



Customer Guidance Notes

Date: January 2010

Introduction

These notes aim to help customers make the best use of our services. They are not definitive and we advise talking to others and to us about what you want. It is important to have an idea in advance of what you want to make with your yarn and how you intend to sell it.

You may also find it helpful to request a copy of our flow chart or look at our website Process page, to see what happens to your wool.

Fibre suitability

The quality of a fibre varies with the animal's breed, location, age and health from year to year. It is not possible to be definitive about the fineness, softness, amount of kemp, etc in advance and you will need to assess your fibre when it is shorn.

Please remember to keep your fibre cool and dry while you store it, and watch out for moths: hanging up in a cloth (duvet cover) or paper bag works best. Other 'nasties' can make their homes in the fibre if you have not removed faeces and vegetation. If mildew or pests invade, remove the affected fibre and destroy – with luck, the remaining fibre should still be useable.

British sheep breeds produce a wide range of fibres, but the minority and rare breeds, as well as those reared mainly for meat, on average have a medium to coarse wool. Thus Shetland, Gotland, Blue Faced Leicester, Portland and Manx are usually suitable for processing into the finer yarns, but others may not be.

Mohair is suitable for spinning as pure mohair if from kids under a year old, but thereafter it may only spin satisfactorily if blended with 10-20% fine white wool. Similarly, both the coarser, longer, lustre wools and alpaca are not always suitable for spinning without blending with 10-20% carrier wool fibre.

Coloured fibres, if mixed, like paints, have a tendency to blend to grey! Although the processing will enable the yarn to have some character, the overall impact will be grey. Thus you should consider separating Jacob in particular or saving fibre from one year to another, blending or joining a share scheme to avoid this.

Orders

Please discuss blends and colours with us and we will do our best to advise you to enable you to produce a useful and saleable yarn. Please note that we require a deposit of £9 per kg for all orders.

Set-up and sorting

We weigh in and sort your wool to assess the most appropriate product for you, given your fleece. If you wish, we will confirm your order and give you an estimate of the potential returned weight of yarn once we have assessed the fibre and the processes you require. We will then remove all contamination or poorer quality fibres (unless you wish the latter to be retained to add character). If necessary we may contact you to tell you the revised incoming weight and provide advice on the suitability of the processes you require. There is a set-up charge, based on the delivered weight.

Own fibre and other options

We normally guarantee that if you supply a minimum of 20 kilograms of fibre you will receive yarn made almost entirely of your own fibre. In practice we have to allow for a minimal 'passing-on' of fibre between batches. This does still allow organic status to be preserved (where relevant) due to our strict cleaning regime undertaken for organic processing. If, after sorting, we do not have enough fibre to feel confident of fulfilling this commitment, we may recommend you to consider adding further purchased fibre, either to provide additional bulk or to improve the average quality and suitability for processing. You may prefer to have the fibre, including that proposed for disposal, returned or to consider putting it into a yarn or weaving share scheme. We will discuss this with you if we need to contact you to confirm or alter your order.

Processing

Mohair benefits from processing when conditions are cool and damp, but we are now able to process both mohair and alpaca, along with wool, all the year round.

We undertake special cleaning before organic spinning so we set specific dates for organic processing.

The first process, scouring, will normally remove up to 25% of the weight of the fibre as dirt and grease. We then add back around 6-10% in a mix of water and oil to aid processing, and the remaining processes can



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remove anything between 10% (a reasonable average target) and 30% or more. The average percentage yield is around 65%, but this may fall with problematic fibres, or those containing a wide range of fibre types, to as low as 30%. It is best to assume a 50% yield. Worsted spinning involves combing out the fibres and the yield will be lower than for the equivalent fibre used for woollen spinning.

Spun yarn returned in an oiled state will therefore lose around 6-10% further when finally washed. It is advisable (but not essential) to wash oiled yarn within six months as the oil may otherwise affect the yarn.

There are no definitive standards for yarn (e.g. Aran or Double Knitting), so the way we aim to achieve repeatability is to work in Yorkshire Skein Weight or Tex for diameter and TPI (Twist per inch) or metric equivalent for twist. We can try to match samples or use previous machine settings, but would advise testing (which we can arrange) for greater certainty. Please note that all ball and skein weights are approximate due to the natural characteristics of the fibre.

Share schemes

As a beginner or small producer, you may wish to consider a share scheme, to gain a greater variety of finished yarn and/or a smaller amount of yarn or woven goods. At first, the cost of a full run of yarn or textiles can be daunting and you need a plan for what you will do with the resulting amount of finished goods.

Cost savings you can consider

- Sorting colours in advance;
- Skirting and grading (either by you, the British Wool Marketing Board or we can arrange this) will improve the percentage yield;
- Discounts are available for single batches of more than 40, 100 and 250 kilograms;
- Washing skeins at home and winding into balls will save paying us to do it;
- Oiled on cone is good for machine knitting and the resulting garments can then be washed;
- Ball and skein bands can be designed and printed at home, saving paying us to do it.

Weaving

If you decide you wish to make yarn for weaving, it is important to consult a weaver and for us to liaise with them. We can suggest weavers who may be suitable, or

would be happy to work with anyone of your choice. We will then spin the yarn to their requirements. We will invoice you for spinning and can send yarn direct to the weaver once payment is received. You will require a minimum of 42 kilograms of fibre for suiting or fine scarves and 115 kilograms for blankets. This is more suitable for a business than for private customers, who would usually find a share scheme more appropriate. Please see our advice note on weaving.

Time to return

We try to give estimates of the likely time to return your yarn when we confirm your order. The busiest time is the autumn. It is well worth considering shearing twice a year if you have a long wool sheep (as do most mohair producers), as this makes for easier processing and sometimes improves quality.

Special information for organic producers

We cannot take responsibility for the maintenance of organic status outside our premises, and therefore customers must assure themselves of the organic status of other processors such as weavers or dyers.

The times of organic runs will be notified to all known organic customers. Those customers not able to supply the fibre and all required documentation in time may have to wait for the next run. Please contact us on this.

Contamination - IMPORTANT

It is vitally important that we do not receive fibre which contains organo-phosphates, synthetic pyrethroids or any other chemicals potentially dangerous to health or the environment. All customers are required to sign a compliance statement undertaking that they have not used any such chemicals within a three-month withdrawal period prior to shearing and no fibre batch will be processed until this statement has been received.

We reserve the right to refuse to process any fibre suspected of containing such chemicals and to undertake random tests to assure compliance. Customers are expected to remove obvious faeces and vegetable contamination as far as possible prior to sending us fleece. We reserve the right to remove fibre we consider too contaminated to process prior to processing.

We welcome comments or additional information for these notes.