V Producer: Cantine San Silvestro
<b>Wine 3</b>	Country: New Zealand Region: Central Otago Wine: Akarua Brut N/V Producer: Akarua Ltd

This flight was well answered with a relatively high pass rate, as is common for Unit 5. Weaker candidates failed to give comprehensive descriptions of aroma and flavour profiles, giving descriptors from one cluster in isolation. Candidates are encouraged to think broadly when using descriptors.

For Wine 2, candidates had to identify the 'region of origin'. Many failed to spot this and gave Italy as the country of origin instead, missing a potential mark.

**March 2015: Unit 5 THEORY**

**In relation to sparkling wines, write about each of the following:**

- a) Lees ageing
- b) (Pinot) Meunier OR Cap Classique
- c) Sekt OR Cap Classique

A disappointing set of scripts with the poorest examples omitting one or even two sections making a pass impossible. Candidates are reminded that even when running short of time in the exam or struggling with a topic it is always better to attempt an answer than write nothing at all.

Answers for lees ageing, Cap Classique and Sekt relied too much on basic, generic descriptions of the traditional method rather than specifics. For the first section, the examiners were looking for a detailed explanation of tirage times and the character this imparts.

Cap Classique was answered particularly poorly with many candidates clearly confused about the origin and possible varietal composition of this wine.

**June 2015: Unit 5 TASTING**

<b>Wine 1</b>	Country: Italy Region: Veneto Wine: Modella Prosecco N/V Producer: Mabis S.R.L.
<b>Wine 2</b>	Country: France Region: Loire Valley Wine: Sauvion Brut Crémant de Loire N/V Producer: Maison Sauvion
<b>Wine 3</b>	Country: USA Region: California Wine: Schramsberg Blanc de Blancs 2011 Producer: Schramsberg Vineyards

There was widespread confusion amongst candidates about the sweetness of the Prosecco with many finding it dry. Those that did identify it as sweeter seemed to assume that it had to be Moscato. A disappointing number of candidates identified autolytic character in this wine. There was also a marked tertiary character on Wine 2 which many candidates overlooked, perhaps because they did not expect it to find it in a sparkling wine.

Many candidates seem to be making assumptions which are not based on the wines in front of them. Candidates should always be guided by what is in the glass and resist the temptation to jump to conclusions about a wine's identity.

**June 2015: Unit 5 THEORY**

In relation to sparkling wines, write about each of the following:

- a) Removal of sediment from bottle-fermented wines
- b) Crémant de Bourgogne OR Rosé Champagne
- c) Rosé Champagne OR Muscat

Answers to this question tended to be rather superficial. Candidates' attention is drawn to the supplementary study materials available on the online global campus which contain highly relevant information for this Unit.

For Section (a) many candidates described riddling and disgorgement process for traditional method wines but overlooked transfer method wines completely: an important omission. Better answers gave examples of wines made by these methods and described the effect of autolysis as well as minimum tirage times for NV and vintage wines from different origins.

## Unit 6 – Fortified Wines of the World

Unit 6 examinations took place in November 2014, March 2015 and June 2015.

*NB: Where theory question topics are separated by the word 'OR', different versions of the question were in circulation.*

November 2014: Unit 6 TASTING	
<b>Wine 1</b>	Country: Spain Region: Jerez Wine: Amontillado Príncipe de Barbadillo Producer: Bodegas Barbadillo
<b>Wine 2</b>	Country: Spain Region: Jerez Wine: Tío Pepe Fino Producer: González Byass S.A.
<b>Wine 3</b>	Country: Portugal Region: Madeira Wine: Barbeito 10 Years Old Sercial Producer: Vinhos Barbeito Lda
<p>This was the first tasting examination in which candidates were expected to work with the concept of aroma and flavour types (i.e. primary, secondary and tertiary) to identify aroma and flavour characteristics. Many identified the oxidative tertiary characteristics on Wines 1 and 3 but overlooked other aromas and flavours that were present, such as those derived from biological ageing in the first wine and fruit development in the third. Candidates are encouraged to think in broad terms when choosing descriptors for aroma and flavour characteristics; for all but the most basic wines more than one type and cluster will likely apply.</p> <p>Some candidates came unstuck by seeming to hedge their bets and overusing the 'medium' scale when describing structural components. These are distinctive styles of fortified wines and highs and lows were more often appropriate.</p> <p>Many candidates failed to give enough reasoning in their assessment of quality answers. Candidates should note that of the five marks available for this section, only one was for identifying the correct SAT quality category. The remaining four were allocated to detailed explanation/justification of this quality level. "<i>Balanced</i>", "<i>complex</i>" and "<i>typical</i>" are meaningless terms unless tasters can explain what is balanced with what, how a wine is complex and why and what it is typical of.</p>	

**November 2014: Unit 6 THEORY**

**In relation to fortified wines, write about each of the following:**

- a) Tawny Port styles**
- b) Soils in Jerez**
- c) Beaufort-de-Venise OR Maury OR Banyuls**

A low pass rate. Tawny Port was answered particularly poorly with many candidates comparing generic Tawny to other styles of Port rather than describing basic, reserve, age-indicated and colheita styles of Tawny which was the key to this question.

For section (b) most candidates were able to name the three main soil types in Jerez but the best took this further by linking soil characteristics to the style and quality of the wines produced.

There was confusion about how VDNs are produced. Some otherwise good candidates observed that fermentation is arrested by fortification with RCGM. This implied a fundamental lack of understanding.

**March 2015: Unit 6 TASTING**

<b>Wine 1</b>	Country: Spain Region: Jerez Wine: Solera 1847 Cream Sherry Producer: Gonzalez Byass S.A.
<b>Wine 2</b>	Country: France Region: Roussillon Wine: Els Pyreneus Maury 2012 Producer: Maison Lafage SCEA
<b>Wine 3</b>	Country: Spain Region: Jerez Wine: Matusalem Cream/Oloroso Dulce Viejo VORS Producer: Gonzalez Byass S.A.

A reasonable set of scripts though many mistook the Maury for Port despite it having low alcohol for a fortified wine. Some candidates not only failed to go into sufficient detail on their assessment of quality answers but included irrelevant information such as observations about the wine's readiness for drinking, possible food matches and price.

## March 2015: Unit 6 THEORY

In relation to fortified wines, write about each of the following:

- a) Symington Family Estates
- b) Sanlúcar de Barrameda OR Vintage Madeira
- c) Touriga Nacional OR Sanlúcar de Barrameda

'Symington Family Estates' was generally well answered and the majority of candidates had committed a good amount of historical and commercial detail about this leading producer to memory. There is plenty in the public domain about this company and most candidates had researched it in preparation for the exam. Those who hadn't found themselves with little to say.

Poorer answers on 'Vintage Madeira'. Most candidates picked up on the extended maturation times for these wines, the fact that most are made from noble varieties, and were able to mention canteiro ageing as the norm; better answers took this further to distinguish between *frasqueira* and *colheita* wines. Successful candidates tended to pick up on minimum ageing requirements.

Weak candidates wrote about generic styles of madeira (Medium Dry, Medium Rich, etc.) which implied they were unaware of vintage madeira as a separate category. A number of candidates laboured the difference in residual sugar between wines from the noble varieties but this was of little relevance. Lengthy discussion of the attributes of different grapes and their growing conditions and the fortification process were also typically misplaced: maturation was the key to this question. Other candidates had clearly learned *estufagem* by heart and were determined to shoehorn this in even though it is highly unlikely for vintage wines and so irrelevant.

Poor spelling of key terms was an issue throughout with very few candidates able to spell *frasqueira* accurately; disappointing at this level. Terms such as this are important and should be learned correctly.

Sherry is topical at the moment and the majority of answers on Sanlúcar de Barrameda covered sufficient of the main points for a pass, demonstrating sound knowledge of Manzanilla production. The best answers distinguished between climatic conditions in Jerez and Sanlúcar and explained how the humidity in the latter promotes thicker *flor* to yield more elegant wines. It was insufficient to explain that Sanlúcar is known for Manzanilla production without explaining why.

Touriga Nacional was well answered with most candidates making solid observations about this grape and its growing conditions.

**June 2015: Unit 6 TASTING**

<b>Wine 1</b>	Country: Portugal Region: Douro Wine: Cockburns Special Reserve Port Producer: Symington Family Estates
<b>Wine 2</b>	Country: Portugal Region: Douro Wine: Ramos Pinto Quinta de Ervamoira, 10 Years Old Tawny Producer: Casa Ramos Pinto
<b>Wine 3</b>	Country: Portugal Region: Madeira Wine: Barbeito 10 Boal Reserva Velha Producer: Vinhos Barbeito Lda

A significant number of candidates misjudged the sweetness of the Ruby Port as well as overstating its quality. The Tawny Port was also found to be dry by a concerning number of candidates and its quality underrated – surprising as this was the better wine.

Madeira was also answered poorly with candidates missing this wine's trademark high acidity. There were a number of flawed conclusions as to 'style within the category', some identifying the madeira as a fino despite its sweetness and colour and others incorrectly determining it to be dry before going on to identify it as port. This implies a worrying lack of theory knowledge about fortified wines.

**June 2015: Unit 6 THEORY**

**In relation to fortified wines, write about each of the following:**

- a) Blending in Sherry production**
- b) Oxidation OR Rutherglen**
- c) Vintage Port or Rutherglen**

Answers to this question were basic with limited factual coverage – very few distinction grades were awarded.

Blending in Sherry production was particularly poorly answered and many candidates gave convoluted descriptions of the solera system, often generalising that all sherries pass through the same number of scales/criaderas which is inaccurate. Many failed to consider blending between soleras and the use of PX/ *vino de color*/RCGM to achieve sweetness.

**Appendix 1 – Pass Rates for the Level 4 Diploma in Wines and Spirits**

Paper	2015			2014			2013			2012			2011			2010		
<b>Unit 1 CWA</b>	April 84%	Nov 82%		April 91%	Nov 90%		April 88%	Nov 91%		April 90%	Nov 91%		April 88%	Nov 91%		April 75%	Nov 90%	
<b>Unit 1 Case Study</b>	Nov 58%	Mar 72%	June 79%	Nov 72%	Mar 73%	June 83%	Nov 77%	Mar 71%	June 85%	Nov 87%	Mar 68%	June 74%	Nov 83%	Mar 67%	June 84%	Nov 76%	Mar 71%	June 68%
<b>Unit 2</b>	92%			90%			91%			93%			90%			88%		
<b>Unit 3 Tasting</b>	June 69%	Jan 59%		June 82%	Jan 64%		June 82%	Jan 64%		June 74%	Jan 66%		June 85%	Jan 72%		June 62%	Jan 62%	
<b>Unit 3 Theory</b>	June 32%	Jan 27%		June 40%	Jan 29%		June 40%	Jan 47%		June 43%	Jan 46%		June 54%	Jan 34%		June 66%	Jan 49%	
<b>Unit 4</b>	52%			55%			57%			67%			63%			61%		
<b>Unit 5</b>	66%			71%			84%			75%			70%			74%		
<b>Unit 6</b>	53%			82%			61%			65%			60%			66%		



## Appendix 2 – Grade Bands for Diploma Closed-book Examinations

GRADE BANDS FOR DIPLOMA CLOSED-BOOK EXAMINATIONS	
<b>Fail Unclassified</b> <b>&lt;44%</b>	A seriously inadequate answer which, through lack of information or errors of fact, demonstrates a very weak understanding of the subject. May be poorly expressed and/or confused. Very limited progression beyond WSET® Level 3 in content or analysis.
<b>Fail</b> <b>45% to 54%</b>	A borderline answer which may contain some correct detail and be close to a pass but which is too superficial in content or narrow in scope. May contain serious errors of fact/evidence of misunderstanding but for which the answer would be of pass-level standard.
<b>Pass</b> <b>55% to 64%</b>	A basic answer which demonstrates an adequate understanding of the topic. Any errors or omissions are minor. Covers sufficient of the main points to be 'more right than wrong' but with limited use of examples.
<b>Pass with Merit</b> <b>65% to 74%</b>	A good answer which demonstrates clear evidence of understanding and application of Diploma-level knowledge. Shows greater factual coverage and more accuracy with good use of examples. Very sound, but without the extra edge for a pass with distinction.
<b>Pass with Distinction</b> <b>&gt;75%</b>	An excellent answer which demonstrates an in-depth understanding of the topic and shows flair, creativity or originality in analysis, argument or choice of examples.

### Appendix 3 – Grade Bands for Diploma Coursework Assignments

GRADE BANDS FOR DIPLOMA COURSEWORK ASSIGNMENTS	
<b>Fail Unclassified</b>	<b>&lt;44%</b> A seriously inadequate assignment which, through lack of information or errors of fact, demonstrates a very weak understanding of the subject. Very limited evidence of relevant research. Poorly expressed or confused with unsatisfactory presentation/referencing; lacks coherence and structure.
<b>Fail</b>	<b>45% to 54%</b> A borderline assignment which may contain some correct detail but fails to address the question in sufficient depth or is too narrow in focus. Little evidence of research beyond the recommended reading. Lacks original thought with poor or superficial analysis of source material. Rudimentary structure/presentation, possibly with inaccurate referencing.  This grade is also awarded for assignments which do not meet the minimum word count.
<b>Pass</b>	<b>55% to 64%</b> A satisfactory if basic assignment with sound explanation and some evidence of critical thinking/personal commentary. Analysis of key concepts, terminology and use of examples is limited but clearly expressed. Adequate presentation as well as sound referencing and a competent bibliography.
<b>Pass with Merit</b>	<b>65% to 74%</b> A good assignment which demonstrates a clear understanding of the subject. Thorough analysis and critical use of a wide range of relevant source material, properly referenced in the bibliography. Clear evidence of original thought and engagement with the question combined with rigorous argument and mature expression. Evaluates more than one side of the argument with good use of examples. Correct presentation with mostly accurate referencing.
<b>Pass with Distinction</b>	<b>&gt;75%</b> An excellent assignment which demonstrates mastery of the subject. Comprehensive analysis of key themes and sophisticated personal commentary with well-chosen examples. Extensive evidence of original research with judicious and critical use of source material. Evaluates more than one side of the argument, linking theory and practice as appropriate. Excellent presentation with coherence, clarity and flair. Relevant and accurate referencing.