

WSET[®] Awards



DIPLOMA EXAMINATIONS 2003/04

EXAMINERS' REPORT

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INTRODUCTION	3
DIPLOMA EXAMINATIONS 2003/04	4
STATISTICAL ANALYSIS	4
GENERAL COMMENTS	5
Supplementary reading	6
Commercial awareness	7
The regulars	7
COMMENTS ON INDIVIDUAL QUESTIONS	8
UNIT 1, THE GLOBAL BUSINESS OF WINES AND OTHER BEVERAGES	8
Assignment attached to Unit 3	8
Assignment attached to Unit 4	10
Assignment attached to Unit 5	12
Assignment attached to Unit 6	14
UNIT 2, WINE PRODUCTION	16
UNIT 3, WINES OF THE WORLD	17
Tasting Paper 1	17
Tasting Paper 2	19
Theory Paper.....	21
UNIT 4, SPIRITS OF THE WORLD.....	31
UNIT 5, SPARKLING WINES	31
UNIT 6, FORTIFIED LIQUEUR WINES	31
UNIT 7, INDIVIDUAL RESEARCH PROJECT.....	32

INTRODUCTION

This report has been compiled with the primary aim of assisting those who are preparing to sit Diploma Examination Papers in the future. It will also be of benefit to lecturers, course co-ordinators, tutors and mentors. It aims to give brief comments on candidates' answers to each question, as well as highlighting common pitfalls and successes. It is designed to provoke constructive thought as much as to give all the answers. Comments on individual questions are preceded by some statistics and general comments. In some instances, guidance notes are supplemented by extracts from candidates' responses. Where appropriate, advice is given on where additional marks could have been gained. Whilst examples are not provided for every question set, there are examples for each of the specific styles of question – coursework assignments, tasting questions and theory questions from the Unit 3 paper. In each instance, the scripts have been selected to illustrate good coverage of either the topic as a whole, or a specific section of it.

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

Candidates' responses published in this report were actual submissions in the 2003-04 examination cycle and as such are anonymous and are reproduced as submitted to the examiner. Additional examples of coursework assignments are also published on our website, www.wset.co.uk.

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

Janet Bangs
Director, WSET Awards
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DIPLOMA EXAMINATIONS 2003/04 STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

Paper	2004	Paper	2003	2002	2001	2000	1999
Unit 1	(1)	NO DIRECT EQUIVALENT PAPER					
Unit 2	79%	Section I (A)	48%	62%	53%	56%	50%
		Section I (B)	43%	44%	65%	66%	52%
Unit 3 Tasting 1 & 2	59%	Section IIA Tasting	60%	65%	68%	71%	68%
		Section IIB Tasting	51%	74%	75%	71%	61%
Unit 3 theory	27%	Section IIA Theory	50%	52%	52%	56%	53%
		Section IIB Theory	59%	57%	56%	67%	53%
Unit 4	76%	NO DIRECT EQUIVALENT PAPER					
Unit 5	70%	NO DIRECT EQUIVALENT PAPER					
Unit 6	65%	NO DIRECT EQUIVALENT PAPER					
Unit 7	(2)	NO DIRECT EQUIVALENT PAPER					
NO DIRECT EQUIVALENT PAPER		Section III (A)	83%	64%	78%	78%	85%
NO DIRECT EQUIVALENT PAPER		Section III (B)	78%	68%	84%	90%	74%

NOTES:

- (1) Direct pass rates for Unit 1 are not given as this Unit is awarded on completion of elements of Units 3, 4, 5 and 6.
- (2) At the time of writing this report, insufficient candidates have completed Unit 7 to generate reliable statistics.

GENERAL COMMENTS

Most of those reading this report will be studying for one of the seven Units of the revised Diploma syllabus, either as a first or second year candidate or one of those qualifying as being in transition from the old syllabus to the new. Whilst the majority of candidates have welcomed the changes, a very small number have found the move, from closed book examinations once a year to a more flexible, unitised qualification with continual assessment throughout the academic year, difficult to adapt to.

It is undeniable that this initial year has had its fair share of teething problems, with many transitional candidates finding it hard to come to terms with the rationale for the system of equivalency that allowed them to carry forward pass grades achieved under the old format. In addition, the WSET vastly underestimated the enormity of the administrative organisation required to process the submission of coursework assignments and portfolios of tasting notes from around one thousand candidates that register for this qualification worldwide each year. There were additional problems with the time required to turnaround candidate results. This was largely exacerbated by the cumbersome introduction of the Portfolio as part of the assessment criteria – something that clearly needed addressing as part of the syllabus review process, which has just taken place.

However, despite any setbacks in the administration of the new syllabus, the revised Diploma qualification certainly appears to be achieving its goal as far as candidate results are concerned with pass rates for the qualification as a whole, showing a welcome increase on those achieved under the old format.

The coursework assignments that form the assessment methodology for Unit 1 (the Global Business of Alcoholic Beverages) are generating good results, but there have been some instances where the authenticity of work has come into question. Where candidates have clearly committed plagiarism, the Examination Panel has had no option but to impose a fail grade for the work concerned. Fortunately these have been few and far between and the standard of work submitted, on the whole, has been high. There are nevertheless grave concerns that some candidates are not actually retaining the knowledge they demonstrate in the coursework assignments, with some extremely poor work submitted for the closed book theory questions in units 3, 4, 5 and 6.

The multiple choice examination format for Unit 2 (the Production of Wine) certainly seems to be the preferred method of assessment, particularly amongst candidates where English is not the mother tongue. Results for this unit have improved considerably worldwide since its introduction in August 2003 (see statistical analysis on page 4). However, in terms of content, this paper is just as challenging from an academic standpoint, as the former Section I, essay style paper. The multiple choice format clearly allows candidates to demonstrate their factual knowledge without the restriction of having to express this in an essay – something which many overseas candidates find too challenging.

Unit 3 has seen mixed results. Pass rates for the tasting papers are very much in line with the former Diploma examination – not really surprising, as the format of these papers has not really changed. Tasting Paper 2 generated better results than Tasting Paper 1, but this was due to the fact that Paper 1 was sat exclusively by first year candidates, who traditionally perform less well than second year candidates. This phenomenon was also very evident in the Unit 3 theory paper where candidates were either students in their first year of study or transitional candidates who had failed the old style theory paper. The pass rate for this theory paper was extremely poor at only 27% (see statistical analysis). This reinforces the trend that has emerged over recent years, whereby first year candidates appear to vastly underestimate the level of this qualification and the amount of revision work required to succeed in the closed book examination. It cannot be stressed often enough – study of the course notes in isolation is not sufficient for a

qualification of this level. The WSET and Approved Programme Providers must continue to ensure that candidates enrolling on the Diploma programme are fully aware of the standard required to succeed, and the level of commitment that they will have to demonstrate in terms of additional study and revision time. This is a professional qualification, which sits within the National Qualifications Framework at level 4 (just below Degree level) and requires sound background knowledge and the ability to analyse data rather than simply recall fact.

As with Unit 3, units 4, 5 and 6 generated mixed results. Candidates appear to have taken the introduction of the new tasting paper for spirits and sparkling wines in their stride – with clear evidence of good application of the Systematic Approach to Tasting Technique (SAT), particularly in the case of spirits which was written specifically for this unit. However, the level of factual knowledge displayed in the theory question was extremely worrying – in some cases even below that required for Advanced Certificate. This is very unsatisfactory as these units are a test of all-round knowledge and a significant number of candidates in the 2003/04 academic year have passed this paper purely on the strength of their tasting skills alone. This will also be addressed as part of the syllabus review process.

The number of candidates submitting Unit 7 assignments has so far been quite limited. Where candidates have accurately followed the brief in the Candidate Assessment Guide and have ensured that their work contains a significant amount of original research and analysis, results are encouraging. Those who have merely stated facts have either achieved a simple pass or a fail/refer grade. To date, there have been some highly original submissions and it has been encouraging to see the enthusiasm with which some candidates have approached this unit.

To finish on a positive note, the overriding message is one of optimism. Under the old Diploma format, the overall pass rate for the qualification as a whole tended to lie around 55%. Results in this first year of study (and excluding results for Unit 7, for which we do not currently have sufficient submissions to give reliable statistics) appear to suggest that the overall pass rate has risen to the low 60%. This does not imply that the examination has become easier, but rather that it is now more approachable and flexible. However, feedback from both candidates and programme providers indicates that some refinements to the new format qualification will be necessary as part of the current process of syllabus review. It goes without saying that these will be introduced only where required to ensure the continued robustness and appropriateness of this international trade qualification. All in all, we seem to have achieved what we set out to do – produce a more approachable and relevant qualification that meets the needs of both candidates and the wine and spirit industry as a whole.

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

Supplementary reading

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

Commercial awareness

Unit 1, The Global Business of wines and other beverages specifically examines candidates' commercial awareness through the means of coursework assignments. There is some evidence that candidates are ignoring the fundamental fact that wine and spirit production and trading are business enterprises, and therefore fail to bring a commercial approach to their answers where appropriate. All coursework assignments have a distinct commercial focus and a pass cannot be achieved simply by reiterating facts relating to production methods. Those interested in reading examples of good submissions for the 2003/04 coursework assignments will find them on the WSET website under www.wset.co.uk. This also contains details of the assignment titles for the 2004/05 academic year. Titles for the 2005/06 academic year will be published on 1 August 2005.

The regulars

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

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

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

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

Janet Bangs
Director WSET Awards

COMMENTS ON INDIVIDUAL QUESTIONS

Unit I, The Global Business of Wines and other Beverages

Firstly some general comments about the grading of coursework assignments:

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

The allocation of the balance of 80 marks varies according to the individual assignment and will be detailed as appropriate below.

Assignment attached to Unit 3

Many believe the bubble has burst for Cabernet Sauvignon and Chardonnay. Based on evidence of what is currently taking place in wine producing regions throughout the world, compile a report to illustrate whether this is the case or not. What effect is consumer demand having on the situation, and how are the wine trade and wine industry reacting?

Results for this question were disappointing considering the topical nature of the question. This was largely due to many candidates straying too far from the actual focus of the question and writing "open" essays on these two varieties in general. Many candidates limited their background reading to a small number of sources and simply loaded their assignment to fit what they had read. What they should have done, was to use their imagination and their own knowledge and understanding of the subject matter to define what was required and then read around the subject to corroborate and supplement their facts.

When setting assignment titles, the Diploma Examination Panel takes steps to ensure that the wording of the assignment leads candidates clearly and unambiguously towards the required format that the work should take. In this instance, the question contained important key words as highlighted here – "*Many believe the bubble has burst for **Cabernet Sauvignon and Chardonnay**. Based on **evidence** of what is currently taking place in wine producing regions throughout the world, compile a **report** to illustrate whether this is the case or not. What effect is **consumer demand** having on the situation, and how are the **wine trade and wine industry reacting?**" These key words provide the structure for the marking key that ensures that marks are allocated fairly, accurately and consistently to all candidates irrespective of the approach they choose to take for their answer. Marks are awarded depending on the depth and relevance of the candidates' response to these points.*

The balance of 80 marks for the content of this assignment was awarded as follows:

- ?? the introduction (clarification on the approach to the assignment, discussion of the opening statement in general terms, including the writer's own personal views, discussion of trends in consumer preference in the local market)
- ?? the report on what is taking place in wine producing regions (attracting just over half the marks available)
- ?? an evaluation of the effect of consumer demand
- ?? an evaluation of the reaction of the wine trade and industry

?? a final small allocation of marks for a conclusion, drawing together of ideas and possible recommendations

As already mentioned above, many candidates failed to cover all elements of the question or, did so in insufficient detail. In particular, many gave little evidence of what effect consumer demand is having and few suggestions on how the trade and industry could, should or is, reacting.

In terms of presentation, marks will be lost where work is presented with spelling and grammatical errors. With good spell checkers on all PCs these days, there is really no excuse for sloppy work of this kind. Structure is also important, particularly if candidates do not follow the format dictated by the working of the question, as it is easy to stray too far from the actual title of the assignment if a more “loose” structure is adopted. The bibliography is an essential part of the assignment and those submitted without one will be graded fail/refer. The bibliography needs to cover a variety of sources – books, magazines, internet, interviews – and certainly needs to have strong commercial evidence of the kind that can be obtained from trade journals such as *Harpers*, *Drinks Business*, or *Just Drinks*. These are vital for identifying trends and problems.

The introduction is important and should clearly set out the author’s stance in relation to the question posed – has the bubble burst or not?

The report on what is currently taking place in wine producing regions throughout the world, carried the bulk of the marks in this assignment and should therefore be extensive and conclusive. Far too many candidates limited this to a list of countries and some planting figures. The examiner was expecting evidence of analysis of statistical data given. Candidates should always aim to question figures to establish what they really mean. For example, is planting of these varieties increasing or decreasing? If plantings are increasing, you should be asking by how much and how quickly? Are vineyards being replanted or are growers top-grafting to get a quicker turnaround from one variety to another (i.e. reacting to consumer demand)? Are they ripping out indigenous varieties to replace them with Cabernet and Chardonnay and if so why, and where? Is it because these varieties are not popular with the consumer?

The report also needed to focus on what is happening in the winery. What trends are emerging? A very clear shift in recent years has been a move away from the very heavily oaked Chardonnays in Australia to the leaner, cleaner, more fruit-driven styles. This is a very clear indication of how consumer demand is influencing what is going on in terms of production. Far too many candidates failed to take their report beyond the realms of planting figures. The report should have covered issues such as the use of these varieties to improve quality, i.e. their increased use in the South of France as “cépages ameliorateurs”, or their blending capacity with other less well known varieties in places like Eastern Europe.

For an assignment on still, light wines of the world, there really should not be any reference to sparkling wines and the importance of the Chardonnay grape in this context. Far too many candidates wrote at length about Champagne and the growth of sparkling wines in the New World.

As far as the second half of the question is concerned, candidates needed to undertake some clear analysis of what the consumer wants. Obvious things to think about here are the ABC movement. But, candidates should also have considered whether this was being driven by the consumer or the producer (in the guise of mavericks such as Randall Grahm). If the consumer is tired of Cabernet and Chardonnay, what varieties are they switching to? Is there any evidence to support any suggestion that they are switching in any event (i.e. the increase in demand for grapes such as Merlot, Pinot Grigio or Sauvignon Blanc in the US)? Varietal labelling is something that is very much driven by consumer demand.

Finally, there needed to be some discussion and recommendation of what the trade and industry is doing to meet consumer demand. Of course the content of this section really hinged on whether “the bubble has indeed burst” or not. Statistical evidence seems to

suggest irrefutably that it has not. Planting of these two varieties is still increasing and the wines continue to sell in vast quantities. Therefore, this section should have focussed on what the trade and industry is doing to meet this demand or, indeed, take advantage of it to lead the consumer to other products.

There was plenty to say here:

- ?? labelling trends (varietal labelling in particular),
- ?? the marketing of flagship wines like classic Bordeaux and Burgundy to “trade consumers up”,
- ?? the marketing of commercial blends such as those from Australia and Eastern Europe
- ?? the role of premium blends such as Penfolds Grange, Chateau Musar, Angelo Gaja's wines etc.

Candidates should have asked themselves “what is the trade doing?” Are they offering the consumer more of the same (i.e. Cabernet and Chardonnay) but from other countries (i.e. diversification) or is the consolidation of the trade forcing them to rationalise their portfolios and thereby creating a need to “educate” the consumer about other classic wines from these varieties? What are the trends in distribution, marketing and sales? What is the role of these varieties as brands in their own right? What about the issue of “own label” brands where regionality is relatively unimportant as opposed to a movement towards increased regionality and originality, and indeed, terroir?

It is important that candidates understand that assignments are not simply a test of their literary skills, or their ability to replicate facts assembled from a variety of textbooks and magazines. They are a test of their ability to research and present information within clearly defined parameters, which ensures that they give the examiner the information required for the question as set.

Assignment attached to Unit 4

Describe briefly the principal styles and quality of white spirits available in your national market. What are the sales trends for these? For each identified style, explain the production factors and marketing techniques that influence pricing and market share.

This was a very straightforward question but many failed to read it carefully enough and so did less well than they thought they had. Assignments do not aim to test candidates' factual knowledge – this can only truly be tested by means of a closed book examination format. The examiner for this assignment was unimpressed by those who simply reproduced from textbooks long and detailed descriptions of how the various spirits were produced. This was not what was asked for - what was required here was careful extraction of only those specific processes that “**influence pricing and market share**”.

Once again this assignment contained vital key words that determined the allocation of marks in the marking key:

- ?? principal **styles** and **quality** of **white** spirits
- ?? **national market** (by definition, the market place of the country where the candidate is sitting the examination, not the market of the country where the candidate was born)
- ?? **sales trends**
- ?? **production factors** and **marketing techniques** that **influence pricing** and **market share**

Once again, a clear introduction was required, possibly commenting on current trends of white spirits generally in the national market and identification of the principal spirits to be discussed.

Candidates were specifically requested to describe the principal styles and quality of the spirits they had identified. As the question asked for **spirits** (in the plural), those who wrote only about one type of spirit, were penalised for not answering the question as set. This was a particular fault amongst Japanese candidates for example, who wrote exclusively about Shoshu or Scandinavians who only covered Aquavit. The examiner was looking for a minimum of 2 different categories of spirits and to cover this question well, candidates should have been aiming to address at least 3 or 4. For the majority of candidates, irrespective of where they sat the examination, there were clear choices of which spirits to include. In the UK, no assignment would have been complete without addressing Vodka, Gin and Rum (and to a lesser extent, Tequila). In the US, we would certainly have expected Tequila to have focussed more prominently, in France, it was clear that white rum plays a larger role. In terms of quality levels, this could be defined in a number of ways. The obvious route is to think in terms of generic levels such as "COD/cheapest on display", "BOB/buyers own brand", "premium", "super-premium". In specific terms for each style of spirits, this would cover issues such as Western/Eastern/Scandinavian vodka; London Dry/Plymouth/Dutch gin; silver/blanco/plata/joven tequila for example. Many candidates listed these but did not describe their characteristics as asked in the question.

Sales trends was covered well by most candidates, but as with other assignments, there was very little evidence of any analysis of the data quoted. Some candidates were clearly thinking beyond the charts and tables they produced, giving an overview of the market and looking for trends over the past few years. Some mentioned the fact that Gin has now been replaced by Vodka in the "shopping basket" used to calculate the RPI in the UK. Others acknowledged the fact that the increase in sales of premium gins such as Bombay Sapphire and Tanqueray is keeping this category afloat, or that sales of Tequila are dominated by the major brands. However, these were in the minority – most simply listed figures.

The really telling section of this assignment was the final part relating to production factors and marketing techniques. Far too many candidates simply copied from books the entire production process for each spirit discussed. Even more worryingly, they were then unable to replicate this information in the closed book theory question of the Unit 4 tasting exam, thereby proving that they had acquired no knowledge at all in the process of writing their assignment. This section of the assignment should have provided easy marks for those who gave the relevant information – not how they are made but which processes, raw materials etc make some products more expensive or desirable than others. For example,

Vodka – type of raw material (some produce different styles or quality levels), provenance of water, type of still, number of distillations, type and number of filtration processes, design of bottle (some are almost pieces of art)

Gin – distilling or cold compounding, type of raw material, number and type of botanicals, abv

Rum – type of still, use of molasses or cane juice

Some candidates were able to provide great detail here and show that they had researched their chosen categories extremely thoroughly.

Finally, marketing techniques should have covered the obvious – the 4 Ps (product, presentation, price, placement) and USPs often deriving from the unique production factors and how these can be profited from. Many candidates just described advertising campaigns without any comment on their influence on price or market share. Those who approached this well, discussed specific issues like changes in packaging – the blue bottle of Bombay Sapphire, the rejuvenated "Beefeater" on Beefeater Gin, the significance of the Smirnoff "breathless" campaign, the importance of cocktail bars and, of course, FABs and RTDs.

As with all assignments, a good conclusion is essential – not just summarising the question, but something original, perhaps drawing together ideas, making some comment about

possible future trends or personal opinion or recommendations. Far too many candidates either give no conclusion at all or simply repeated the question.

Finally, many commented on the fact that gin is drunk by an increasingly ageing customer group – no where is this more pertinent than in France where “Old Lady” gin adorns the shelves of many supermarkets.

Assignment attached to Unit 5

You are the owner of EITHER a sparkling wine brand OR a middle priced, but well thought of, Champagne – the choice is yours. Outline sales performance and market trends for your chosen category in its key markets. Then develop a plan for increasing sales while maintaining product reputation and profitability.

Once again, many candidates failed to read the question carefully enough. It asks for an outline of sales performance and market trends in key **markets**. Those who limited their answer to one market in isolation failed to answer the question as set and were penalised accordingly.

Many of the “plans” were extremely unimaginative (Pommery Pop is **not** the answer for all sparkling wines) and simplistic, in some cases merely listing what existing brands already do or not thinking at all about the effect of their suggestions in terms of product reputation or profitability. Many candidates talked of event sponsorship (Grand Prix racing) or advertising (large circulation glossy magazines) with no thought of the huge financial outlay that these would entail. Many sales plans contained good ideas of what could be done, but candidates did not always follow these suggestions through to their conclusion. There was often an indication of what needed to be done, but not always how to do it, what the cost implications were likely to be or what kind of timeframe would be needed to develop such initiatives.

On a general note, as with other assignments, where statistics were quoted, these were often taken no further in terms of analysis. In addition, there was a tendency with some to regurgitate the lecturer's notes (where lectures had formed part of the study plan) whether these bore any relevance to the question or not. Some assignments showed signs of collaboration or “leading” by the Approved Programme Provider, or in the worst cases, plagiarism or simply copying another candidate's work. Candidates must remember that assignments are to be the work of one individual only and they should be in no doubt that it is always very obvious to the examiner when this is not the case. The penalties in such instances can be very severe indeed.

This assignment is quite clear and specific in what it asks. Firstly, identify your chosen product category – brand or mid-priced Champagne. Secondly, identify the key markets for your product and outline sales performance and market trends. Thirdly, develop a plan for increasing sales. Any submission for this assignment must address these three aspects as these determine the allocation of marks available.

In terms of product category, some candidates created problems for themselves by selecting products that did not transpose well beyond the home market, for example, English sparkling wine. As the assignment dictated that sales performance and market trends should be outlined for the category in its key markets, this proved difficult unless the candidate widened this analysis to cover the sparkling wine category in a generic sense. This market analysis should have considered the current state of the market, provided evidence on whether sales were increasing, stagnant or decreasing and suggest possible reasons for this. Obviously, this should have gone beyond the home market, therefore considering the domestic and export markets, and even possibly taking this further to consider different types of market within the various countries such as on and off trade, HORECA etc.

The sales plan carried the bulk of the marks in this assignment and in many instances was far too brief. Many candidates wrote at length describing the profile of their potential customer, eg the Champagne regular, brand advocate, impulse buyer etc clearly regurgitating, word for word, class handouts without actually analysing how they apply to the product category selected. Whilst useful as a tool for identifying likely target customers, this was often covered in too much detail to the detriment on other key points that should have been the focus here. There was also widespread adoption of every conceivable marketing analysis from SWOT, PEST, PESTLE and the 4 P's. Again, whilst some of these had some relevance, many were not sufficiently linked to the question.

Despite the negative comments above, there were some imaginative and possibly more importantly, realistic suggestions for the marketing plan. Some of the best included:

- ?? targeting the WSET to use the product on wine courses thereby reaching potential customers at little cost
- ?? targeting the on-trade to get restaurant listings as a pouring brand
- ?? focussing on Gentlemen's Clubs as a means of maintaining "reputation"
- ?? offering tutored tastings around set meals to introduce the concept of sparkling wine/Champagne as a food wine
- ?? devising different labels for the on and off trade to avoid "devaluing" in the eye of the consumer
- ?? putting disgorgement dates on back labels
- ?? extending the range – single vineyard wines, single village wines
- ?? use in cocktails

There were of course many more initiatives from BOGOFs, discounting (both dangerous in terms of reputation and profitability), sponsorship, staff incentives, advertising etc, but the examiner really was expecting candidates to think beyond the obvious here. For example, many candidates talked about repackaging or label design in simplistic terms. The following candidate mentioned this also as a possibility, but took this one stage further by raising the issue of reputation.

"Marketing and promotion need careful handling if they are not to damage the brand. Successful brands need to be revitalised by changing packaging in ways which maintain the brand triggers while bringing the package up to date, but this is an expensive and risky process. The fashion is to go outside design agencies, with varying results; Pol Roger's recent repackaging by Lewis Moberly has been successful, while Billecart-Salmon's redesign is widely seen as too simple and downmarket (The Drinks Business, November 2003)"

Not only has this candidate taken an initiative and questioned its validity, they have also correctly referenced and acknowledged the source of their material – something that far too many simply did not do.

The following extract shows what constitutes a good clear introduction.

"Beaumont & Cie Champagne is a (fictitious) middle priced but well thought of Champagne. A relatively small producer compared to the market leaders, in 2002 it shipped 290,000 bottles, an estimated market share of 0.1%, worth 3.48m euros.

"Middle priced" is defined as the "house" branded Brut Non-Vintage Champagne ("Premiere Cuvee"). Its current price ex-cellars is 12 euro, equating to a UK retail price (before discounts) of £18-£22.

"Well thought of" means known for good quality at this price point by intermediaries and consumers.

*This report first outlines **sales performance and market trends** in key Champagne markets. Supporting statistics are enclosed in the appendices. Market forecasts, key factors and competitive analysis are included.*

A **market opportunity assessment** then collates this information and identifies sales opportunities and risks.

From this a **sales plan** is developed. The strategic objective is to increase sales while maintaining reputation and profitability. The plan shows the revenue impact of delivering sustainable sales growth of 5% pa for the next 3 years and the tactics needed to achieve this target.”

This is very clear and concise. It introduces the examiner to the product, defines some important key terms and explains what the assignment will cover.

Assignment attached to Unit 6

What measures have the Port and Sherry industries taken to modernise the production of their wines and to market and sell them?

The Examination Panel regarded this as a very straightforward question, and the factual format seemed to appeal to candidates more than the open, discursive style of the other assignments. However, this still required a strong commercial understanding of the marketplace to fully appreciate the problems faced by the Port and Sherry industries. There was a clear distinction between the answers where candidates had read widely and had up-to-date commercial awareness of recent changes, and those who had simply read the “required reading” and approached this question from a historical standpoint.

The examiner for this question was looking for the following key points:

- ?? an introduction outlining the author's approach to the question and possibly giving some key facts on the current state of the market
- ?? a report on production for both categories of wine covering what is currently taking place in the vineyard, in the winery and recent changes within the trade structure
- ?? a report on initiatives in terms of sales and marketing
- ?? conclusion drawing together all the facts and making appropriate observations or recommendations

The bulk of the marks were allocated between the report on production and that on marketing with a slight bias in favour of production.

In terms of production, a good distinction between the average and the good candidate was the difference between those who merely quoted the trend in Portugal of block planting of varieties and those who not only mentioned it but also questioned the validity of this move. Some of the other key points to mention here (but by no means all) are the switch from socalcos to patamares and vinho ao alto, investment in electricity permitting the use of robotic lagares and autovinifiers, use of quad bikes and electric secateurs and snap max grow tubes for new vines, replacement of the Casa do Douro with the CIRDD, suspension of bulk shipments by the IVP.

Many candidates struggled to come up with initiatives on Sherry production, often resorting to simplistic phrases like “machine harvesting” and “stainless steel fermentation”. Whilst correct, this needed more detail. The following candidate provided this.

“In the pre-phylloxera period there were a great number of grape varieties used in the production of Sherry. Post-phylloxera, this was greatly reduced to the three quality grapes used today —Palomino, Moscatel and Pedro Ximenez, Palomino is by far the most significant making up 90% of total production. After phylloxera, vines were grafted onto American rootstocks. These are chosen according to the soil's lime content. Vines are more and more planted in rows and trained on wires as opposed to the hexagonal patterns, called tresbolillo,

and bush training used in the past. Further, traditionally the vines have been spaced 1.5m apart with 1.5m between the rows. This is now being replaced with vines planted 1m apart and 2m between rows. These modern spacing and training techniques allow tractors to pass allowing for increased mechanisation. While mechanical harvesting is currently only conducted on an experimental scale, Luis Breton, former secretary general of export association Fedejerez, believes "(it) will be commonplace within ten years". Research conducted in the region concluded with the pronouncement that mechanical harvesting is "suitable for Jerez wine" with "minimal damage" to vines, and that "there was no great difference between the hand and mechanical harvest" in the resulting wines (Richards, 2002). Mechanisation seems to be the most logical way for growers to increase their income as labour is often scarce and grape prices are fixed.

Sherry wine making has modernised over the years as well. Traditionally harvest began on 8 September but this harvest is now decided by more scientific means, measuring the potential alcohol of the grapes. Harvest typically begins when grapes reach 11 dg baume. The exact date a grower harvests is now decided by measuring potential alcohol and acids in the grapes. Grapes are rarely dried on straw mats as was traditionally done. For the drying of Pedro Ximenez grapes, straw mats have largely been replaced by plastic tunnels. Because of high temperatures and to prevent oxidation, pressing is now often done in press-houses, which have been established in the vineyards. Traditionally gypsum was added to grapes before pressing, primarily to help increase acidity. Due to health concerns this additive has been eliminated. Modern winemakers now add tartaric acid to increase acidity after pressing. Temperature controlled fermentation is now often used with temperatures kept between 25 and 30 degrees celsius. Wine which is to become fino sherry is fermented at lower temperatures than oloroso to retain freshness. Fermentation in temperature controlled stainless steel tanks has replaced barrel fermentation. The process of fractional blending used in Sherry soleras is traditionally quite labour intensive, involving fractions of the volume of one barrel of the solera being added to another manually. This process known as "running the scales" has been mechanised in many bodegas. Today filtration and cold-sterile bottling are quite common place. This modern technology and increased hygiene gives the winemaker control over what style of Sherry is to be produced and in creating a consistent product."

This is by no means the best example of Sherry modernisation but gives a good idea of what is required to achieve a basic pass grade. Anything less than this really is not enough.

A good technique to adopt when writing assignments is the use of key headings. Many candidates did this to ensure that they covered all the relevant parts of the assignment. An example of this from one candidate was as follows:

Introduction
Sherry industry
 Viticulture
 Marketing and advertising
 New products
Port industry
 Viticulture
 Winemaking
 Marketing, new products, distribution
Conclusion"

Whilst there are gaps in this (nothing in winemaking in respect of Sherry) and some inconsistency, the concept is good.

The following candidate wrote a good, clear introduction, which sets the scene and goes beyond merely repeating the question.

"The Port and Sherry industries share a long history within the fortified wine trade. Sherry is one of the oldest fine wines in the world and its exports to England date back to the 13th century. Traditional methods of viticulture and vinification are employed in the production of

Port and Sherry and the vast majority of grapes are picked by hand. Skilled labour shortages, cost and quality benefits have led to new innovation within the vineyards and wineries. This new innovation has been driven in the Douro region, while Sherry production methods are steadily advancing in the 21st century.

Port shipments have increased steadily in the last decade, from 7.2 m cases in 1992 to 10.3 m in 2002. This is a 32% increase over a 10-year period. Whilst the Port industry has shown this considerable growth, the Sherry industry has suffered decline over the same period. There has been a realisation throughout the Port and Sherry industries that modernisation is essential for survival in the current market place. With a new generation of wine drinkers the importance of transforming their images, to capture this growing market sector whilst maintaining and improving the quality of their product range, is recognised.

To explore the modernisation of the Port and Sherry industries, this paper will examine viticulture and vinification techniques and analyse measures taken to successfully market and sell the two traditional fine wines.”

In terms of marketing and sales, there was a great deal to cover here which made it all the more disappointing when candidates failed to use their eyes to see what is happening on supermarket shelves, relying only on what they could “glean” from articles and books.

Very few mentioned the obvious initiative – the growth of tourism in the Douro and in Jerez. Most covered food and wine matching, in particular the “10 star tapas” initiative. There was plenty to say about product development or redesign. However, it was obvious from some assignments, where candidates could think of nothing more innovative than the introduction of LBV Port, that they are not paying enough attention to the importance of commercial awareness for the completion of these assignments. Most mentioned the new age dated Sherries VOS and VSOP and talked of Tio Pepe’s move towards marketing their Sherry as a “wine”. On the Port front, there is plenty in the way of brand marketing to mention, Warre’s Otima, Sandeman’s Vau Vintage, Noval’s Raven for example.

On the whole, there were some excellent submissions for this assignment. The WSET website will give examples of full assignments for each of the 4 titles in due course so that candidates have a clear idea of where they should be setting their sights.

Unit 2, Wine Production

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

Nevertheless, it should be pointed out that statistics are showing a vastly increased pass rate for this paper under its new format compared to the former essay style questions. Whilst the questions are certainly not easy, candidates have little to fear providing they study the recommended reading thoroughly.

Unit 3, Wines of the World

Tasting Paper 1

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

Answers: 326

Passes: 229 (70%)

The easiest way to lose marks in this paper is by failing to identify the grape variety. A number of candidates insist on giving a different variety for each wine despite being told in advance that one variety applies to all three wines. Another classic mistake is assuming the identity of the grape variety on the basis of the first wine tasted. It is easy to become distracted and attempt to make the remaining descriptions fit the variety chosen rather than use the information they contain to arrive at the correct identity. A number of candidates give two varieties rather than one. This is "hedging your bets" and earns no marks at all even if one of the varieties is correct. If you are asked to give one variety, that is what you must do.

The three wines in this instance were Châteauneuf du Pape La Bernadine 2000, Martinez Bujanda Valdemar Garnacha 2003 Rioja Rosada, and Purisima Mountain Vineyard Grenache 2001 from the Santa Ynez Valley. There were some concerns following the examination that candidates had found this paper difficult and the choice of Grenache as the grape variety was an unfair one. These were completely unfounded, as the majority of candidates identified the grape correctly (the Rioja and the level of alcohol in all three wines were the clue here) and this question generated extremely good results compared to the other questions in the tasting paper.

Common errors in this question, apart from those already identified above, were inaccurate identification of colour of the wine and poor assessment of quality. Many candidates use the terms ruby and garnet indiscriminately – there is a very clear distinction between the two, which can give important clues, in many instances, to the identity or provenance of the wine. The difference between ruby and garnet is that the latter heads more towards brown rather than the blue/purple side of the spectrum, which applies more to ruby. In terms of the quality assessment, many made short, vague assessments such as "good quality" or "excellent wine of high quality". With 4 marks available for this section of the tasting note, this is clearly insufficient. Candidates need to explain what is leading them to such a conclusion. What deductions in their tasting note support their claims? What is required here is an analysis of comments made in the tasting note (but not simply repetition of them, which many do). For example, for the Châteauneuf du Pape, the complexity of the fruit aromas clearly pointed to a good quality wine rather than an ordinary one. However, this wine had a slight gap in the palate and lacked a certain amount of elegance despite the complexity and structure. This hinted at a very good rather than excellent example. For the Rioja Rosada, the assessment should have recognised that this was a simple, one-dimensional wine of basic quality, designed for easy drinking. The fruit on the nose did not follow through on the palate to the same extent and the evidence of slight volatility on the nose and palate indicated some lack of balance. This was a good commercial style of wine. An assessment such as "good quality deep rosé" conveys none of this.

Another way to lose marks is through loose, unquantified or vague application of the Systematic Approach to Tasting Technique (SAT). Examples found on some scripts were "acidity present" (acidity is present in all wines from the most flabby to the most tart, the precise level needs to be defined), "tannic" (this simply implies that tannin is present, candidates need to specify whether it is high, low, medium, soft, harsh etc). Such comments do not specifically tell the examiner what he needs to know about the wines and marks cannot be allocated. Other terms to avoid are "nice" or "good" – in isolation, they convey nothing to the examiner, for example "nice tannins" "good acidity" "nice finish" – all far too vague to merit any marks. Many candidates use the term "balance" incorrectly. Consider the following comment "very balanced between alcohol, acidity and fruit/oak". This tells the examiner nothing unless each of these attributes is defined in turn. They could all be "in balance"

because they are all high or low or medium, equally, the acidity could be high but the fruit intensity only medium yet still be “in balance”. This is precisely why such comments are not appropriate unless quantified in some way.

As far as the third wine was concerned, the California Grenache, We certainly were not expecting candidates to be able to identify the provenance of this wine accurately. But we did expect them to be able to recognise the grape variety and place it in the New World rather than the old (the ripeness of fruit and huge body and alcohol were the clue here). The marking key made an allowance in this respect and marks were allocated for any reasonable warm climate New World country.

Of the three wines in this question, the simple Rioja Rosada was answered the most confidently, however the quality of the Châteauneuf was not identified well, many decided it was from Bordeaux or felt it was past its prime.

On a lighter note, one candidate disliked one of the wines so much, they suggested “serving it to the mother-in-law”.

Question 2: Wines with a common theme

Answers: 326

Passes: 164 (51%)

The wines for this paper were cited as “all made sharing a common theme in respect of vinification and or maturation”. Despite being given this information an alarming number of candidates decided they were “all Chardonnay wines” – nothing to do with maturation at all. This kind of error is careless and completely unnecessary, causing the loss of valuable marks. Information provided within the question is there to help you – make sure you use it. They had in fact all been subject to barrel fermentation and/or maturation.

The three wines were a Rutherford Hill California Chardonnay 2001, Beringer Vineyards Fumé Blanc 2002, and Puligny-Montrachet 1er Cru, Les Folatières 2002. The varietal character was clearly evident on the Fumé Blanc and this should have prevented candidates from believing all three wines to be from the same grape variety even if they had not read the question clearly enough and realised the significance of the reference to vinification and maturation.

Another common reason for failure or a poor performance in the tasting paper is not using the WSET Systematic Approach. Missing out key features such as sweetness, acidity, body, alcohol etc is simply throwing marks away. With three marks available for the appearance, the candidate needs to make three valid observations. No marks are given for stating that the wine is clear or bright on the basis that all examination wines are in condition and by default therefore clear and bright. By simply correctly identifying the colour of the wine, the intensity of the colour, and any variation between the rim and core, the three marks are assured. Other observations that could be made where appropriate include comments on signs of development, viscosity or bubbles. Vagueness or inaccuracy in terms of colour will not guarantee any marks, such as describing a wine as “straw gold” in colour – two very distinct ends of the spectrum, one very pale and the other usually deep. Even worse, are the candidates who simply use the term “yellow”.

Many candidates still do not appear to understand what is required in a professional, analytical tasting note. There is a general tendency amongst some to compare the three wines rather than describe them individually. This leads them to write imprecise comments such as “deeper than wine no 1”, “more intense than wines 1 and 3”, “higher acidity than wine 2”. This is not correct application of the Systematic Approach. Each wine must be assessed on its own merits with all attributes analysed according to the terminology defined in the SAT. This means that the acidity, tannin, body, alcohol etc must be quantified. It would be acceptable to describe a wine as having “high alcohol, but slightly lower than wine no 1”, as the level has clearly been defined at the outset. By comparison, a comment of “alcohol lower

than wine 1" is sloppy and imprecise as it could mean the alcohol is medium or low in the case of wine 1 having "high" alcohol.

As with the previous question, many candidates give insufficient information when assessing the quality of the wine and there is still confusion over what is meant by "state of maturity". This report covers this every year – maturity is **not** the same thing as age. Maturity refers to the development of the wine. Is it immature and therefore not ready to drink as in the case of a top quality Bordeaux that needs more time in bottle? Or is it fully mature and starting to decline as with many high volume, commercial wines, which are sold within a year of production, say a Vinho Verde or a Beaujolais Nouveau? Many candidates would incorrectly describe this latter wine as "young or youthful" rather than "mature". Many give a vintage date under "state of maturity" – this is not the same thing and gets no marks.

Tasting Paper 2

Question 3: Partly-Specified Wines

Answers: 635

Passes: 454 (72%)

The examiner noted a wide variety in the quality of the answers. Most wrote good tasting notes, but were confused or not precise enough when it came to the quality assessment. Comments such as "average quality" will not gain marks unless some reference is made to the quality level the wine is pitched at. For example, is it "average" for a Grand Cru or for an entry level £3.99 wine? This section of the paper carries 7 marks and comments such as "good" or "AC level" are simply not detailed enough. What the examiners are looking for here is a statement of the quality of the wine that is supported by well argued reasoning and analysis that demonstrates an understanding of the elements of a wine that contribute to its quality.

As the focus of this question is to test the candidates' ability to differentiate between the quality levels of the three wines, this assessment is a powerful tool. Unfortunately many took the obvious route, and assumed that as wine no 2, the Château de la Guimonière was a sweet wine and therefore probably a Coteaux du Layon, this was bound to be the most expensive of the three. In fact, this was an inexpensive Coteaux du Layon at only £8.99 for a full 75cl bottle. Those who wrote a tasting note based on what was actually in the glass rather than what they would expect from an expensive botrytised sweet wine, realised that this wine was outclassed by wine no 3, the Vouvray Sec, le Haut Lieu 2002 from Domaine Huet. Wine no 1, the supermarket Anjou Blanc caused few such problems.

Question 4: Unspecified Wines

Answers: 635

Passes: 435 (69%)

Many of the comments made under the 3 preceding questions apply equally well here, so I have chosen to reproduce below a good example of a script which scored high marks. Each heading has been addressed in full, assessments of quality are analytical and logical, and conclusions are correct apart from the region for wine no 10.

Wine no 10 – Plantaganet Mount Barker Cabernet Sauvignon

Appearance: *Clear. Deep opaque garnet core with a narrowish but still quite intense ruby rim. Legs clearly evident indicating alcohol or sweetness.*

Nose: *Clean, pronounced aroma of black cherry and hints of mint. Ripe juicy blackcurrants, tobacco, smoke and spice. A youthful, vibrant wine with a slight stalky, sappy edge.*

Palate: Dry but very ripe fruit gives an impression of sweetness. Medium plus, juicy acidity (almost crisp) and chewy, slightly astringent tannins. Full bodied with concentrated ripe fruit, blackcurrants and brambles. A hint of cigar box and cedar indicating use of oak. Mint and peppery spice but also herbaceous. High alcohol and a massive long finish.

Assessment of quality: A quality wine with pronounced rich ripe fruit and beautifully integrated oak. The wine shows complexity and structure with a long length and the capacity to develop further.

State of maturity: Approachable now but will benefit from bottle ageing to allow it to soften. Will drink over next 8 - 10 years.

Approximate age of wine: 2 - 4 years old

Country of origin: Australia

Region of origin, if applicable: South East Australia

Predominant grape variety / varieties: Cabernet Sauvignon

Wine no 11 – Mommessin Beaujolais Petits Fruits Rouges 2002

Appearance: Clear and bright. Pale ruby core fading to a broad pink rim with watery edges. Noticeable legs.

Nose: Clean, youthful and simple. Pronounced nose of bubble gum, confectioned, boiled sweets, strawberries and cream, jammy, currants and slightly peppery. Clearly no oak ageing.

Palate: Dry, medium acidity. Light bodied, quite green in character but tannins are soft and on the low side. Low fruit intensity of simple jammy, redcurrants and strawberries with a slight touch of spice. Medium alcohol and a short, simple, one-dimensional finish.

Assessment of quality: Simple, made to be drunk young. Attractive fresh fruit but no complexity. Short finish dominated by acidity and slight greenness and lacking any real depth on the mid palate.

State of maturity: Drinking now, will not improve.

Approximate age of wine: 2 years

Country of origin: France

Region of origin, if applicable: Burgundy

Predominant grape variety / varieties: Gamay

WINE No. 12 Marques de Grinon Rioja Reserva collection Personel 1999

Appearance: Clear and bright. Medium garnet core fading to a broad rim with hints of mahogany. Showing development.

Nose: Clean, intense aroma of oak, tobacco, leather, smoke, tar, spice, plums, black cherry, herbs. Aroma is slightly meaty and savoury. A developed aroma with lots of complexity and richness.

Palate: Dry with ripe tannins (but still some grip), Medium plus acidity with medium body. Moderate intensity of slightly dusty, earthy, dried fruits, red berries, savoury, oak, tobacco and spice. Fruit falls away a little and is not as intense as on the nose. Warm medium plus alcohol and a long, spicy finish.

Assessment of quality: A good quality wine. Reasonable balance of fruit to oak. Nose quite complex, but palate does not quite live up to this, lacking some fruit intensity and depth, slightly disappointing on the palate.

State of maturity: Mature and best drunk over the next couple of years.

Approximate age of wine: 3 - 5 years old

Country of origin: Spain

Region of origin, if applicable: Rioja

Predominant grape variety / varieties: Tempranillo

Theory Paper

Group A: Compulsory Question

What are the factors that have led to top quality Cabernet Sauvignon being produced in each of the following:

- a) **Bordeaux**
- b) **Tuscany**
- c) **Maipo Valley**
- d) **Napa Valley**

Answers: 296

Passes: 97 (33%)

This was a compulsory question and clearly highlighted which candidates had not studied the whole Unit 3 syllabus. This is, of course, the purpose of the compulsory question – to differentiate those candidates who have good all round knowledge from those who may know a great deal about a few areas only.

This was judged to be a fair choice for the compulsory question, covering both the old and new world and taking one of the most popular grape varieties as its focus. For those who had read widely and extensively in researching their Unit 3 coursework assignment this should have been a gift of a question. Unfortunately, there was far too much evidence that candidates are not covering the whole syllabus and, more worryingly, that they retain very little (if anything at all in some instances) from the work done in compiling their coursework assignments. This calls into question the value of coursework as a reliable or valid means of assessment.

The results for this question were poor, with few demonstrating a good understanding or knowledge of all four regions. As all four sections carried equal marks, the candidate who knew one very well, one only adequately and two extremely badly was unlikely to pass with a 55% pass mark. The starting point for this question is quite simply the basic factors responsible for determining the style of a wine. These are taught at all levels of WSET qualifications – climate, weather, soil, viticulture, vinification, grape variety. Clearly the key ones here were the first three.

A large number of candidates failed to provide evidence of even Advanced Certificate level in this respect. There were fundamental errors in discussion of climate, with poor understanding of what maritime implied. Many stated that Bordeaux has a mediterranean climate, some that it was continental, some concluded that all four regions had a maritime climate, which could have been argued to some extent if one includes Bolgheri on the Tuscan coast, but it really is not as simple as that. Several candidates described both Maipo and Napa as being cool, because of the maritime influence instead of referring to the “cooling effects” of the nearby ocean.

Not surprisingly, Bordeaux posed fewest problems, followed by Maipo. Climate in general was the factor most often cited as a contributing factor, but as already discussed, not always correctly. Tuscany proved to be the weakest section. Although most candidates knew about the “Super Tuscans”, many did not know enough about the geographical factors in Tuscany. If they did, they were confused between Bolgheri (on the coast) and the rest of Tuscany (further inland) and wrote about both areas under the same umbrella. A few people tried to hedge their bets when it came to defining exactly where Maipo was, indicating in their answer that they knew it was in South America, but clearly unsure whether it was Argentina or Chile.

In terms of structure for this question, this was left entirely up to the candidate. Many took it simply at face value and wrote four paragraphs. Others adopted an essay format and discussed each region in turn.

The following is an extract from one candidate's script, specifically on Bordeaux. This was excellent and the adoption of the same format for the remaining 3 regions, ensured this candidate gained high marks.

"Cabernet Sauvignon is a noble grape which has enjoyed success throughout the world. However, there are some wine producing regions which are particularly suited to this variety and therefore produce stunning wines showing the full potential of this grape.

The first of such regions is Bordeaux – the classic homeland of Cabernet. The reasons for its success here lie in the terroir and its treatment in both the vineyard and the winery.

Climate – the maritime influence of the Atlantic (warmed by the Gulf Stream) allows Bordeaux a temperate climate with long warm summers. This particularly suits Cabernet, which does not ripen properly in cooler climates.

Soil – the gravel based soils of the left bank of the Gironde is where Cabernet is at its happiest. They provide good drainage and extra reflected heat. Cabernet is able to fully express its terroir in Bordeaux, with marked differences even between the village communes of the Haut Medoc. For example, in St Estephe where the soil has less gravel and more clay, the wines are more austere than those of St Julien whose soil is better drained.

Topography – adding to the natural good drainage of the soils, the topography of the region contains a number of small "jalles" or streams, which cut through the flat plateau land and provide gentle slopes for better drainage.

Viticulture – high vine density (up to 10,000 vine/ha in the best vineyards) and low maximum yields (40 hl/ha in the best vineyards) both contribute to better quality Cabernet. The guyot training system helps air circulation which, along with regular spraying, helps prevent rot which Cabernet is susceptible to.

Vinification – the most important aspect in Bordeaux winemaking is the blending of Cabernet with other varieties such as Merlot, Petit Verdot, Cabernet Franc and Malbec. The winemakers here have realised the Cabernet, with its empty middle palate, needs to be blended to reach its full potential. Typical blends of top Chateaux will have about 75% Cabernet. Another aspect is top quality vinification to include extended maceration periods and at least 18 months in oak. These expensive processes can be well afforded due to the high prices the top wines fetch."

This was followed by further discussion of the other three regions under the same basic headings.

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

Describe the climate of each of the following areas and explain how climatic factors determine the principle style(s) of light wines produced in each:

- a) Valdepeñas, Spain***
- b) Willamette Valley, USA***
- c) Lower Hunter Valley, Australia***
- d) Barolo, Italy***
- e) Côte Rôtie, France***
- f) Casablanca Valley, Chile***

Answers: 226

Passes: 119 (53%)

Candidates rarely do well in paragraph questions. A quick browse through this and earlier reports will confirm this. Candidates should take note of the advice given in this document, as

paragraph questions will continue to feature heavily in the closed book examination for Unit 3, Wines of the World.

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

As so often happens, this paragraph question produced some very poor results. Candidates really should not attempt this style of question unless they are sure of their facts for the majority of the six paragraph headings. However, having said this, at a 53% pass rate, this question really was the best of a bad lot.

The six regions in this question were selected for the diversity of their climates – this meant that candidates needed to be able to differentiate between the various types. The previous question had already identified some clear weaknesses in this respect. However, this question required candidates to go beyond the simple “tags” such as continental, maritime etc, and it was clear in many instances that candidates had little understanding of the most obvious elements that determine climate – sunlight, temperature, rain, wind. Many also failed to address the issue of wine style or failed to grasp what “style” meant in this context – colour, ripeness, structure, acid, tannin, alcohol etc. Too many candidates did not read the question properly and included unnecessary or irrelevant information in their answers, such as soil and training methods. This was a question specifically on climate in isolation. Of course, it is a temptation under examination conditions to tell the examiner “everything you know” in the hope of extra marks. This is a waste of time. Marks are awarded only for information relevant to the question.

The following is an example of how **not** to succeed at paragraph style questions:

“ Valdepenas – warm climate, continental, very hot summers and very cold winters. Long ripening season (autumn), warm reds with chocolate flavours, usually aged in oak – integrated.

Willamette – cool climate.

Lower Hunter Valley – sub tropical climate, wet summers, hot and humid, warm winters. Produce Semillon and Shiraz. Australian fruity wines but rather elegant. Lively balanced spice in Shiraz.

Barolo – continental climate with influence from the River Po, warm, fruity wine from the Nebbiolo grape variety.

Cote Rotie – long hot summers, cold winters, cooling influence of the River Rhone. Situated on the west bank near proximity of the Alps. Spicy, peppery, fruity Northern Rhone from the Syrah grape variety.

Casablanca Valley – Chile has the Atacama Desert to the north, the Pacific Ocean to the west, the Andes to the east and the Antarctic influence from the south. The Casablanca Valley is extremely hot but gets cool sea breezes coming on-shore from midday onward, and cool, oxygen-full breezes at night coming down from the Andes. The grapes including Chardonnay and Sauvignon Blanc are influenced by these factors, producing concentrated fruity wines.

Needless to say, this candidate failed. Not only is this answer brief, but it also contains factual errors and where the information is correct, it is extremely general and vague. An answer of this quality is not even worthy of Advanced Certificate.

For the Willamette Valley this candidate could have mentioned any of the following:

Temperate, maritime (marginal) climate with mild winters and cool, wet summers
Long growing season; the influence from the Pacific
Altitude of the vineyards at 250-750m above sea level
Rarity of frost and the variable autumns (cool and damp) with associated rot/dilution problems
Common vintage (and volume) variation
Prevalence of aromatic, medium-bodied wines with good acidity from grape varieties such as Pinot Noir, Riesling and Pinot Gris

The paragraph on Barolo was particularly weak and worrying since this is a classic wine. The key points are as follows:

Classic northern continental climate - fairly hot summers, cold winters
Cooling Alpine influence
Long, damp, foggy autumns
Rainfall throughout the year, peaks in April-May and October-November
Danger of summer hail
Vintage variation (averages 2 excellent vintages per decade); volumes vary
Rot problems
Aromatic, floral red wines with high acidity
Not always phenolically ripe with high tannins which need time to resolve
Relatively pale colour

Botrytis cinerea helps to make great sweet wines in Sauternes and in Tokaj-Hegyalja. Describe the production techniques used in each region and the resulting wine styles. (An essay format is required for this question.)

Answers: 228

Passes: 83 (36%)

Despite the warning that this question specifically required an essay format answer, some candidates still chose to ignore this instruction. They were penalised in the marking process as a result.

This was a popular question and one of the better pass rates of an extremely poor lot. A number of candidates attempting to answer this question knew enough about Sauternes to pass but were caught out by the need to cover Tokaji as well. Those who did know about Tokaji, were not always aware of the current trend towards the new fruit driven styles – with the emphasis on non oxidative winemaking and shorter ageing. Only two candidates demonstrated they were aware of these changes even if they could not provide the detail. Many scripts were simply too short. In the time available for each question (1/2 hour), the examiner expects about two sides of A4 paper, yet many scripts were barely one side or even less, resulting in an inadequate answer. Some candidates mis-spelt words contained in the question itself such as botrytis cinerea, Sauternes and Tokaj-Hegyalja. This is careless in the extreme and will not impress the examiner even if it is unlikely to lose much in the way of marks.

In general, production of Sauternes was covered well. Those who passed, were aware of the climatic conditions, often with specific detail of river names and conditions for noble rot. Grape varieties could be named and there were some good comments relating to vinification and maturation. Few, however, really conveyed the risk factor entailed in the production of great Sauternes or understood how corners might be cut to make an acceptable rather than great wine. Tokaji was clearly a problem for many as reflected in the large number of candidates who failed this question. If able to locate production in Hungary (or more

accurately the north east of the country) or cite the conditions required for noble rot, most were unaware of the slightly different conditions, were unable to name the rivers (Bodrog and Tisza) and struggled to list the relevant grape varieties (Furmint, Harslevelu and Muscat Lunel). Knowledge of the vinification method was at best sketchy. Although some candidates were aware that aszu berries are made into a paste, there were many versions of how this paste was used to make the different grades of Tokaji. As already discussed, the majority were unaware that things have moved on from the Communist era and that modern styles are non-oxidative.

Finally, many candidates failed to answer the second half of the question and did not describe the style of the wines produced. This lost them a sizeable portion of the marks allocated in the marking key.

With reference to Australasia, Africa and/or Asia, write a short paragraph on each of the following:

- a) **Chenin Blanc**
- b) **Swan Valley**
- c) **China**
- d) **Mataro**
- e) **Hawkes Bay**
- f) **KWV**

Answers: 182

Passes: 38 (21%)

Questions on the new world are often popular as are paragraph style questions (despite the pitfalls already identified in this report). However, this question was a recipe for disaster, with two very clear dangers – not reading the question carefully enough to realise that the paragraph on Chenin Blanc should not relate to the Loire Valley, and not covering the whole syllabus and thereby missing out “less mainstream” regions such as China.

Those who had read and learnt the Study Notes, were able to recite these for the paragraph on China and pick up the marks available. The examiners were certainly not expecting any detail here beyond that given in the Study Notes. Some candidates, clearly caught out here, made an intelligent stab at this section, and picked up marks for any justifiable comment. Others were very obviously guessing and stumbling in the dark. There was an alarming level of ignorance in respect of Swan Valley and Mataro with some claiming it was a wine region in Chile. This is of course Maipo – fairly similar in sound and could have been excused as exam nerves if Maipo had not already been the subject of the compulsory question on Cabernet Sauvignon.

The following is an example of poor quality paragraphs:

“Swan Valley is a production area in Western Australia producing both red and white wines.

China is an emerging wine producing country. Consumption is increasing so it will be a potential market in the future.”

Both of these are seriously inadequate and this candidate should not be attempting this qualification at this stage. Unfortunately, submissions of this quality are an increasingly common occurrence.

By comparison, the following paragraphs on Hawkes Bay and the KWV show how it should be done.

“Hawkes Bay – located on New Zealand’s North Island on the central east coast. Maritime climate which is one of the driest, sunniest and warmest in the country. Low rainfall thanks to mountain protection from the wet westerlies. Quite varied soils ranging from gravel, loam, clay and sand. Known for very good Chardonnay but is the best place to ripen Bordeaux

varieties, especially the Gimblett gravel sub-region with its gravel soils, slightly warmer temperatures and sheltered area. The producers are experimenting with hillside planting as prices couldn't justify the costs before. The best whites will be barrel fermented and/or oak aged. Only in the hottest years do the reds ripen fully.

KWV – Known as the South African Co-operative Winegrowers Association. Formed in 1918 when farmers were going bankrupt after the British wine market was cut off due to the Boer War. Its mandate was to protect the Cape farmers and it became a producer, marketing body and Government Regulator all in one. It is considered a big reason why a quality wine culture did not develop as it established minimum prices and would buy whatever the growers had (no incentive for quality) and it established a quota system, which specified where grapes would be grown. In 1997 the regulatory arm was taken from it, becoming the South Africa Wine Industry Trust. Today, the KWV still has considerable power as it continues its marketing function as well as being the largest supplier of vines to farmers.

**“Rioja has been overtaken in quality by some of the emerging Spanish DO zones.”
Write a paragraph on each of five DO areas that support this statement. (Paragraph or essay format is acceptable for this question.)**

Answers: 141

Passes: 42 (30%)

Candidates were given the choice of approaching this question in an essay format or by means of five paragraphs. Most took the latter option. Unfortunately, some of those who adopted an essay format made the mistake of spending too long discussing the wines of Rioja rather than dealing with the real issue of this question – the five emerging DO zones, which are challenging Rioja in terms of quality.

This was in essence a fairly straight-forward question – select five **appropriate** regions and describe examples of wines using the 7 factors as a guideline. Those who knew the country and its wines, did well, others succeeded in the first half of the question with one or two relevant DO zones but came unstuck later on when they ran out of ideas and so wrote about any remaining zones irrespective of relevance.

The question did not specify whether answers should have been limited to red wines only. Most candidates assumed that they should only address red wines, however, the question was deliberately left open to allow candidates to include white wines in their answer, providing they fitted the criteria regarding quality. This meant, for example, that Rueda was a potential valid contender in this context.

In spite of some very dubious choices of DO (la Mancha, Jumilla, Yecla), most candidates managed to cover the obvious contender – Ribero del Duero. Other options included:

Toro in Castille-Leon with their Tempranillo wines
Rueda also in Castille-Leon, and famous for its white wines from Marques de Riscal Navarra, largely due to the work of the oenological research station EVENA
Somontano for its mix of new and old (Tempranillo and international varieties)
Penedes where Miguel Torres has achieved so much
Priorato where quality estates such as Rene Barbier are leading the way
and to a lesser extent, Costers del Segre where Raimat have their experimental station.

The following extract is a good example of how an introduction can convey the author's interpretation of the question. This tells the examiner that he/she has understood the real issue here.

“Spain itself is a very exciting country at the moment with many DO zones emerging in terms of quality. None yet have the power that “Brand Rioja” has on the world stage but with the right investment, it could be only a matter of time.

The author of this answer has interpreted the question in terms of quality achievement per se and not necessarily direct competitors of Rioja."

This candidate then proceeded to discuss the wines of Priorato, Somantano, Costers del Segre, Ribero del Duero and Penedes before concluding as follows:

"The pendulum has swung back in favour of Spanish wines in the UK market, particularly with the new wine laws in August 2003. With big investment by international companies such as Allied Domecq, emerging quality DO zones will continue to raise their sights. Rioja must not be complacent and must continue their own innovation and development."

Whilst the actual content between the introduction and conclusion forms almost all of the marks for this question, candidates should not underestimate the importance of these sections when adopting an essay format. In this instance, the examiner was able to allocate bonus marks for style and clarity as the introduction and conclusion in this instance clearly show that the candidate has a good understanding of the focus of this question.

2003 saw abnormal weather conditions in the Northern Hemisphere. Select FOUR of the following regions. For each, describe the weather conditions and explain the impact on the wines produced.

- a) **Chablis**
- b) **California**
- c) **England**
- d) **Sicily**
- e) **Pomerol**
- f) **Austria**

Answers: 184

Passes: 50 (27%)

A controversial question in the opinion of many but judged by the Examination Panel as perfectly valid and certainly very topical given global weather patterns in 2003. This was not a good choice of question for those who had limited their preparation for the examination purely to the Diploma Course Notes and the required reading. Those who had read beyond these, and had appreciated that the issue of "vintage variation" as defined by climate" (and clearly specified in the syllabus) are important for any real understanding of the wines of the world, were able to approach this question with some degree of confidence. Therefore, results for this question tended to range from a few good scripts from those who were aware of the issues and a large number from those who simply guessed and assumed that all 6 regions had experienced the same problems.

There were a number of reasons for failure in this question. In the first instance, candidates were asked to write about FOUR regions only, not all six. In cases where candidates did not follow instructions, the marks for the four highest scoring sections were taken when calculating a total mark. The second problem, was that many candidates wrote about climate in general for each of the regions rather than specific conditions in 2003. Some assumed that the excessively hot weather in Europe, produced the same results in all European regions – this was, of course, far too simplistic. Finally, some, clearly clutching at straws, hoped (incorrectly) that all regions had experienced the same conditions. There would have been very little point in asking this question if this had been the case.

Most candidates could give a good account of conditions in the UK and in Chablis, both experiencing spring frost followed by a long, hot summer. However, the impact on wine style and quality was not the same in the two regions, with the UK producing a small quantity of very good wines (particularly reds) and Chablis producing wines which were less typical in terms of traditional style, and not as long lived as cooler vintages – not a classically good vintage for Chablis.

California proved difficult to evaluate for most, with many assuming it followed the same pattern as the rest of Europe. The following example was a sound answer covering most of the key points.

“California – here the weather pattern was more Bordeaux/Burgundy like than normal. It was much cooler and wetter than is typical. Getting full ripeness was not as assured as it usually is. The resulting wines were leaner, more austere, slightly greener than normal. In short, more Bordeaux-like, while in Bordeaux, the conditions were more Californian. There were more fungal problems and crop reduction. But cooler climate grapes – Riesling, Sauvignon Blanc - were less affected than the reds. Acidity was up, alcohol was down.”

There was a fair amount of generalisation to this answer, but all the comments made were intelligent assumptions given the general weather pattern for that vintage. In fact, conditions in California were very mixed, February was warm, while April was unseasonably cold and wet. May saw normal weather conditions, warming up in June and July. However, August temperatures were only average or below normal followed by rain in early September and then soaring temperatures. This fluctuation from one extreme to another was far more European (as noted by the candidate above) with all the complications one would expect as a result – early budbreak, slowing down of growth in April, picking up again in May, harvest later than usual with a very short period for ripening followed by frantic picking in the second half of September when temperatures soared. In terms of wine quality, this was a mixed bag with some varieties performing better than others.

Sicily could have been answered by using a bit of common sense. One of the hottest summers and worst droughts in history meant less mould and rot but irrigation was essential. Harvest was early and short with small yields but of higher quality. Resulting wines were rich and concentrated with high levels of alcohol.

The key point about Pomerol, apart from the general heat, was the violent hailstorms in June which caused some serious damage resulting in lower yields than 2002 with the usual result in terms of quality and price. Many grapes suffered from sunburn, particularly Merlot, and varieties on clay soils suffered less heat stress than those on sand. This was an early vintage which favoured the early ripening varieties such as Cabernet Franc – Ch Pétrus gained 97 Parker points for this vintage.

Austria followed most of Europe with a hot and rain free summer, but temperatures dropped dramatically at the end of August, followed by an Indian summer with cool September nights. This meant ideal ripening with reasonable retention of acidity (something not always achieved in other parts of Europe). There was limited development of botrytis and no ice wines but reds performed particularly well as did most whites apart from Sauvignon Blanc and Traminer where acidity tended to be low.

With reference to the maps attached as Appendix A, answer the following.

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

- a) ***Aglianico del Vulture DOC***
- b) ***Orvieto Amabile DOC***
- c) ***Dolcetto d'Alba DOC***
- d) ***Dürkheimer Fronhof Scheurebe Spätlese QmP***
- e) ***Rangen Riesling Grand Cru AC***
- f) ***Bereich Kaiserstuhl Tuniberg Spätburgunder Trocken QbA***

Answers:155

Passes: 43 (28%)

Another outing for the former compulsory map question in a new format and offered as an optional question in this instance. It was not surprising therefore to see that few candidates actually chose to do this question voluntarily. However, as can be seen from the very poor pass rate, not always with great success.

This poor performance calls for some general words of warning when answering this type of question. When asked to indicate the **number**, which locates the area of production, do not give a choice of numbers in the hope that one of them may be correct. When asked to **describe** the factors that determine the style of the wine, it is not sufficient to list the factors in broad terms such as "climate, yields, winemaking techniques, grapes used" etc. These must be quantified – what is the climate like? Are yields high or low? Name the grapes used. Specify winemaking techniques, ie use of oak, maceration carbonique, fortification etc. The description of the wine should relate to the one specified in the question, not simply be a generic tasting note that could apply to any number of wines. For example, the Orvieto was an "amabile" wine and should have been described as medium dry. A number of candidates clearly either misread the question or had no idea what "amabile" meant. Likewise, the German wine was a Spätlese and the description should have reflected this detail as should the Grand Cru element of the Alsace Riesling – this latter could have been conveyed in descriptors such as the length of the finish, the ageing potential, the intensity of the wine. The vast majority of candidates completely failed to appreciate the significance of this detail.

The following script did exactly what was required as is shown from their section on Orvieto Amabile DOC

"Located at map reference 6

Very pale yellow, almost watery core and rim. Rather neutral nose with fruit, floral hints. On the palate, demi-sec, soft but balanced acidity. Medium intense, but simple flavours of fresh hay, floral hints, with a touch of marzipan. Soft finish of medium length. Medium alcohol. This is a style of wine that has failed in terms of popularity, it is semi-sweet and soft, and also rather light with unfashionably subtle and unassertive flavours. To achieve this semi-sweetness, the fermentation is stopped before all the sugar has fully fermented out. Nowadays this is done by the addition of sulphur and then filtering to extract all the yeast."

The map reference was correct and the description of the wine was good, clearly following the Systematic Approach. The use of "yellow" as a colour could be criticised for being too vague, but this was a minor error. The section dealing with the factors accounting for this style is limited to vinification only and should have included additional comments on some of the following:

climate, topography and location (around the hill town of Orvieto in Central (landlocked) Italy), grape varieties (Trebiano Toscana, Grechetto, Malvasia and Verdello) and viticulture (bush trained on mainly tufa soils).

Compare this to the following, which contains errors and omissions:

"Map reference – not given

Straw, pale yellow, gold, youthful, medium nose with fruit of peach, citrus, dry, medium intensity, medium body, medium alcohol, flavour of lemon, peach, short length. The climate is temperate. The rainfall is relatively low, long sunshine hours, temperature controlled vinification."

With no map reference given marks are lost. The tasting note is repetitious (citrus and peach repeated twice) and inaccurate (dry) and the colours listed just about cover every eventuality (straw to gold). The factors determining this style are extremely vague. This candidate did not achieve a pass grade.

Unit 4, Spirits of the World

For comments on the Unit 4 coursework assignment, see Unit 1.

The combined tasting paper and theory paper for this unit generated good results in general. However, a large percentage of candidates passed this paper purely on the strength of their tasting notes alone. This is particularly worrying and something that the Diploma Syllabus Review Panel will aim to address in future examinations.

There was clear evidence in the written theory question that candidates were not sufficiently prepared for this and had done very little in the way of revision to prepare themselves. More worryingly, although many of them had described at great length in their coursework assignment how, for example, Barcardi is produced, they were unable to do the same in the closed book question.

Another common mistake was not reading the question carefully enough. If the theory question called for a description of the **distillation process**, then information regarding the preparation of wine in the case of Cognac or molasses in the case of rum, was not relevant. Equally unnecessary was any discussion on the ageing requirements or bottling process.

Unit 5, Sparkling Wines

For comments on the Unit 4 coursework assignment, see Unit 1.

Observations made above under Unit 4 apply equally well here. Candidates need to read the question and provide the information asked for rather than writing everything they know in the hope of picking up extra marks.

As far as the tasting question was concerned, there were some very interesting results here. It was surprising how many candidates were unable to recognise top quality Champagnes when these were selected as samples by the Approved Learning Provider. This was particularly so in the case of vintage Champagnes, which were often described as “poor” or “out of condition” – it seemed that candidates struggled to distinguish between age/maturity and poor quality. Another common mistake was misinterpreting the wet wool, lanolin aromas of Chenin Blanc in Saumer as petrol aromas in sparkling Riesling. Where programme providers selected Cava as a sample, candidates usually made of good job of recognising the typical “rubber” character of this wine. Perhaps these are just symptomatic of what people drink more frequently in their everyday life. I don't imagine many of us can afford vintage Champagne on a regular basis whilst Cava is within the price range of all.

Unit 6, Fortified Liqueur Wines

For comments on the Unit 4 coursework assignment, see Unit 1.

For general comments on this Unit, see Units 4 and 5 above. On a more specific note, once again failure to read the theory question closely enough led to low marks for many. Questions will often require candidates to cover two separate issues, for example, the fortification of a particular style of wine and the effect this has on the wine itself. In such instances, many candidates did the former but not the latter. It does not matter how well a candidate addresses half a question, unless the whole thing is covered, a portion of the marks will go unallocated.

The tasting paper for this unit posed few problems in general but some candidates lost marks by failing to state the obvious – legs or viscosity for example on the appearance.

Unit 7, Individual Research Project

The following are examples of project proposals submitted for Unit 7. They are not chosen exclusively as examples of good proposals, but to illustrate where candidates need to focus their attention in their report to ensure that they fulfil the assessment criteria.

“Does the wine market still represent a strong investment opportunity? What will be the “keys” to successfully investing in wine in the future?”

This candidate was warned not to rely too heavily on case studies of one investor only, but to widen the net to get a real spread of opinion. However, although the candidate did this, they failed to properly reference their work with the result that the majority of their findings were unsubstantiated and unexplained.

“The ACC structure in the Southern Rhône: prospects for extension of the Cru classification and potential for promotion of existing Cotes du Rhône Villages to Cru status.”

This candidate was advised to ensure that the project (which is largely factual) did not overlap too much with the Unit 3 syllabus and that they should concentrate on the theoretical aspects of this title suggested by the use of the words “prospects” and “potential”.

“What is the most viable marketing strategy for Biodynamic wines in the UK?”

This candidate was warned of avoiding any overlap with the Unit 2 syllabus on wine production and to concentrate on the strategy rather than long winded definitions of biodynamic practices.

“Are sparkling wines the future for the English wine industry”

This candidate conducted original research as part of their project and therefore relied far less on factual content. This ensured that they fulfilled the assessment criteria of taking this beyond the compilation of facts towards the development of new ideas and recommendations – things that cannot be obtained from books or magazines but require to candidate to develop their own opinions.