



WSET® Level 4 Diploma in Wine

Examiners' Report for:

- **D1 on demand (to date)**
- **D2 January 2020**
- **D4 January 2020**

This report is designed to assist candidates and those involved in the teaching of the Diploma by giving feedback on examination performance in the January 2020 exams. This report does not replace the annual examiners' report which will be released at the end of the academic year. This report will not publish examination questions but will refer to question topics in general terms. Further reports covering the examinations not included will be published in due course.

D1 – Wine Production

D1 is the first foundation Unit and is assessed by a 90-minute written examination that is comprised of open-response questions. The weighting will vary from question to question but will be clearly indicated on the examination paper.

A full report on D1 will appear in the examiners' report produced at the end of the year. At this point, we will not comment on the specifics of these papers but can provide an overview of candidate performance in the examinations so far together with some general guidance on good examination technique.

D1 ACADEMIC YEAR 2019/2020 (up until 9 April 2020)	
TOTAL NUMBER OF CANDIDATES	705*
OVERALL PASS RATE	67%

**note this is the number of papers marked at this point, not total sat.*

Grade boundary percentage breakdown:

PASS WITH DISTINCTION	3%
PASS WITH MERIT	18%
PASS	46%
FAIL	23%
FAIL UNCLASSIFIED	10%

The majority of candidates are doing enough to pass but are struggling to achieve the higher grades. This is mainly due to them failing to answer the questions as set. Candidates are reminded to pay particular attention to the wording, in particular any command verbs as these are used to guide candidates in their answer. Candidates are advised to plan their answers before they start writing as this will allow them time to consider what the question is asking, answer more concisely and fully consider the implications of the question weighting.

The weightings are clearly indicated for each question and it is each student's responsibility to apply these weightings appropriately. The examiners are commonly seeing candidates who appear to ignore the weightings. If a question is worth 50% of the exam, then half the available time should be spent planning and answering that question. A question worth 10% will only require a brief answer – in the case of D1 a 10% weighting would equate to 9 minutes of the exam and a short paragraph should be enough to answer it fully. However, a question worth 50% will require a far more in-depth answer and will require 2 – 3 sides of text or more to answer it in full.

D2 – Wine Business

D2 is the second foundation Unit and is assessed by a 60-minute written examination comprised of open-response questions. Weightings will vary by question but will be clearly indicated on the examination paper.

D2 January 2020	
TOTAL NUMBER OF CANDIDATES	275
PASS RATE	69%

The pass rate is positive and there was a good distribution of marks with 5 candidates gaining a Pass with Distinction and 46 candidates gaining a Pass with Merit.

Examiners' comments:

This examination comprised three questions, the first with a weighting of 50%, the second 30% and the third 20%. Some candidates failed to consider these weightings and wrote more text answering the final question than either of the other two. This is bad exam technique; candidates should take some time to plan their answers before they start writing. It is **extremely** important that candidates take note of the weightings.

The first question asked about the cost involved in managing a vineyard for the production of wine. Many candidates identified that there are costs involved in the establishment of a vineyard in addition to the management of the vineyard. The question was specifically asking about the latter, so the former was beyond the scope of the question. However, since there is quite a bit of cross over, the examiners were lenient with candidates who did include comments about the establishment costs, but they were less lenient where candidates wrote about costs incurred in the winery and post-production. The question clearly refers to costs involved in **managing a vineyard**. Writing an answer about the costs of winery equipment or marketing expenditure is clearly not answering the question as set and candidates will not gain any credit for this information.

It is also important to stick to the question and avoid going off on a tangent. For example, if referring to the cost implications of pest control, there is no benefit in explaining how the pest control works. Stick to the question, which in this case was about the costs.

The second question required an evaluation of custom crush facilities. Candidates who simply described the function of a custom crush facility were limited to a pass grade. Evaluation means addressing why someone might or might not use this option - what are the advantages and disadvantages? In the main, candidates knew this topic and gained good marks.

The final question asked about the advantages and disadvantages of selling in one type of market compared to another type of market. This was a straightforward question for many and did not require a large amount of information to answer it well. However, one frustrating failing for some candidates was in referring to only one of the two markets stipulated in the question rather than both. If the question specifically mentions two types of market, candidates must refer to both.

D4 - Sparkling Wine

D4 January 2020	
TOTAL NUMBER OF CANDIDATES	399
PASS RATE	57%

Grade boundary percentage breakdown:

PASS WITH DISTINCTION	2%
PASS WITH MERIT	17%
PASS	38%
FAIL	33%
FAIL UNCLASSIFIED	10%

Examiners' comments:

Tasting paper

The wines for this paper included two traditional method wines of different quality levels and a tank method wine that was well-made but simple in style.

With 6 marks allocated to the “assessment of quality” of each wine, this was clearly an important element of the paper. The examiner was looking for evidence that candidates were not only able to detect these differences in quality level but, more importantly, were able to justify their reasoning for this in sufficient detail for the allocation of marks assigned to this section of the paper.

However, answers tended to be simplistic and formulaic, with many candidates relying solely on the “B-L-I-C” principle, (balance/length/intensity/complexity), applying it with no explanation. It is not enough to state that a wine is “complex” or “balanced”. Such observations need to be quantified. What is contributing to the “complexity”? Which elements of the wine are providing the “balance” and how?

There were some good responses on the traditional method wines but tasting notes were often weaker in respect of the tank method wine where there was a general reluctance to comment on the simplicity of this wine despite it being a key feature of the style. With marks for aromas and flavours split across various clusters it is often easier to score marks where these are clearly defined as “primary”, “autolytic” and “tertiary” (for example as in an aged Champagne). Candidates tend to be less skilled however at separating clusters in the case of less complex wines, but even wines that have only primary aromas may display multiple clusters of aromas even if lacking in autolytic or tertiary character. In the case of the tank method wine, there was an allocation of marks for the many floral and fruity characteristics but also a separate allocation for descriptors conveying the “simple” character of this wine. These included the obvious descriptor “simple” itself, but also others such as estery, generic, peardrop, confected, bubblegum, sherbet etc. Only the more skilled tasters commented on these characteristics. Many candidates not only fail to comment on simplicity when relevant but they also overuse descriptors linked to autolysis, with some even assuming these to be a characteristic of all sparkling wines. Clearly this is not the case and with a marking process that is dictated by the principles of aroma/flavour “clusters”, marks will be restricted to those clusters relevant to each specific wine and, in some instances, marks may even be capped where a candidate identifies autolytic character in a wine that clearly does not display this.

Theory paper

Question 1 on this paper was on the Champagne region and its viability for the production of high-quality sparkling wine. This question was answered in the greatest depth by the vast majority of candidates, not only because it carried the highest weighting, but also because it clearly illustrates the way in which many candidates focus their studies primarily on the most popular wines and regions and are therefore better able to answer questions on these topics.

There were a number of strong answers, with the best of these demonstrating a mix of solid, accurate facts along with application of knowledge and higher skills, for example, by bringing issues such as global warming into their answers and assessing how this has affected the region and the quality of the wines produced there.

However, there were some common pitfalls that re-occur throughout all Diploma exam cycles. The most notable of these was candidates wanting to highlight **everything** they knew about Champagne and the region. This question was specifically about location and climate, yet many answers included details of soils, training methods, processes in the winery and market forces. Regardless of how accurate and astute such comments may have been, they will not secure any additional marks as they are not relevant in the context of the question that had been set. It is essential that candidates focus specifically and exclusively on what the question is asking. The 'scattergun' or 'catch-all' approach will never be rewarded with high marks and if anything, highlights an inability to form the direct and targeted answer that examiners are looking for.

Question 2 on Lambrusco generated a wide range of marks with a relatively high number of Distinctions and Fail (unclassified) grades. This was simply the result of candidates either having learned this section of the syllabus, or not.

It is imperative that candidates study all aspects of the Specification. Examiners appreciate that the more common wines and regions will inevitably be given more attention (as answers on question 1 clearly demonstrate), however, this was a straight-forward question that, had this topic been studied in sufficient depth, would have generated better results.

The final question of this paper addressed sparkling wines from South Africa. It was also straight-forward and relied heavily on factual recall rather than analysis or application of these facts. This was answered well as the majority of candidates were able to address the key points relating to the relevant wines, distinguishing between the processes used in their production and the resulting wine styles and quality levels.