



WSET
WINE & SPIRIT
EDUCATION TRUST

WSET® Level 3 Award in Spirits

Specification



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in Spirits

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Designed by Paul Barrett

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Introduction

This Specification contains necessary information for both candidates and Approved Programme Providers (APPs) about the WSET Level 3 Award in Spirits.

The main part of the document is a detailed statement of the learning outcomes of the Level 3 Award in Spirits. These outcomes should be used by APPs to prepare programmes of learning, and by candidates to plan their studies, because the examination is specifically set to test these outcomes.

The Specification also provides a list of recommended tasting samples, guidance concerning the examination and the examination regulations.

At the end of this document you will also find information on the other WSET qualifications and WSET's qualification division, WSET Awards.

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Introduction to the WSET Level 3 Award in Spirits

Qualification Aims

The WSET Level 3 Award in Spirits is designed to give a thorough understanding of the factors that account for the style and quality of spirits. The qualification will prepare candidates with the skills required to make professional evaluations of spirits with regards to their style and quality. The qualification provides the in-depth knowledge required to underpin job skills and competencies, for example in product selection in the retail and hospitality sectors.

Successful candidates will be able to describe the characteristics of the principal spirits of the world and give information concerning the key factors influencing style and quality. They will consequently be in a position to advise management, to answer customer queries authoritatively, and to make informed selections of spirits in a variety of situations.

Qualification Structure

Learning Outcomes

In order to meet the qualification aims there are four learning outcomes spread over two Units. In order to gain the WSET Level 3 Award in Spirits candidates must pass both Units.

Unit 1: The Theory of the Spirits of the World	
Learning Outcome 1	Understand the principal factors involved in the production of spirits and how they influence style and quality.
Learning Outcome 2	Understand the key characteristics and labelling terms of the selected global spirits and how legal frameworks and production choices influence their style and quality.
Learning Outcome 3	Understand the key characteristics of other named global spirits, their labelling terms and key production choices that are made.
Unit 2: The Analytical Tasting of Spirits	
Learning Outcome 1	Describe the key characteristics of selected global spirits and use the description to identify a spirit's quality level, giving supporting reasons, and its category.

Entry Requirements

The WSET Level 2 Award in Spirits or an equivalent level of experience is recommended for entry to the WSET level 3 Award in Spirits. Potential candidates should discuss their current level of knowledge with their APP before enrolling on the course, to ensure that this is a suitable qualification for them to undertake.

Please refer to section Entry Requirements on page 24 for additional eligibility information.

Total Qualification Time (TQT) and Guided Learning Hours (GLH)

TQT is an estimate of the total amount of time, measured in hours, that a learner would reasonably need to be able to show the level of achievement necessary for the award of a qualification. It is made up of GLH and private study time. GLH include all tutor-supervised learning and supervised assessments.

The TQT for the Level 3 Award in Spirits is 84 hours. This is made up of 32½ GLH (of which 2½ hours are for the examination) and 51½ hours of private study.

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Learning Outcomes

Unit 1 The Theory of Spirits of the World

Learning Outcome 1

Understand the principal factors involved in the production of spirits and how they influence style and quality.

Assessment Criteria

- 1 Describe how raw materials are processed in spirits production.
- 2 Describe the processes used during fermentation, distillation and the post-distillation period in spirits production.
- 3 Explain how processes related to raw materials, fermentation, distillation and post-distillation influence the style and quality of spirits.

Ranges

Range 1: Processing raw materials	
Provided by raw materials	Simple carbohydrate/fermentable sugars (glucose, fructose, sucrose), complex carbohydrates (starch, fructans), aromas/flavours
Fermentable Sugars	
Raw materials	Fruits (any) Principal types of fruit – Grapes, pomace, stone fruit, soft fruit, pip fruit Sugar cane Sugar cane juice, cane syrup, molasses, brown sugar
Processing	Processing challenges – Spoilage, oxidation, management strategies Fruits Fermentation option – Crush, press, fruit juice / crush, fruit pulp and juice Maceration option – Macerate in diluted neutral alcohol, distil Pomace - White grape pomace (dilute, ferment, distil), black grape pomace (distil) Sugar Cane Sugar cane juice – Crush, sugar cane juice, pasteurisation, clarification Refining – Sugar cane syrup, evaporation, centrifugation, grades of molasses, grades of brown sugar
Starch	
Raw material	Grains – Barley, wheat, rye, corn (maize), sorghum, rice, Parts of grains – Husk, bran, germ, endosperm Potatoes

Processing starch	Starch – Formation, starch granules, modification, gelatinisation, gelatinisation temperatures, enzymatic hydrolysis (amylases) Grains – Malting, green malt, milling, mashing; distillers' malt, speciality malts; cooking, adding enzymes (endogenous or exogenous) Potatoes – Cooking, adding enzymes (exogenous) Endogenous enzymes – Malted grain Exogenous enzymes – Bought-in enzymes, filamentous fungi, <i>kōji</i>, <i>qu</i>, <i>nuruk</i>
Fructans	
Raw materials	Agave (any)
Processing fructans	Fructan structure, inulin Agave Cooking <i>piñas</i> – Steaming or roasting <i>piñas</i> (Maillard reactions), milling, dilute with water, formulation (optional) Cooking extracted juice – Shredding, flush with hot water (acid use optional), cook extracted liquid
Range 2: Fermentation	
Key principles	Yeasts' environment requirements – Acid, temperature Yeasts' nutritional requirements – Fermentable sugars, nitrogen- Yeast outputs from sugar metabolism – Ethanol, carbon dioxide, heat Other yeast outputs – Methanol, fusel alcohols, fatty acids, esters, sulfur compounds
Approaches to fermentation	Cultured yeast (single or multiple strains), ambient/wild yeast Sequential fermentation, parallel fermentation Liquid-state fermentation, semi-solid-state fermentation, solid-state fermentation
Bacteria	Malolactic conversion (lactic acid bacteria) Flavour creation (long fermentation)
Range 3: Distillation	
Key principles	Concentration and selection Boiling and volatility Reflux and rectification – Temperature gradient Fractions in an alcoholic liquid – Group 1, Group 2, Group 3, Group 4 Managing reflux in a still – Still height, controlling heat input, dephlegmator, rectification plates Flavour Management in the still – Maillard reactions, esterification, varying pressure in the still, copper/clay and sulfur compounds Type of distillation – Liquid-state distillation, solid-state distillation

Pot Stills	Common Features Heat source – Direct heat, indirect steam heat (coils, jackets, heat exchangers), steam injection Structure – Pot, swan neck (<i>chapiteau</i>), still head, lyne arm (<i>col de cygne</i>), rectification plates Condensers – Dephlegmator (head condenser), shell and tube, worm tub, ‘bowl of water’ (Mezcal) Batch Distillation Outline of Scottish Double Pot Still Distillation ● 1st Distillation – Liquid waste and low wines ● 2nd Distillation – Heads, heart, tails, liquid waste, recycle heads and tails Using cuts to spirit style – Inclusions and exclusions Advantages and challenges of using pot stills
Column stills, hybrid stills	Common Features Heat source – Direct heat, indirect steam heat (reboiler, steam jacket), steam injection Managing reflux – Rectification plates (sieve plate, bubble cap plate, downcomer), packed columns Condensers – Worm tub, dephlegmator (head condenser), shell and tube Approaches to Column Still Distillation Dynamic equilibrium – Reaching and maintaining, separation of fractions over still height Continuous distillation – Single-column still, double-column still (Coffey still, analyser, stripper, rectifier), multiple-column still (hydroselection, de-methylising) Batch distillation – Hybrid stills

Range 4: Post-distillation	
Oak	Key Functions – Additive (colour, aroma/flavour, texture, oxygen), subtractive (char, evaporative loss) Vessel design – Species of oak (American, European), size Vessel’s previous use – Age (refreshing), previous contents, sulfur taint Vessel in use – Fill strength, temperature (variation), humidity, time (rancio, esterification) Wood management policy – Match spirit and wood, barrel location (within warehouse, warehouse location), re-barrelling, wood finishing Oak alternatives – Chips, cubes, staves
Inert vessels	Materials – stainless steel, glass, pottery, earthenware Uses – Storage, maturation (change to flavour and texture), preservation

Adding flavours other than oak	Types of flavour – Botanicals, animal flavourings, other flavourings Tinctures – Maceration, percolation Distillates – Re-distillation (one-shot, multi-shot, position of botanicals in still, still management (cuts, temperature management), vacuum distillation, all-together/individually) Other – Adding other flavourings, adding animal flavourings (cream, egg yolk)
Adjusting	Filtration – Removing visual imperfections (coarse filtration, chill-filtration), carbon filtration (Lincoln County Process, activated charcoal) Adding colour – Caramel colour (E150a), natural colours, artificial colours Adding sweetness – Sugar, syrup barrels Adjusting texture – Glycerol, sugar, <i>abocante</i>, <i>boisé</i>, vodka additives Adjusting alcohol – Water (distillation, filtration, UV light, reverse osmosis, ion exchange), <i>faibles</i>
Blending	Creating style and complexity, managing consistency
Packaging	Containers – Glass, PET Closures – Screw caps, stoppers

Learning Outcome 2

Understand the key characteristics and labelling terms of the selected global spirits and how legal frameworks and production choices influence their style and quality.

Assessment Criteria

- 1 Describe the style and quality of the selected global spirits.
- 2 Describe the legal framework for the selected global spirits and explain how it can influence their style and quality.
- 3 Apply knowledge of production to explain how choices made at any of the four key stages of production influence the style and quality of the selected global spirits.

Ranges

Range 1: Legal framework and key production choices	
Scotch Whisky	
Styles of Scotch Whisky	Single Malt Whisky and Blended Scotch Whisky
Legal Framework	Production Raw material – Permitted grains, permitted source of enzymes Distillation – Permitted still types, maximum distillation strength Post-distillation – Maximum barrel size, minimum age, permitted additions Labelling Terms Single Malt Scotch Whisky, Single Grain Scotch Whisky, Blended Malt Scotch Whisky, Blended Grain Scotch Whisky, Blended Scotch Whisky, age statements, vintage dates, Highland, Lowland, Speyside, Islay, Campbeltown
Production choices that influence style and quality	Processing raw materials – Variety of barley (malted), peat, wheat and corn (cooked) Fermentation – Cultured yeast, bacteria Distillation – Double pot still distillation (Scottish model), direct heat (Maillard reactions), indirect heat, still height, purifiers, angle of lyne arm, shell and tube (copper, other), worm tub, cut points Column still distillation (single- and double-column), distillation strength Post-distillation – Centralised warehouses, type of warehouse (dunnage, racked, palletised), barrel position in the warehouse, ex-ASB, ex-Sherry butts, paxarette, wood finishing, time (fall in abv), blending, dilution or cask strength, chill-filtration, caramel colour
Whiskey in the USA: Bourbon, Rye Whiskey and Tennessee Whiskey	
Styles of American whisky	Bourbon, Rye Whiskey and Tennessee Whiskey

Legal framework	Production Raw material – Permitted grains, permitted source of enzymes Distillation – Maximum distillation strength Post-distillation – Lincoln County Process (Tennessee Whiskey), maximum barrel entry proof, new charred oak vessel, bottling proof Labelling Terms Straight, Bottled in Bond, age statements, Bourbon, Rye Whiskey, Tennessee Whiskey
Production choices that influence style and quality	Processing raw materials – Corn, rye, wheat, cooking, malted barley, other (craft), mash bill, exogenous enzymes Fermentation – Sour mashing, cultured yeast, recipe Distillation – Beer still, doubler, thumper, backset, distillation strength, pot still Post-distillation – Barrel entry proof, new charred oak barrels, barrel sizes, oak alternatives, warehouse location, barrel position in the warehouse, time (rise in abv), blending, dilution or barrel strength, chill-filtration Other labelling terms – Small Batch, Single Barrel
Cognac	
Styles of Cognac	VS, VSOP and XO
Legal framework	Production Raw material – Permitted grape varieties grown in a designated area, Fermentation – Restrictions on adding sugar and SO₂, minimum and maximum abv Distillation – <i>Alambic Charentais</i> sizes and design, double pot still distillation using <i>Alambic Charentais</i>, maximum distillation strength, distillation complete by 31st March Post-distillation – Minimum period of maturation in oak barrels, <i>compte</i> system, permitted additions Labelling Terms Grande Champagne, Petite Champagne, Fine Champagne, Borderies, Fins Bois, Bon Bois, Bois Ordinaires, VS, <i>Trois Étoiles</i>, VSOP, <i>Réserve</i>, <i>Napoléon</i>, XO, <i>Hors d'Age</i>
Production choices that influence style and quality	Raw material – Ugni Blanc, vineyard location Fermentation – Cultured yeast, malolactic conversion, removal of gross lees Distillation – Who distilled the spirit, when the wines are distilled, direct heat, distillation with fine lees, recycling the <i>secondes</i>, Martell method, Rémy Martin method Post-distillation – <i>Coupes</i>, new oak barrels, old oak barrels, wet cellars, dry cellars, re-barrelling, time, glass demijohns, syrup barrels, sugar, <i>faibles</i>, caramel colour, <i>boisé</i>, chill-filtration

Armagnac	
Styles of Armagnac	<i>Blanche</i> , VS, VSOP and XO, age statements
Legal framework	Production Raw material – Permitted grapes varieties grown in a designated area Fermentation – Restrictions on adding sugar and SO₂, minimum and maximum abv Distillation – <i>Alambic Armagnacais</i> required, design, single column distillation using <i>Alambic Armagnacais</i>, minimum and maximum distillation strength, distillation complete by 31st March, double pot still distillation using <i>Alambic Charentais</i> (optional) Post-distillation – Minimum period of storage in inert vessels (<i>Blanche</i>), minimum period of maturation in oak barrels (all others), <i>compte</i> system, permitted additions Labelling Terms Haut-Armagnac, Bas-Armagnac, Armagnac-Ténarèze, <i>Blanche</i> Armagnac, VS, <i>Trois Étoiles</i>, VSOP, XO, <i>Hors d'Age</i>, Vintage
Production choices that influence style and quality	Raw material – Ugni Blanc, Baco, Folle Blanche, Colombard, vineyard location Fermentation – Cultured yeast, malolactic conversion, removal of gross lees Distillation – Who distilled the spirit, when the wines are distilled, direct heat, distillation with fine lees, optional devices to enhance reflux or exclusions Post-distillation – Stainless steel tanks, <i>coupes</i>, new oak barrels, old oak barrels, wet cellars, dry cellars, re-barrelling, time, glass demijohns, syrup barrels, sugar, <i>faibles</i>, caramel colour, <i>boisé</i>, chill-filtration
Caribbean rum	
Featured producing countries/regions of Caribbean rum	Islands – Martinique, Guadeloupe, Haiti, Cuba, Puerto Rico, Jamaica, Barbados, Trinidad and Tobago Central and South America – Guatemala, Nicaragua, Panama, Colombia, Venezuela, Guyana
Legal Framework	Production EU – Molasses, cane syrup, sugar cane juice, maximum distillation strength, minimum bottling strength, no added flavour, maximum level of sweetness, <i>rum agricole</i> USA – Molasses, cane syrup, sugar cane juice, sugar, maximum distillation strength, minimum bottling strength Martinique Raw material – Martinique grown sugar cane, sugar cane juice Fermentation – Maximum duration, maximum alcohol strength Distillation – Defined single column still, maximum and minimum distillation strength Post-distillation – Minimum period of storage in inert vessels (<i>rum blanc</i>), minimum period of maturation in oak barrels (<i>rum vieux</i>)

Legal Framework	Cuba Raw material – Molasses from sugar cane grown in Cuba Fermentation – Cultured yeast appropriate for style Distillation – Column still distillation (<i>aguardiente</i>, superfine cane spirit) Post-distillation – Oak maturation, 1st ageing (required), 2nd ageing (required), 3rd ageing (optional), no additives or flavourings permitted Jamaica Raw material – Sugar cane juice, cane syrup, molasses, sugar Post-distillation – unaged or oak-aged, only water and caramel (oak-aged) are permitted Labelling Terms EU – <i>Rhum agricole</i> Martinique – <i>Rhum Blanc, Rhum Vieux, VO, VSOP, Réserve Spéciale, Cuvée Spéciale, Très Vieux, Extra Vieux, Grande Réserve, Hors d'Age, XO, Vintage</i> Cuba – <i>Ron Añejo Blanco, Ron Añejo Carta Blanca, Ron Añejo Carta Oro, Ron Añejo Reserva, Ron Añejo, Ron Extra Añejo</i>
Production choices that affect style and quality	Raw material – Sugar cane juice, cane syrup, blackstrap molasses Fermentation – Adding acid, adding nitrogen, short fermentations, long fermentations, yeast and bacteria, dunder, muck Distillation – Pot stills, pot stills with retorts, single-column stills, double-column stills, multiple-column stills Post-distillation – Unaged, short ageing (colour removed by activated charcoal filtration), oak maturation (Caribbean, continental, wood finishing, re-barrelling, 'solera'), blending (single distillery, multi-distillery), caramel colour, adding sweetness, dilution (overproof), chill-filtration Other labelling terms – Overproof, Navy Strength, Common Cleans, Plummers, Wedderburn, Continental Flavoured/High Ester
Tequila	
Styles of Tequila	<i>Blanco, Joven, Reposado, Añejo, Extra Añejo</i>
Legal framework	Production Raw material – Blue agave/<i>Agave tequilana Weber (var azul)</i>, grown in Jalisco or specified municipalities in four other states Conversion, extraction and formulation – Heat, acids, 49% non-agave sugars Post-distillation – Inert vessels or wood vessels (depends on class of Tequila), additives (<i>abocante</i>, others for colour, flavour and sweetness) Labelling Terms Category – Tequila, Tequila 100% agave Class – <i>Blanco, Plata, Silver, Joven, Oro, Gold, Reposado, Añejo, Extra Añejo</i>

Production choices that influence style and quality	Raw material – Highland, Tequila Valley, maturity of agave, trimming <i>piña</i>, removal of <i>cogollo</i> Conversion and extraction – <i>Hornos de mampostería</i> (brick oven), <i>autoclaves</i>, <i>tahona</i>, mechanised mills, diffuser (use after cooking, use before cooking) Formulation and Fermentation – Non-agave sugars, agave fibres, yeast nutrients, cultured or ambient yeast Distillation – Pot still, column still, distillation strength Post-distillation (usage dependent on class) – Vessel (inert, <i>pipones</i>, ex-ASB, other), additives (<i>abocante</i>, others), blending, dilution, chill-filtration
Mezcal	
Styles of Mezcal	<i>Blanco Mezcal</i>
Legal Framework	Production Raw material – Any species of agave, grown in designated municipalities of Oaxaca and eight other states Conversion and extraction (usage depending on category) – <i>Hornos de pozo</i> (fire pit), <i>hornos de mampostería</i> (brick oven), <i>autoclaves</i>, mallets, <i>tahona</i>, mechanised mills, diffuser Fermentation (usage dependent on category) – Stone/soil pits, hollowed out tree trunk, masonry, wood, clay or inert vessels, animal skins, agave fibres Distillation (usage dependent on category) – Column stills, copper pot stills, Asian style clay pot stills, agave fibres Post-distillation (usage dependent on category) – Storage/maturation (inert, clay or wood), re-distilled with flavourings, macerated with flavourings, additives (colour, flavour and sweetness) Labelling Terms Category – Mezcal, Artisanal Mezcal, Ancestral Mezcal Class – <i>Blanco</i>, <i>Joven</i>, <i>Madurado en vidrio</i>, <i>Reposado</i>, <i>Añejo</i>, <i>Abocado con</i>, <i>Destilado con</i> Other required labelling terms - 100% agave, name of agave(s) used, period of maturation (<i>Añejo</i>, <i>Madurado en vidrio</i>)
Production choices that influence style and quality	Raw material – Variety of agave, <i>Agave angustifolia</i> Haw (var. <i>espadín</i>) Conversion and extraction – <i>Hornos de pozo</i> (fire pit), <i>hornos de mampostería</i> (brick oven), hand crushing, <i>tahona</i>, mills Fermentation – Agave fibres, ambient yeast, bacteria, vessel (inert, other), duration Distillation – Column stills, pot stills (various depending on category), Asian style clay pot stills Post-distillation – Vessel (inert, other), maceration/re-distillation with fruits, spices or meat, blending the cuts Other labelling terms – <i>Pechuga</i>

Vodka	
Styles of vodka	Neutral, characterful
Legal framework	Production Raw material – Typically any raw material (Canada an exception) Distillation – Minimum distillation strength EU and USA Post-distillation – Minimum bottling strength EU and USA Labelling Terms EU – Raw material must be stated unless it is grain or potato
Key choices during production	Raw material – Corn, wheat, barley, rye, potato Fermentation – Cultured yeast Distillation – Column still distillation, hydroselection, de-methylising, hybrid stills Post-distillation – Chill-filtration, charcoal filtration, purity of diluting water (distillation, filtration, UV light, ion exchange, reverse osmosis), sugar, glycerol, vodka additives
Gin	
Styles of gin	Classic juniper forward, contemporary
Legal framework	Production Base spirit – Neutral Spirit (EU), any spirit (USA) Botanicals – Juniper Post-distillation – Sugar addition, minimum bottling strength Labelling Terms USA – Gin, Distilled Gin EU – Gin, Distilled Gin, London Gin/London Dry Gin
Production choices that influence style and quality	Base spirit – Neutral spirit, other Botanicals – Recipe Re-distillation – Vacuum, cuts, one-shot, multi-shot, re-distil botanicals together or individually, position of botanicals in still Post-distillation – Adding other flavourings, adding sugar, wood barrels, blending Other labelling terms – Old Tom

Learning Outcome 3

Understand the key characteristics of other named global spirits, their labelling terms and key production choices that are made.

Assessment Criteria

- 1 Describe the style typical of the other named global spirits.
- 2 State the meaning of legally defined and other commonly used labelling terms.
- 3 State the key legally defined and/or optional production choices that are made during the production of the other named global spirits.

Ranges

Range 1: Other whiskies	
Irish whiskey	
Production choices	Raw materials – Malted barley, unmalted barley, corn/maize, mash bills Distillation – Pot stills (triple pot still distillation), column stills, maximum distillation strength Post-distillation – Ex-ASB, ex-Sherry butts, other, minimum period of and location of maturation, oak not required, caramel colour
Defined labelling terms	Pot Still Irish Whiskey/Irish Pot Still Whiskey, Malt Irish Whiskey/Irish Malt Whiskey, Grain Irish Whiskey/Irish Grain Whiskey, Blended Irish Whiskey/Irish Blended Whiskey
Other whiskies of the USA	
Production choices	Raw materials – Minimum percentage of principal grain, speciality malts (craft) Distillation – Maximum distillation strength Post-distillation – Permitted containers
Defined labelling terms	Wheat, Malt, Corn, Straight, Bottled in Bond
Canadian whisky	
Production choices	Raw materials – Corn, rye, others Distillation – Base whiskies, flavouring whiskies Post-distillation – New and old barrels of various types, minimum period of maturation Other – Blending, caramel colour, flavourings (limited to 9.09% for exported Canadian whisky)
Defined labelling terms	Canadian Rye Whisky, Rye Whisky

Japanese whisky	
Production choices	Raw materials – Malted Barley (peated optional), corn, wheat Distillation – Malt whiskies (double pot still distillation Scottish model), grain whiskies (column stills various designs) Post-distillation – Oak, <i>mizunara</i> Other – Blended whiskies
Range 2: Asian spirits	
Shōchū	
Production choices	Raw material – Unmalted grains (short grain rice, long grain rice, barley), sweet potatoes, sake lees, brown sugar Processing and fermentation – <i>Kōji</i>, two step, one step (<i>Awamori</i>), parallel semi-solid-state fermentation Distillation – Continuous column still distillation, single pot still distillation (<i>Honkaku Shōchū</i>, <i>Awamori</i>), vacuum (optional) Post-distillation – storage/maturation earthenware pots, skimming off oily components
Defined labelling terms	<i>Honkaku Shōchū</i>, <i>Awamori</i> Sweet potato – <i>Imo shōchū</i>, Satsuma <i>shōchū</i> Sake lees – <i>Sake-kasu shōchū</i> Barley – <i>Mugi shōchū</i>, <i>Iki shōchū</i> Long grain rice – <i>Ryūkyū Awamori</i> Rice – <i>Kome shōchū</i>, <i>Kuma shōchū</i> Sugar cane – <i>Kokutō shōchū</i>
Baijiu	
Production choices	Raw material – Sorghum, rice, corn, wheat Qu – Big <i>qu</i>, small <i>qu</i>, bran <i>qu</i> Fermentation – Parallel solid-state fermentation, fermentation pits (Strong and Sauce Aroma), semi-solid-state fermentation (Rice Aroma) Distillation – Traditional <i>baijiu</i> stills (Strong and Sauce Aroma), other stills (Rice Aroma) Post-distillation – Pottery vessels, stainless steel vessels
Subcategories of <i>baijiu</i>	Strong Aroma, Sauce Aroma, Light Aroma, Rice Aroma Phoenix Aroma, Sesame Aroma, Laobaigan Aroma, Chi Aroma, Mixed Aroma, Special Aroma, Extra-strong Aroma, Medicine Aroma
Soju	
Defined styles	Diluted- <i>soju</i> , distilled- <i>soju</i>

Production choices	Diluted-Soju Base spirit – Highly rectified spirit Production – Distillation techniques, dilution, activated charcoal filtration, flavourings Distilled-Soju Raw material and processing – Rice, barley, sweet potato, <i>nuruk</i>, <i>ipkook</i> Distillation – Single distillation Post-distillation – Maturation (ceramic, inert or oak vessels)
Range 3: Other fruit spirits	
Brandy de Jerez	
Production choices	Key grape – Airén (La Mancha) Distillation – Pot still and column stills, <i>holandés</i>, <i>aguardientes</i>, <i>destilados</i>, required distillation strengths Post-distillation – <i>Solera</i> system (Jerez), blending, added sweetness
Defined labelling terms	<i>Solera</i> , <i>Solera Reserva</i> , <i>Solera Gran Reserva</i>
Chilean pisco	
Production choices	Key grapes – Typically aromatic Distillation – Pot still distillation (maximum distillation strength) Post-distillation – Minimum resting period, wood ageing (local woods)
Defined labelling terms	<i>Corriente/Tradicional</i> , <i>Especial</i> , <i>Reservado</i> , <i>Gran Pisco</i> , <i>Guarda</i> , <i>Envejecido</i>
Peruvian pisco	
Production choices	Key Grapes – Aromatic, non-aromatic Distillation – Single pot still distillation, distillation of wine prior to end of fermentation (optional), maximum and minimum distillation strength Post-distillation – Minimum resting period in inert vessels, nothing may be added prior to bottling
Defined labelling terms	<i>Pisco Puro</i> , <i>Pisco Mosto Verde</i> , <i>Pisco Alcolado</i>
South African brandy	
Production choices	Key grapes – Colombard, Chenin Blanc Distillation – Pot stills (maximum distillation strength), column stills (neutral spirit, optional) Maturation – Oak barrels, minimum ageing requirements
Defined labelling terms	(Blended) Brandy, Pot Still Brandy, Vintage Brandy

Grappa	
Production choices	Raw materials – White grape pomace, black grape pomace Fermentation – Only required for white grape pomace Distillation – Steam injected pot stills (batch), steam injected column stills (continuous), maximum distillation strength. Post-distillation – Inert vessels, wood vessels (various species of wood), sugar, caramel colour
Defined labelling terms	<i>Vecchia, invecchiata, riserva, stravecchia</i> , varietal labelling (one variety or two)
Calvados	
Production choices	Fruit – Apples and pears Distillation – Pot stills and column stills Post-distillation – Large old oak vessels typical (<i>foudres</i>)
Defined labelling terms	Calvados, Calvados Pays d'Auge, Calvados Domfrontais <i>Trois Étoiles, Trois Pommes, VS, Vieux, Réserve, VO, VSOP, Vieille Réserve, XO, Hors d'âge, Très Vieille Réserve, Très Vieux, Extra, Napoléon</i> , age statements
European fruit spirits	
Important regions and countries	Alsace (France), Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Northern Italy, Central Europe
Production choices	Pip fruit – Williams pear (Poire William), apples, quince Stone fruit – Plums, cherries, apricots Soft fruit – Strawberry, raspberry Processing – Fermentation then distillation, maceration in neutral spirit then distillation, maximum distillation strength Post-distillation – Unaged, inert vessels, wood vessels
Range 4: Other sugar cane spirits	
Cachaça	
Production choices	Raw material – Sugar cane juice from sugar cane grown in Brazil Post-distillation – Unaged, wood maturation (oak and other woods), sugar, caramel colour
Defined labelling terms	<i>Adoçada, Prata, Clássica, Tradicional, Ouro, Envelhecida</i> , Premium, Extra Premium
Other countries	
	India, Philippines, USA, Australia

Range 5: Other agave spirits and Sotol	
Bacanora	
Production choices	Location – Sonora Agave species – <i>Agave espadín</i>
Defined labelling terms	<i>Blanco, Joven/Oro, Reposado, Añejo</i>
Raicilla	
Production choices	Location – Jalisco Agave species – Various
Sotol	
Production choices	Location – Chihuahua, Coahuila, Durango Raw material – <i>Dasyliroton wheeleri</i>
Defined labelling terms	<i>Sotol, Sotol 100% Puro, Blanco, Joven/Oro, Reposado, Añejo</i>

Range 6: Other flavoured spirits and aromatised wines	
Genever	
Production choices	Base Spirit – Neutral spirit, <i>moutwijn</i> Flavouring – Botanical recipe, juniper must be used, re-distillation Other – Oak maturation, sugar, caramel colour (<i>Oude Genever</i>)
Defined labelling terms	<i>Jonge Genever, Oude Genever, Graangenever</i>
Flavoured vodka	
Production choices	Base spirit – Neutral spirit Flavouring options – Tinctures, distillates, adding other flavourings Types of flavours – Botanicals, other flavourings Other – Colour, sweetness
Styles	Traditional, modern
Aniseed flavoured spirits	
Production choices	Base spirit – Neutral spirit, <i>suma</i> (raki) Plants with anethole – Aniseed, star anise, fennel Flavouring options and types – Tinctures, distillates, adding other flavourings Other – Colour (natural, artificial), sugar, blending, bottling strength

Defined labelling terms	Pastis, Pastis de Marseilles, Ouzo, Raki
Other	Absinthe (wormwood, thujone)
Aquavit/akvavit	
Production choices	Base spirit – Neutral spirit Key flavours – Largely attributable to caraway and/or dill seeds, Flavouring options and types – Distillates of caraway and/or dill seeds, adding other flavourings Other – Oak maturation
Bitters	
Production choices	Base spirit – Neutral spirit Flavouring options and types – Maceration to add bitter tastes (quinine, gentian, bitter orange, rhubarb root), distillates, tinctures, adding other flavourings Other – Oak maturation, caramel colour, sweetness
Styles of bitter	Aperitif, digestif and cocktail
Spiced rum	
Production choices	Base spirit – Rum Flavouring options and types – Tinctures, adding other flavourings Other – Oak maturation, caramel colour, sweetness
Flavoured whiskey	
Production choices	Base spirit – Oak aged whiskey Flavouring options and types – Tinctures, adding other flavourings Other – Sweetness
Liqueurs	
Production choices	Base spirit – Any Flavouring options and types – Distillates, tinctures, adding animal flavourings (cream, egg yolk), adding other flavourings Other – Sweetness, oak maturation, unaged, colour (natural, artificial)
Defined labelling terms	USA – Minimum level of sweetness EU – Minimum level of sweetness, minimum bottling strength <i>Crème de...</i> , <i>Crème de Cassis</i> , Advocaat, Sloe gin, Sambuca

Aromatised Wines	
Production choices	Key botanicals – wormwood, gentian, quinine Other – base wine, fortifying alcohol, botanical recipe, sweetness, blending, caramel colour, maturation
Defined labelling terms	Vermouth, Americano, Quinquina/Chinato Extra dry, dry, semi-dry, semi-sweet, sweet

Unit 2 The Analytical Tasting of Spirits

Learning Outcome 1

Describe the key characteristics of selected global spirits and use the description to identify a spirit’s quality level, giving supporting reasons, and its category.

Assessment Criteria

- 1
- Describe the key characteristics of the selected global spirits using the WSET Level 3 Systematic Approach to Tasting Spirits®.
- 2
- Identify the quality level of the spirit, giving supporting reasons, and its category.

Ranges

Range 1: Selected global spirits	
Selected global spirits	Scotch Whisky (Single Malt Scotch Whisky, Blended Scotch Whisky), American Whiskey (Bourbon, Rye Whiskey, Tennessee Whiskey), Grape Brandy (Cognac, Armagnac), Caribbean rum, Agave spirits (Tequila, Mezcal), gin
Range 2: WSET Level 3 Systematic Approach to Tasting Spirits	
APPEARANCE	
Clarity	clear – hazy (faulty?)
Intensity	water-white – pale – medium – deep – opaque
Colour	colourless – lemon – gold – amber – brown pink – red – orange – yellow – green – blue – purple – brown – black
Other observations	louching other slightly hazy – cloudy and opaque particles

NOSE	
Condition	clean – unclean (faulty?)
Aroma intensity	neutral – light – medium(-) – medium – medium(+) – pronounced
Aroma characteristics	e.g. raw materials, processing, oak and maturation

PALATE	
Sweetness	dry – off-dry – medium – sweet
Flavour intensity	neutral – light – medium(-) – medium – medium(+) – pronounced

Texture/other		e.g. rough, smooth, watery, mouthfilling, warming e.g. bitterness
Flavour characteristics		e.g. raw materials, processing, oak and maturation
Finish	length nature	short – medium(-) – medium – medium(+) – long neutral – simple – some complexity – very complex

CONCLUSIONS	
Building an argument	e.g. balance, length and intensity, complexity, expressiveness
Quality level	faulty – poor – acceptable – good – very good – outstanding

3

Recommended Tasting Samples

Session 1

- An acceptable or good white rum
- A good or very good gin
- An outstanding *Blanco* Mezcal
- An acceptable blended rum
- A very good or outstanding blended rum

Session 4

- Two very good or outstanding Single Malt Whiskies showing different wood maturation techniques
- An acceptable Blended Scotch Whisky
- A very good or outstanding Blended Scotch Whisky
- A very good or outstanding Single Malt Whisky showing impact of sulfur
- A very good or outstanding Single Malt Whisky showing the impact of peat

Session 5

- A Tennessee Whisky and a Bourbon at entry price point for main brands
- A very good or outstanding wheater Bourbon
- A very good or outstanding high rye Bourbon
- A very good or outstanding Rye Whiskey
- A craft American whiskey showing an unusual feature (e.g. smoke, speciality grain)

Session 6

- A very good or outstanding Japanese Whisky
- A very good or outstanding Pot Still Irish Whiskey
- A very good or outstanding Canadian Whisky

Session 7

- A VS Cognac
- Two VSOP of similar quality levels but different styles
- An XO Cognac
- Two contrasting Armagnacs (e.g. *Blanche* vs wood aged, two different predominant grape varieties)

Session 8

- Either a Brandy de Jerez or South African Brandy
- A very good or outstanding Calvados

- A very good or outstanding Grappa
- A very good or outstanding Pisco
- A very good or outstanding unaged central European fruit spirit or something similar

Session 9

- A very good or outstanding Strong Aroma *Baijiu*
- A very good or outstanding Sauce Aroma *Baijiu*
- A very good or outstanding *kome* or *mugi shōchū*
- A very good or outstanding *imo shōchū*
- A very-good or outstanding *Awamori*

Session 10

- Two unaged rums of a similar quality level showing molasses and sugar cane juice (molasses rum may be slightly aged and filtered to remove/reduce colour)
- Four very good or outstanding wood aged single distillery rums showing different styles (e.g. Cuban, *rhum agricole*, Jamaican, Barbadian, Guyanan, Central American)

Session 11

- Three *Blanco* Tequilas showing a range of quality levels
- A *Reposado* and either an *Añejo* or an *Extra Añejo* from the same distillery as the outstanding quality *Blanco*
- A very good or outstanding Mezcal

Session 12

- Three unflavoured vodkas showing a range of quality levels and/or types or raw material
- Three gins showing a range of quality levels and/or styles (e.g. buyers' own brand, classic juniper-forward gin, contemporary gin)

Session 13

- A selection of four very good or outstanding flavoured spirits representing four distinct categories (e.g. Aniseed, Aquavit, Genever, spiced rum, bitter, liqueur)
- Two very good or outstanding Vermouth
- Another contrasting style of aromatised wine

4

Examination Guidance

Examination Administration

Examinations are conducted by WSET Approved Programme Providers (APPs). APPs must comply with WSET policies and procedures set out in the APP Handbook.

Assessment Method

The WSET Level 3 Award in Spirits is assessed by a closed-book theory examination, comprising two parts, and a tasting examination. In order to gain an overall pass a candidate must achieve a pass mark of 55 percent in both parts of the theory examination and the tasting examination.

Candidates must sit both examinations at the same sitting. Only resit candidates who have achieved a pass in one examination are permitted to resit an individual examination. WSET Awards does not offer aegrotat awards; all assessment requirements of the qualification must be met.

Unit 1: Theory Examinations — Unit 1 of the Specification will be assessed using an examination made up of two parts.

The theory examination paper must be completed in two hours. All examination questions are based on the published learning outcomes; the recommended study materials contain the information required to answer these questions correctly. In order to secure a pass for the Unit 1 theory examination a candidate will be required to attain a minimum mark of 55 per cent in both part 1 *and* part 2.

- **Part 1 Multiple Choice** — This part is made up of 50 multiple-choice questions. This part will assess knowledge across all learning outcomes.

Each question has only one correct answer, which should be indicated on a computer-readable answer sheet. The examination invigilator will give the full instructions on how to complete the answer sheet on the day of the examination. Each correctly answered multiple-choice question is worth one mark, and marks are not subtracted for incorrect answers.

- **Part 2 Short Answer Questions** — This examination is made up of six 5-mark-questions, three 10-mark-questions and one 20-mark-question. They will assess the skills of description and explanation across learning outcomes 1 and 2.

Answers should be written on the examination paper in the spaces provided. The marks for each question are indicated on the examination paper. Marks are not subtracted for incorrect answers.

Unit 2: Tasting Examination — The tasting examination assesses Unit 2 of the Specification. It will be internally set and marked by a WSET Approved Level 3 Internal Assessor using an assessment brief provided by WSET Awards. The results will be verified by WSET Awards.

The examination will consist of a tasting of two blind spirits. For information on what the samples could be, see the relevant learning outcome. The examination will assess a candidate's ability to accurately describe a spirit; identify its quality level and give supporting reasons for this assessment; and identify its category. The tasting examination must be completed in 30 minutes.

Answers should be written on the examination paper in the spaces provided. Marks for each question or part-question are indicated on the examination paper. There are 25 marks available for each sample. Marks are not subtracted for incorrect answers.

In order to secure a pass for the tasting examination a candidate will be required to attain a minimum mark of 55 per cent across the whole paper.

1 Entry Requirements

1.1 Eligibility

- 1.1.1** Candidates applying to sit the WSET Level 3 Award in Spirits examination must be over the legal minimum age for the retail purchase of alcoholic beverages in the country where the examination is being held, or be preparing for the examination as part of a recognised full-time programme of study, or have obtained consent from their parents or legal guardians.
- 1.1.2** There are no restrictions on entry to the WSET Level 3 Award in Spirits through overlaps with other qualifications or parts of qualifications.
- 1.1.3** Candidates who are under the legal minimum age for the retail purchase of alcoholic beverages in the country where the examination is being held, or those who choose not to taste alcohol for health or religious reasons, will not be allowed/required to sample any alcoholic beverage as part of their course. These candidates will not be eligible to complete the assessment of Unit 2 of the WSET Level 3 Award in Spirits. In such instances, candidates will receive a record of achievement on successful completion of Unit 1, but will not be awarded the WSET Level 3 Award in Spirits qualification.

1.2 Recommended Prior Learning

- 1.2.1** Completion of the WSET Level 2 Award in Spirits or an equivalent level of experience is recommended for entry to the WSET Level 3 Award in Spirits. Candidates who believe they have a sufficiently good understanding of the subjects covered by the Level 2 Award in Spirits are advised to consult their prospective tutor before enrolment on a course of study for guidance on the accreditation of prior learning.
- 1.2.2** Candidates sitting in English where it is not their first language are strongly recommended to have IELTS at 6.5 or above or be able to demonstrate an equivalent ability level.

2 Reasonable Adjustments

- 2.1** Examination candidates who have special examination requirements, which are supported by independent written assessment, are requested to notify the examinations officer at their APP of any such requirement at the time of enrolment. Further guidance for examination officers and candidates is available from WSET Awards as required.
- 2.2** It is the policy of WSET Awards that such candidates should not be placed at a disadvantage in the examinations. Candidates are responsible for informing their APP of any such requirement at the time of enrolment.

3 Format and Results

- 3.1** Candidates will be required to pass a closed-book examination comprising two units. Unit 1 is split into two parts.
- 3.2** In order to gain a pass grade in Unit 1 part 1, Unit 1 part 2 and Unit 2 a candidate must gain a mark that is equal to 55 per cent or more.
- 3.3** Candidates are required to pass Unit 1 part 1, Unit 1 part 2 and Unit 2 in order to gain the WSET Level 3 Award in Spirits.
- 3.4** The final result is the mean average of the three individual pass marks expressed as a percentage.
- 3.5** Once the final result has been calculated it will be graded using the following grade bands.

Grade Band	Required Percentage
Fail unclassified	mean average mark of 44% or below
Fail	mean average mark of 45% to 54%
Pass	mean average mark of 55% to 64%
Pass with Merit	mean average mark of 65% to 79%
Pass with Distinction	mean average mark of 80% or more no individual examination results below 65%

3.6 A record of achievement will be issued to candidates indicating the grade achieved. Once all units are completed, a final result will be issued. Results for candidates will be issued to APPs within eight week from receipt of completed scripts.

3.7 Examination results are issued by WSET Awards as follows:

- WSET Awards will issue an all-candidate grade list to the APP so that they can communicate results to their candidates. This grade list will be issued within eight weeks of the receipt of completed scripts by WSET Awards.
- Subsequently, WSET Awards posts candidates' record of achievement letters and certificates to APPs, who are responsible for forwarding these documents to their candidates.

4 Resits

4.1 Candidates may apply to resit an individual examination if they are unsuccessful. There is no limit on the number of attempts that may be made.

4.2 Candidates who have passed an examination are not permitted to retake them to improve their grade.

5 Examination Conditions and Conduct

5.1 Upon registration for an examination candidates are deemed to acknowledge and agree to the following specific conditions:

- At the start of the examination all candidates must supply the invigilator with proof of identity in the form of photographic ID.
- The examination is to be completed in the time specified for each unit.
- No reference is to be made to any material, in whatever form, other than the examination question paper and answer sheet.
- Once the invigilator has declared that examination conditions are in place, no communication of any kind between candidates is permitted until they have left the examination room or the invigilator has announced the end of the examination.
- During the examination candidates are only permitted to have the following items with them; tasting glasses, spittoons, pens, pencils, erasers and drinking water.
- It is prohibited for candidates to take any photographs of the examination room or examination materials.
- For the tasting examination, candidates should not wear perfume, after shave lotion or any other strong scent.
- The use of electronic devices of any kind is prohibited.
- Mobile phones must not be on the examination desk, they must be switched off and placed out of sight.
- The use of dictionaries of any kind is prohibited.
- The use of audible 'alarms' on any clock or watch is prohibited.
- Candidates may not leave the room until the first 15 minutes of the examination time have elapsed.

- Candidates who arrive after the published start time will NOT be allowed to sit the examination if any other candidate has already left the examination.
- Candidates who arrive late may be allowed to enter the room at the discretion of the invigilator and only if other candidates are not compromised. Under normal circumstances we would not expect any candidate to be allowed to start the examination if they arrive more than 30 minutes after the published start time.
- Candidates may not leave, and then return to, the examination room once the examination has started unless they can be accompanied by an invigilator at all times while they are out of the examination room.
- Candidates who complete the examination early may leave the examination room up until the last 10 minutes providing they do not disturb other candidates; no re-admission is permitted.
- Invigilators have no authority to comment upon, interpret, or express an opinion on any examination question.
- Any candidate who is suspected of misconduct will be advised to leave the examination room immediately and their examination paper will be submitted to the Examination Panel to determine its validity.
- No examination question papers are to be removed from the examination room; candidates who fail to submit the question paper with their answer sheet will be deemed guilty of misconduct.
- It is prohibited for candidates to reveal the content of examination papers to others, or reproduce it in any way.

5.2 Candidates also agree to abide by the invigilator's instructions. Failure to do so may render a candidate's results invalid.

5.3 Examination papers and answer sheets are the property of WSET Awards and will not be returned to candidates.

5.4 WSET reserves the right to permanently exclude candidates found guilty of misconduct from WSET qualifications

6 Examination Feedback, Enquiries and Appeals

6.1 Candidates requiring enquiry (re-mark) and/or feedback on their examination paper should contact their APP and request an Enquiry and Feedback Form. The form must be completed and submitted to WSET Awards along with the appropriate fee within 12 weeks of the date of the examination. Any request received outside this time-frame will not be reviewed. Enquiries and feedback will be issued within eight weeks of receipt by WSET Awards.

6.2 Any candidate dissatisfied with the result of an enquiry of an examination paper should contact the APP and request an Appeal against Enquiry Application Form, which must be completed and returned to WSET Awards, together with the appropriate fee, no more than 10 working days following notification of the enquiry decision. Appeals received outside this time-frame will not be reviewed. Appeals will be issued within eight weeks of receipt by WSET Awards.

7 Candidate Satisfaction

7.1 Should any candidate have concerns that their APP is not providing the service that they expect, or is behaving in a way that is inconsistent with the standards required in terms of administration, tuition or examinations, they should first make a complaint with their APP. If this does not lead to a satisfactory resolution, candidates are asked to contact our Quality Assurance Team by emailing qa@wsetglobal.com. Please note that all complaints will be dealt with confidentially, but WSET Awards cannot act on anonymous complaints.

8 Examination Regulations

8.1 WSET Awards reserves the right to add to or alter any of these regulations as it thinks fit.

6

WSET Qualifications

WSET Qualifications

The WSET has a range of qualifications that cover sake and wine as well as spirits. These are developed and maintained by WSET Awards. In full, the qualifications are:

WSET® Level 1 Award in Wines (600/1504/4)

WSET® Level 2 Award in Wines (603/4432/5)

WSET® Level 3 Award in Wines (601/6352/5)

WSET® Level 4 Diploma in Wines

WSET® Level 1 Award in Spirits (600/1501/9)

WSET® Level 2 Award in Spirits (600/1507/X)

WSET® Level 3 Award in Spirits

WSET® Level 1 Award in Sake (603/2051/5)

WSET® Level 3 Award in Sake (603/2066/7)

More information about all of these qualifications can be found on the WSET website [wsetglobal.com](https://www.wsetglobal.com).

Who can offer a WSET Awards Qualification?

WSET qualifications can only be offered by APPs and students wishing to study for a WSET qualification must enrol with an APP. The student's primary relationship is with their APP and the APP is responsible for the delivery of the course and administering the examination, which is set by WSET Awards.

Group study with an APP is the best way of learning how to taste, but some APPs also prepare candidates for our examinations by distance learning.

A list of APPs is published on the WSET website [wsetglobal.com](https://www.wsetglobal.com). Please contact the APP directly to find out about their programmes.

If you are interested in becoming an APP please contact the Quality Assurance Team by emailing qa@wsetglobal.com.

About WSET Awards

WSET Awards is the division of the WINE & Spirit Education Trust responsible for the creation, processing and quality assurance of assessments leading to WSET qualifications. It is recognised as an awarding organisation of Ofqual, the English regulator for qualifications and examinations.

WSET Awards operates a Quality Management System that complies with the requirements of **BS EN ISO 9001** for the management of awards for qualifications and examinations in the product knowledge and tasting competence of alcoholic beverages.



Diversity and Equality Policy

WSET Awards fully supports the principle of diversity and equality and is responsible for ensuring that all candidates for its qualifications are treated fairly and on an equal basis. A copy of our diversity and equality policy can be obtained from the Quality Assurance Team by emailing qa@wsetglobal.com.

Customer Service Statement

The quality and scope of service that customers can expect from WSET Awards is published in our Customer Service Statement. A copy can be obtained from the Quality Assurance Team by emailing qa@wsetglobal.com.

In the unlikely event of any dissatisfaction with the service received, please contact the registered APP in the first instance. If the issue is not resolved, please contact the Quality Assurance Team by emailing qa@wsetglobal.com.

WSET Prizes

Prizes are awarded each academic year, 1 August to 31 July, in recognition of academic achievement. Candidates who have achieved outstanding marks in their examinations may be eligible for a prize, in accordance with the prize criteria. Candidates will be contacted by WSET Awards in October or November each year should they be eligible for a prize. For more details on the prizes available, please go to: <https://www.wsetglobal.com/about-us/awards-bursaries/>

Note that these prizes do not take the form of financial grants to fund studies, but are in recognition of examination performance.



WSET
WINE & SPIRIT
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A world of knowledge

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