



**WSET**  
WINE & SPIRIT  
EDUCATION TRUST

# WSET® Level 1 Award in Spirits

# *Specification*





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**WSET®** Level 1 Award  
in Spirits

Wine & Spirit Education Trust  
39–45 Bermondsey Street, London SE1 3XF  
✉ [wset@wset.co.uk](mailto:wset@wset.co.uk)  
[wsetglobal.com](http://wsetglobal.com)

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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 1 Award in Spirits.

The main part of the document is a detailed statement of the learning outcomes of the Level 1 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 (including syllabus weighting), sample examination questions 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.

# 1

# Introduction to the WSET Level 1 Award in Spirits

## Qualification Aims

The WSET Level 1 Award in Spirits is intended for people who have little or no prior knowledge of spirits. It is designed to provide a sound but simple introduction to spirits. The qualification will assist those who need a basic familiarity with the main styles and categories of spirits, for example people who work with spirits as part of a larger beverage portfolio, in the retail and hospitality sectors.

Successful candidates will be able to list the principal spirits categories, state their defining characteristics, and know the key principles involved in the storage and service of spirits. They will consequently be in a position to answer customer queries and provide recommendations for spirits service.

## Qualification Structure

### Learning Outcomes

In order to meet the qualification aims there are three learning outcomes.

<b>Learning Outcome 1</b>	List and state the purpose of the main production processes and stills commonly used in the production of spirits.
<b>Learning Outcome 2</b>	Name the principal categories and types of spirit and state their defining characteristics.
<b>Learning Outcome 3</b>	Know and recognise the common equipment and principles involved in the storage and service of spirits.

## Enrolment

There are no restrictions on entry to the WSET Level 1 Award in Spirits. 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 to sample any alcoholic beverage as part of their course, but this is not a barrier to successfully completing the qualification.

## 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 1 Award in Spirits is 6 hours, all as GLH, this includes the 45 minutes for the examination.

## Recommended Progression Routes

The WSET Level 1 Award in Spirits, or an equivalent level of experience, is recommended for entry to the WSET Level 2 Award in Spirits.



# 2

## Learning Outcomes

### Learning Outcome 1

List and state the purpose of the main production processes and stills commonly used in the production of spirits.

#### Assessment Criteria

- 1 List and state the purpose of the four key steps used in spirits production.
- 2 Identify the two types of still and state how they are used and what style of spirit they can produce.
- 3 Identify the production processes that affect the flavour, sweetness and colour of a spirit.

#### Ranges

Range 1: Four key steps	
Four key steps	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1 Process the raw material</li><li>2 Fermentation</li><li>3 Distillation</li><li>4 After distillation</li></ol>

  

Range 2: Types of still	
Pot still	Batch distillation Lower strength spirits = pronounced flavour intensity
Column still	Continuous distillation Lower strength = pronounced flavour intensity Higher strength spirits = light or neutral flavour intensity

  

Range 3: Production processes that affect flavour, sweetness and colour	
Flavour	Raw material, fermentation, distillation strength, unaged, oak ageing (new and old oak), blending (consistency and complexity), redistillation, maceration, adding natural/artificial flavourings, dilution with pure water
Sweetness	Added sugar
Colour	Oak, caramel, other natural and artificial colours

## Learning Outcome 2

Name the principal categories and types of spirit and state their defining characteristics.

### Assessment Criteria

- 1 Name the principal categories and types of spirit and state the key flavour characteristics of these spirits.
- 2 State the raw materials used for the principal categories and types of spirit.
- 3 Identify key production processes that can have a defining influence on the characteristics of the principal categories and types of spirit.
- 4 State the meaning of key labelling terms for the principal categories and types of spirit.

### Ranges

Ranges 1, 2, 3 and 4: Principal categories and types of spirit	
<b>BRANDY</b>	
Type	Cognac
Raw material	Grapes
Key production processes	Grapes must come from a defined area, double pot still distillation, minimum ageing two years, often sweetened
Key labelling terms	VS (minimum age two years), VSOP (minimum age four years), XO
<b>VODKA</b>	
Raw material	Any raw material (grains and potato are traditional)
Key production processes	Distilled to 95 or 96% abv, unaged
<b>WHISKY/WHISKEY</b>	
Key production processes	Conversion of barley, malting
<b>Scotland</b>	
Type	Single Malt Scotch Whisky
Raw material	Barley
Key production processes	Pot still distillation, minimum ageing three years, must be distilled and aged in Scotland, peat (optional)
Key labelling terms	Single, Malt Whisky
Type	Blended Scotch Whisky
Raw material	Barley and other grains
Key production processes	Blend of malt and grain whisky, minimum ageing three years, must be distilled and aged in Scotland
Key labelling terms	Blended Whisky

USA	
Type	Bourbon
Raw material	At least 51% corn and other grains
Key production processes	New oak barrels, can be made anywhere in the USA, Kentucky number one state for production
Key labelling terms	Bourbon
Type	Tennessee
Raw material	At least 51% corn and other grains
Key production processes	Can only be distilled and aged in Tennessee, new oak barrels, charcoal filtering
Key labelling terms	Tennessee
Type	Rye
Raw material	At least 51% rye and other grains
Key production processes	New oak barrels, can be made anywhere in the USA
Key labelling terms	Rye
Other Whiskies	
Types	Ireland, Canada, Japan
CARIBBEAN RUM	
Raw materials	Sugar cane juice, molasses
Key production processes	Fermentation, pot still rums, column still rums, blending, colouring, sweetening
TEQUILA	
Raw material	Blue agave
Key production processes	Blue agave must come from a defined area, conversion by cooking, typically distilled to a low strength
Key labelling terms	Tequila, Tequila 100% agave <i>Blanco/silver, oro/joven/gold, reposado, añejo</i>
FLAVOURED SPIRITS	
Types	Spiced rum, flavoured vodka, gin, liqueurs
Key production processes	Juniper must be the predominant flavour in gin Liqueurs must be sweetened, often coloured Liqueurs can be made from neutral or characterful spirits

## Learning Outcome 3

Know and recognise the common equipment and principles involved in the storage and service of spirits.

### Assessment Criteria

- 1 Know the correct procedures for the storage of spirits.
- 2 Name the important ingredients used to make cocktails.
- 3 Identify the common equipment and glassware used in the service of spirits.
- 4 State the four factors to consider when making a balanced cocktail.

### Ranges

<b>Range 1: Storage</b>	
<b>Storage</b>	Optimum conditions, effects of poor storage
<b>Range 2: Important cocktail ingredients</b>	
<b>Important cocktail ingredients</b>	Fresh fruit juices, simple syrups, cocktail bitters
<b>Range 3: Common equipment and glassware</b>	
<b>Equipment</b>	Jigger, bottle pourer, muddler, Boston shaker, hawthorne strainer, fine sieve, mixing glass, bar spoon, julep strainer
<b>Glassware</b>	Cocktail or Martini, Margarita, tumbler or Old Fashioned, highball or Collins, shot
<b>Range 4: Balanced cocktail</b>	
<b>Four factors</b>	Strong, weak, sour/bitter, sweet

# 3

## Recommended Tasting Samples

It is recommended that candidates try a minimum of nine samples during the course of their studies. All samples should be benchmark expression of their category and style. The following list has been arranged in the order of the classroom session.

- Vodka
- VS Cognac
- VSOP Cognac (well-aged for the category) or XO Cognac
- Blended Scotch Whisky
- Straight Bourbon
- Colourless Rum
- Oak aged Rum
- Blanco Tequila 100% agave
- London Dry Gin (a second gin optional)
- A Liqueur (optional)

### WSET Level 1 Systematic Approach to Tasting Spirits®

APPEARANCE	
<b>Colour</b>	colourless – lemon – gold – amber – brown pink – red – orange – yellow – green – blue – purple – black
NOSE	
<b>Intensity</b>	neutral – light – medium – pronounced
<b>Aroma characteristics</b>	e.g. fruity, floral, vegetable, grain, spice, herb, oak
PALATE	
<b>Flavour characteristics</b>	e.g. fruity, floral, vegetable, grain, spice, herb, oak
<b>Other observations</b>	e.g. sugar level, texture
<b>Finish</b>	short – medium – long neutral – simple – some complexity – very complex

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# 4

## Examination Guidance

### Examination Administration

Examinations are conducted by WSET Approved Programme Providers (APPs). Administratively, APPs must comply with the criteria and codes of practice set out in the Operating Handbook.

### Assessment Method

The WSET Level 1 Award in Spirits is assessed by a closed-book examination that consists of 30 multiple-choice questions, to be completed in 45 minutes.

All examination questions are based on the published learning outcomes and the recommended study materials contain the information required to answer these questions.

A candidate is required to pass with a minimum mark of 70 per cent.

### About the WSET Level 1 Award in Spirits Examination

The WSET Level 1 Award in Spirits examination paper consists of 30 multiple-choice questions. 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.

All WSET Level 1 Award in Spirits examination papers are carefully compiled to reflect the syllabus. A chart giving a detailed breakdown of the examination weighting is shown below.

Learning Outcome	Multiple-Choice Questions (1 mark per question)
1	5
2	20
3	5
	<b>30 marks</b>

### Issuing of Results

Results of examinations are issued by WSET Awards as follows:

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

# 5

## Sample Examination Questions

The Wine & Spirit Education Trust does not release past paper for the WSET Level 1 Award in Spirits. In order to give candidates an idea of the sort of questions that might be asked, this section includes five sample questions. The examination consists of 30 questions similar to these.

**1 Which of the following processes is used to create alcohol?**

- a Distillation
- b Fermentation
- c Conversion
- d Oak ageing

**2 What is the minimum age of a Cognac?**

- a 2 years
- b 4 Years
- c 6 years
- d 8 years

**3 What is the raw material used to make Tequila?**

- a Potatoes
- b Barley
- c Agave
- d Sugar cane

**4 Which of the following countries/regions has a well-established reputation for whisky production?**

- a Mexico
- b France
- c Caribbean
- d Japan

**5 What is the name of the strainer shown in the picture below?**

- a Hawthorne
- b Fine
- c Julep
- d Jigger



1b, 2a, 3c, 4d, 5c.

**Answers**

# 6

## Examination Regulations

### 1 Entry Requirements

#### 1.1 Eligibility

- 1.1.1** Candidates applying to sit the 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 1 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 to sample any alcoholic beverage as part of their course, but this is not a barrier to successfully completing the qualification.

#### 1.2 Recommended prior learning

- 1.2.1** There are no requirements for candidates to have previous knowledge or previous experience of alcoholic beverages.
- 1.2.2** The indicative levels of literacy and numeracy required for the examination are as follows:
  - literacy:** Level 1 of the UK basic skills national standards, or equivalent level of literacy in the language used for the examination.
  - numeracy:** Level 1 of the UK basic skills national standards, or equivalent.

### 2 Format and Results

- 2.1** The WSET Level 1 Award in Spirits assessment is a closed-book examination of 45 minutes duration and consists of 30 multiple-choice questions worth one mark each.
- 2.2** Results for successful candidates will be issued to APPs within two weeks from receipt of completed scripts.
- 2.3** Results are graded as follows:

Mark of 70% and above	Pass
Mark of 69% and below	Fail

### 3 Reasonable Adjustments

- 3.1** 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.
- 3.2** 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.



## 4 Resits

- 4.1** Candidates may apply to resit the examination if they are unsuccessful. There is no limit on the number of attempts that may be made.
- 4.2** Candidates who have passed are not permitted to retake to improve their grade.

## 5 Examination Conditions and Conduct

- 5.1** It is a condition of entry that candidates agree to the following specific conditions for the closed-book examination.
- At the start of the examination all candidates must supply the invigilator with proof of identity in the form of photographic ID.
  - For all examinations, responses must be written in the same language as the examination paper.
  - The examination is to be completed in a maximum of 45 minutes.
  - 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; pens, pencils, erasers, drinking water and a small handbag or shoulder bag so long as it only contains personal items.
  - It is prohibited for candidates to take any photographs of the examination room or examination materials.
  - The use of electronic devices of any kind is prohibited.
  - 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 and any future ban on sitting papers.
  - 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.

## 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 six 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 two 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 two 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 take this up with their APP. If this does not lead to a satisfactory resolution, candidates are asked to contact our APP Administration Team, [appadmin@wset.co.uk](mailto:appadmin@wset.co.uk). Please note that all complaints will be dealt with confidentially, but WSET Awards cannot act on anonymous complaints.

## 8 WSET Awards Regulations

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

# 7

## WSET Qualifications

### WSET Qualifications

The WSET has a range of qualifications that cover wine and spirits as well as sake. These are developed and maintained by WSET Awards (see Chapter 8 for more information). In full, the qualifications are:

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

WSET Level 1 Award in Wine Service

WSET Level 1 Award in Spirits

WSET Level 1 Award in Sake

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

WSET Level 2 Award in Wines and Spirits (600/1508/1)

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

WSET Level 3 Award in Sake

WSET Level 4 Diploma in Wines and Spirits

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

### Who can offer a WSET Qualification?

WSET qualifications can only be offered by organisations approved by WSET Awards, known as Approved Programme Providers (APPs), and candidates wishing to study for a WSET qualification must enrol with an APP. The candidate's 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 Approved Programme Providers (APPs) is published on the WSET website [wsetglobal.com](http://wsetglobal.com). Please contact the APP directly to find out about their programmes.

If you are interested in becoming an APP please contact the APP Administration Team, [appadmin@wset.co.uk](mailto:appadmin@wset.co.uk).

## About WSET Awards

WSET Awards is the awarding body of the Wine & Spirit Education Trust, which provides quality-assured qualifications that help people to know more about alcoholic beverages and to develop their tasting skills. The development and awarding of WSET accredited qualifications is the sole responsibility of WSET Awards.

The UK government established a regulatory authority, The Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (OfQual), which regulates awarding organisations that offer qualifications. Some WSET qualifications are accredited by OfQual; the accreditation numbers are listed in Chapter 7.

WSET Awards operates a Quality Management System that complies with the requirements of **BS EN ISO 9001:2008** 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 APP Administration Team, [appadmin@wset.co.uk](mailto:appadmin@wset.co.uk).

## 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 APP Administration Team, [appadmin@wset.co.uk](mailto:appadmin@wset.co.uk).

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 APP Administration Team, [appadmin@wset.co.uk](mailto:appadmin@wset.co.uk).

## Scholarship Scheme

Scholarships are awarded for each academic year, which runs from 1 August to 31 July. Candidates who achieve outstanding marks in their examinations *may* be eligible for a scholarship. The scholarships are managed by WSET Awards, and eligible candidates will be contacted by WSET Awards after the end of each academic year once all the results for qualifying examinations have been collated.

There are many scholarships on offer; please go to the scholarships page on the WSET website for more details: [wsetglobal.com/about-us/awards-bursaries](http://wsetglobal.com/about-us/awards-bursaries).

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





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*A world of knowledge*

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Wine & Spirit Education Trust  
International Wine & Spirit Centre  
39-45 Bermondsey Street  
London SE1 3XF

+44(0)20 7089 3800  
✉ [wset@wset.co.uk](mailto:wset@wset.co.uk)  
[wsetglobal.com](http://wsetglobal.com)

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