

An online training tool for wine professionals around the world: from responsible service to a sustainable consumption of wine

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Abstract. Most consumers enjoy wine in moderation, however, there remains a minority that may develop risky drinking habits, potentially harming themselves and those around them. For the last fifteen years, a prime objective of the Wine in Moderation programme has been to educate and empower the wine sector and now for the first time, a central education tool has been developed, integrating the topic of moderate consumption horizontally in all wine activities. The entire wine value chain – from the producer to the salesperson to the restaurant service staff – can contribute to reduce harmful consumption and encourage responsible drinking patterns. Educating wine professionals is crucial to equip them with the necessary knowledge for responsible service and to communicate the message of moderate consumption patterns to encourage good practices among wine consumers. For this purpose, the training tool which has been developed by Wine in Moderation, with around nine training modules will be made available in two formats: face-to-face and online. The topics range from wine/alcoholic beverages and health to responsible advertising, the wine-related legal framework, responsible wine tastings and oenotourism. In this presentation, we will focus on the online tool: The nine modules of this training can be implemented worldwide, even in countries, where the Wine in Moderation programme is not present yet. Since wine drinking patterns vary depending on socio-cultural factors, the training can be adapted to the needs of the respective country. After a pilot-testing phase in different countries and necessary adjustments, the final version of the digital training will be available in seven languages and more countries. Some examples of online modules and its pilot versions will be discussed and presented. Considering the increasing demand for information by wine consumers, educating all actors of the wine value chain via these tailored modules makes this an indispensable tool for the wine the sector to preserve a sustainable culture of wine.

1. Introduction

1.1. Moderate and responsible wine consumption

Most consumers enjoy wine responsibly and in moderation, however a small percentage may develop harmful drinking habits that negatively affect both themselves and those around them. Wine has played a significant role in many cultures and lifestyles worldwide for centuries, and it is generally accepted that moderate and responsible drinking patterns can be part of a balanced lifestyle and diet. Promoting and encouraging such

drinking patterns among consumers should thus be the only way forward and should be based on the latest solid scientific data bearing in mind social and cultural factors.

Nowadays, consumers get access to information through many different channels, digitally, through TV and radio, but also face to face. One effective way to achieve this is through wine professionals, who frequently engage with consumers in settings like wine tastings, hospitality, and wine tourism.

1.2. Training of professionals

Every representative in the wine sector, regardless of the region they come from or the position they hold within the

value chain, plays an important role in encouraging responsible wine drinking patterns and in helping to reduce the harm caused by excessive and risky drinking. Educating and training professionals is crucial, as is equipping them with the knowledge and tools needed to advocate for responsible drinking habits and to encourage moderation among consumers.

Indeed, well-prepared professionals will be better equipped to raise consumer awareness about balanced lifestyles, highlighting the risks associated with excessive drinking, and effectively address these concerns with both consumers and the broader society.

2. Developing a hybrid training for wine professionals

As part of its 2020-2025 strategy, the Wine in Moderation (WiM) Association decided to develop a training focused on educating professionals about responsible service, as well as promoting moderate and responsible consumption practices more broadly, while providing guidance on offering a responsible wine experience. This commitment led to the creation of the training programme “Wine for Professionals: From Responsible Service to Sustainable Consumption.”

The training provides a comprehensive mix of information, practical skills, legal insights, social responsibilities, and best practices that professionals need in order to present wines responsibly—whether in wineries, restaurants, wine bars, or through various forms of communication.

Our aim with this training and its accompanying tools is to equip wine professionals with the knowledge and resources necessary to offer their customers the best possible experience. As wine professionals, we must acknowledge the responsibility that comes with our products, which take root in millennia of history and terroir, and which are associated with pleasure and enjoyment, while also recognising the potential risks in certain situations and among specific groups.

The training is available in hybrid format which means that it can be rolled out in presental classes, but also taken online through the digital tool.

This article presents the content of the training and its structure, while looking more closely at the digital tool that was selected to host the online training and how it will actually work.

2.1. Wine professionals

The wine sector is represented by a large number of professionals working in organisations of different sizes and structures—from bulk wine producers to fine wine makers, and from large multinational corporations to small local winemakers. The network of wine professionals extends beyond just producers and traders; it also includes educators, hospitality businesses, the HORECA sector (hotels, restaurants, catering), wine communicators, and more.

With the possibility to be easily adaptable and translated, online training offers an efficient way to reach these diverse actors across the globe. Furthermore, online trainings also offer the flexibility often required in today’s environments where professionals are expected to attend to numerous tasks throughout their day. With online trainings, they have the possibility to take the training when time allows offering more flexibility and increasing the probability that they will take the time to actually finalise it. Any new employee will also have the possibility to easily take the training online.

Any registered WiM Supporter, along with their employees, can access the online tool if they are interested. The online content is derived from the original nine modules designed for face-to-face training with a trainer.

2.2. Training content

Nine modules have been developed for this training, each tackling a specific subject that is considered of the most crucial importance when it comes to the sustainability of the wine sector. Hereafter a short summary for every module:

2.2.1. Module 1: Introduction to wine

Since ancient times, wine has been connected with life, culture, and diet. Its role has evolved, shifting from a vital source of nutrition to a cultural accompaniment to food and social gatherings. Despite these changes, one constant has remained: wine's deep connection to gastronomy, history, tradition, origin, local quality products, and convivial settings.

In this module, students are introduced to the world of wine, exploring its relationship with culture, the diversity of wine regions, the concept of terroir, a brief historical overview of this ancient beverage, and its socio-economic impact.

2.2.2. Module 2: Wine/Alcoholic beverages and health

The link between alcoholic beverages, particularly wine, and health has been a topic of significant debate in the media and society over the past few years, raising many questions among both consumers and professionals. This module addresses key topics, from drinking guidelines to patterns of responsible and risky consumption. It equips students with the knowledge to understand the basics of wine and health, enabling them to better inform their customers, and also help them identify individuals who should avoid drinking alcohol—including wine—and discuss situations where alcohol consumption should be avoided. The information presented in this module is based on the latest scientific evidence.

2.2.3. Module 3: Legal framework

What are the specific national regulations surrounding wine, such as who can serve alcoholic beverages and when, and who should not consume them? In this module, we address these questions, providing an overview of the current legal landscape in the students' countries.

2.2.4. Module 4: Self-regulation and the Wine Communication Standards

Self-regulation has always been central to the Wine in Moderation programme, and it is now more crucial than ever in our approach to communicating and advertising wine. In this module, we examine the Wine Communication Standards, which serve as the wine sector's self-regulation code. We explore its guiding principles, implementation strategies, and provide examples on how to implement these Standards.

2.2.5. Module 5: Creating the right environment

The overall atmosphere of an establishment can affect how customers consume alcoholic beverages and how the rest of their evening unfolds. In this module, we discuss the importance of creating a positive environment for both employees and customers by providing practical tips to set up the right atmosphere, observing and identifying early signs of risky drinking or problematic behaviour, etc.

2.2.6. Module 6: Good practices

What best practices can professionals implement to promote responsible and moderate wine consumption? In this module, we explore various strategies students could easily apply in their establishments—whether a winery, wine bar, restaurant, or similar venue. Topics include creating the right atmosphere, effectively informing customers, monitoring alcohol promotions, and managing serving sizes.

2.2.7. Module 7: Wine & food

In this module, we highlight the importance of balancing wine with food and share intriguing facts from around the globe. We provide general guidelines for optimal wine and food pairings and explore how wine can be incorporated into cooking. Additionally, we cover factors that influence the calorie content in wine, how to calculate wine calories, and the calorie counts for different types of wine.

2.2.8. Module 8: Wine tasting & events

Are wine tastings at the heart of the student's business offer? How can they show their visitors/customers that they care about their well-being? In this module, we give students some tips on how to facilitate a responsible and moderate consumption of wine, how to taste wine, and how to empower their visitors.

2.2.9. Module 9: Oenotourism: diversifying the offer

Wine tourism is becoming increasingly popular, with more visitors selecting scenic wine destinations for their vacations. The key question is: how can wineries expand their offerings to attract a broader audience? In this final module, we provide tips and strategies for enhancing customer value and encourage students to explore various opportunities for creating a sustainable wine experience that appeals to diverse types of consumers.

2.3. Structure and adaptation

From the beginning, Wine in Moderation has focused on a single message adaptable to cultural, legal, and linguistic contexts: promoting the moderate and responsible consumption of wine. This project followed the same approach. In collaboration with the National Coordinators where the training programme will be implemented, the WiM Association tailored some content to align with each country's specific context. Legal information and culturally relevant content have been adjusted accordingly and will be reflected both for the face-to-face and online training. This information will be reviewed annually, and National Coordinators will be responsible for informing the WiM Association of any legal updates that should be reflected in the training materials.

Every module follows a similar structure that is available in its entirety in the training handout which will be used as a basis for the trainer, and which will be distributed to the students at the end of the training:

- **an introduction to the module:** similarly, as the summary presented hereabove.
- **a set of questions to assess the preliminary knowledge of the student:** A brief set of questions will help the student evaluate their current knowledge of the module's content. This will also enable the trainer to adjust the time spent on each topic accordingly and allow the student to begin engaging with the material.
- **the module content:** A PPT presentation where the content is presented, and which is used by the trainer to structure the session. The same content is used online but more detailed this time since there is no trainer to give the additional information.
- **a scenario (when relevant):** role play was considered central during the development of this training as it is a very efficient way to test the knowledge acquired during the module.
- **a pop quiz to assess what the student has retained from the module**
- **key takeaways:** which can be used by the students as the go-to information in case of reminder.

At the end of each module, students are encouraged to consider how they can apply the module's content to their daily work. This reflection can also serve as a discussion topic for the trainer.

2.4. Initial testing phase & job profiles

After completing the drafting and design of the modules and training handout, the materials were submitted to external experts who had not been involved in the initial development. These experts who were chosen for their specialised knowledge, were invited to review specific modules relevant to their expertise through a structured questionnaire, using comments and track changes to suggest revisions. Their feedback was key in ensuring that the content met the training's objectives and in making necessary improvements.

Once these suggestions and changes had been incorporated, the first “Train the Trainer” was organised in view of future training sessions at national level. These sessions which will be held annually, inviting all trainers identified at the national level to participate, will cover the entire training program and address any questions or concerns the trainers may have, ensuring they are fully prepared. The first session that took place in May 2023 also led to small further changes which were identified during the training, not only in terms of content, but also in terms of structure. In fact, some repetition was found between two modules which encouraged the working group to think about how to address this. It was decided to identify which modules would be most useful depending on job profiles, for example, a professional working in wine tourism might not need the self-regulation module, or a wine producer may not need the introductory module to wine. The job profiles that were identified and for which the Working Group identified the necessary modules are:

- Winemakers,
- Oenologists & Sommeliers,
- HORECA professionals, and
- Oenotourism professionals.

These different recommendations will be included in the handout directly while they will be automatically inserted in the digital tool, redirecting the student to the appropriate training course (with the identified modules) directly.

3. Selection of digital training platform & adaptation

SC Training was selected among a number of available platforms based on several factors: its usability, interactivity, flexibility, the possibility to use it on different e-tools (such as mobile devices, tablets, or computers), etc. Its track record of positive learning experiences also contributed to its selection, supporting long-term knowledge retention.

As mentioned previously, the online tool also offers the possibility to adapt the content both linguistically but also nationally. In fact, module 3 dedicated to the legal framework led us to organise the training by country rather by language.

Every module is thus available in different languages and countries. This means that we may have several linguistic versions of the same module which may

however differ in content, imageries, etc. due to national legislations, limitations or sensitivities.

The way that we have built the training on the SC Training platform requires the person taking the training to start by filling in a questionnaire stating their name, surname, email, job title, company, address and country. The job title and country are especially important as they will redirect the person to the relevant modules directly (see above for more details). It is also important to note, that albeit the modules have been identified according to the job profiles, the students will also have access to the rest of the modules should they be interested.

In cases where the trainee should not find himself in the identified job profiles, they will have access to all the modules directly and will be required to take them all to be considered as a trained professional.

4. Testing of the online tool and adaptation of the content

While the content of the face-to-face training has already undergone extensive testing and evaluation by external experts, the online training and tool will also need to be tested once it is finalised. The different markets for which the content has been linguistically and legally adapted will thus enter a testing phase where a number of professionals will be asked to test the tool and revert back with comments and suggestions. This will allow not only to identify any errors that may have slipped, but also to see that everything works correctly on all types of devices.

Following this pilot phase, National Coordinators will be able to officially launch the training in their markets.

5. Implementation of the digital training

Digital training has been shown to be an effective and efficient method for reaching wine professionals globally. For example, professionals working with wine tourism, or in restaurants could take the training when time allows and remotely. International organisations such as the OIV should consider including information on moderate and responsible drinking in the training curricula of wine professionals.

In the case of the training “From responsible service to a sustainable consumption of wine”, once the training is finalised and launched, National Coordinators will manage access to the Wine in Moderation online training tool in their respective countries. They will make sure the tool is always up to date when it comes to legal issues and will publicize it among professionals nationally. They will have the option to put the training as part of the services they offer to their members nationally and thus increase their offer in terms of moderate consumption of wine.

In countries without a National Coordinator, the WiM Association will manage digital access. Two main items will differ in this case: 1. a small fee will be asked to access the training. 2. for the legal information in module three (Legal Framework), students will have access to

international and more generic content guiding them towards what they should be on the lookout for.

6. Conclusions

Social responsibility is an increasingly important concern, not just for the wine sector but also for society and consumers at large. It should therefore be a central component of modern business offer. Empowering professionals in the wine value chain with knowledge and skills in socially responsible business practices and promoting healthy lifestyles is thus crucial if the sustainability of the entire wine sector should be maintained.

As the social responsibility movement of the wine sector, the Wine in Moderation programme, active for the last 15 years, has developed a number of tools along the years. A new item will be a practical and up-to-date training tool for wine professionals who are committed to promoting moderate and responsible wine consumption. The involvement and efforts of our National Coordinators will be key to the success of this training initiative.

Additionally, international organisations like the International Organisation of Vine and Wine (OIV) and other professional bodies will play a significant role—not only in recognising the importance of such training but also including it in job profiles of wine professionals as well as promoting and fostering partnerships and initiatives to support it.

7. Appendix: The Wine in Moderation programme

Wine in Moderation is the wine sector's social responsibility programme, dedicated to promoting moderate and responsible consumption. Launched in 2008, the programme has steadily grown, becoming the first international initiative of its kind and a true benchmark in the sector.

Centrally coordinated from its Brussels office, the programme is implemented at the national level and can be tailored to meet local needs and demands, while respecting each country's culture and legislation.

Wine in Moderation is a unique coalition of responsible wine organisations, joined by universities, authorities, and wine consumers worldwide. Together, they aim to promote well-being, encourage a balanced lifestyle, and preserve the heritage of wine.

Built around a single message promoting sustainable wine consumption, the programme and all the information provided are based on the latest scientific evidence, education, and self-regulation. Its goal: to empower the wine value chain and enhance awareness and understanding of sustainable wine consumption.

Wine in Moderation is a globally recognised and trusted reference for the wine sector's social responsibility. It leads a variety of initiatives and campaigns designed to inspire the conscious enjoyment of wine, all built on the

core values of moderation and responsibility, diversity, partnership, credibility, and dedication. The following principles also guide its actions:

- A minority of people misuse alcoholic beverages. This misuse can be damaging, not only to the consumers themselves, but also to the people around them. On the other hand, a responsible and moderate consumption of wine can be compatible with a balanced and healthy lifestyle.
- Wine is part of many lifestyles and cultures across the world and drinking patterns depend on local tradition, education, gender, age group and socio-economic factors. Therefore, when encouraging moderation, the needs of each population need to be taken into consideration and in any case all efforts should be based on sound research, social and cultural aspects.
- The wine value chain brings an invaluable social, cultural, agricultural, environmental, and economic contribution to regions and countries. The representatives of the wine sector—in every region and at every step of the value chain—have an important role to play when it comes to communicating about the value of moderation.
- Nonetheless, Wine in Moderation does not intend to promote or increase the consumption of wine, nor does it intend to encourage those who do not drink to start drinking. Wine consumption should be avoided by certain groups such as underage individuals, during pregnancy and breastfeeding, when taking certain medications and when driving. In case of any question about how to evaluate individual health risk, it is advised to consult a medical practitioner.

The WiM Association is the non-profit organisation responsible for coordinating, managing, and expanding the Wine in Moderation programme. It consists of various members and partners operating at both national and international levels, aiming to encourage sustainable wine consumption among professionals and consumers alike. Local entities such as wineries, wine bars, and wine writers can also join as WiM Supporters, directly guiding consumers by promoting the values of moderation and responsible consumption.

Since its inception over 15 years ago, Wine in Moderation has expanded beyond EU borders, now featuring 15 National Coordinators across 12 countries worldwide. Additionally, Wine in Moderation activities are organised globally, including communication efforts, information campaigns at wine fairs and expos, and educational initiatives.