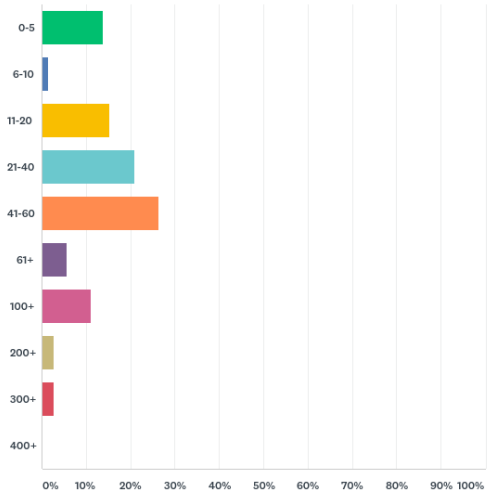
# The Natural Fibre Company 2017 Customer Survey
# Analysis of responses

Q1 What breeds of sheep, goats or alpacas do you keep?

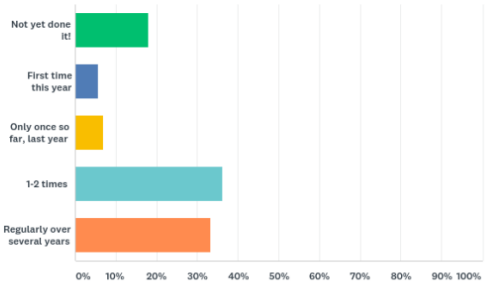
We had 72 responses, which is just under 4% of our mailing list. Most frequent were Shetland (13), Cross-bred (9), Hebridean (8), alpaca (8), White and Coloured Ryeland (8), Blue-faced Leicester, mohair (each 5), then Herdwick, Jacob and Wensleydale or Teeswater (4 each). In total there were 39 different breeds named, which is pretty typical of our processing as well.

Q2 What size is your flock or herd?




- Again we had 72 responses, with only three buying in or working with a farmer, though this is a growing trend, and most having their own animals.
- 27 of the respondents had more than one breed, one had 6, some had between 3 and 5 and 18 had 2 breeds (several of these had sheep and alpacas)
- 4% of the sample have fewer than five sheep. They possibly save up fleece to process over a number of years in order to get to the 20kg minimum.
- The majority of our customers, 62.5%, have between 20-60 animals.
- Another growing trend is that we now have 15% with over 100 animals.

Q3 How often do you process fibre with us?




- Again there were 72 responses and 18% were preparing to work with us …
- 69% have processed with us more than once, of whom half do so regularly.

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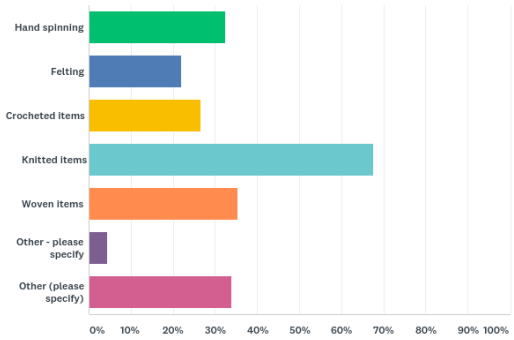
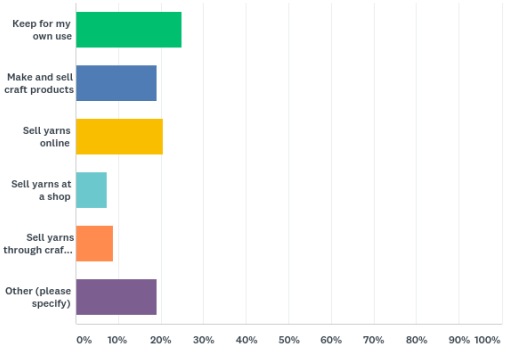
Q4 What products do you make with your processed fleeces?




- 68 people answered this question, some ticking more than one option, so we had 141 responses in total
- Of the 27% who answered 'other', some are actually "all of the above" or two of knitting, weaving, hand dyeing etc.
- Knitting (32%), crochet (18%) and weaving (18%) are predictably out in front for popularity
- Felting (10%) and hand spinning (15%) make 25% of responses and this has been growing in recent years.
- Only 2% mentioned dyeing themselves, though we are doing more and more dyeing for our customers.
- 10% said they simply sold the yarns, but we suspect this question wording was not clear, as probably people make samples and sell yarns, though also of course some people make items for sale. Certainly we now make more and more finished balls or skeins, dyed or natural, with ballbands, ready for direct sale.

Q5 What do you do with the processed fleeces?




- 68 people answered this with a broad spread across all the categories.
- A quarter of the respondents keep their yarn for their own use, which is interesting as we suspect they may not come back for more processing ... This is why we have been working on customer support for marketing the yarns and processed fibre!
- Most of the 'other' responses were 'all of the above'.
- 21% make items for sale, with another 3% specifying socks and woven goods.
- 2% sell specifically to spinners, which is interesting in comparison with the 15% in question 4, so we assume those who spin their own yarns then sell on or keep for their own use.
- 11% use a shop, another 11% sell at shows and fairs while 25% sell online.

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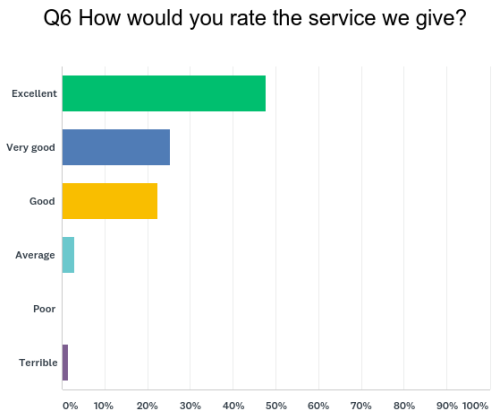
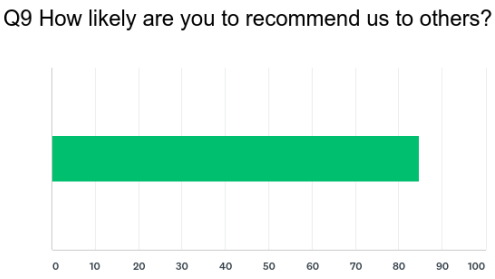
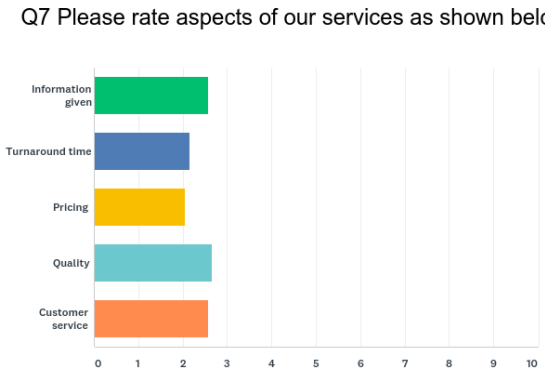



- 67 people replies and nearly 50% rated us as excellent; overall nearly three quarters said we were very good or excellent. This is very good news!




- Again good news: of the 69 people responding, the vast majority at 85% would recommend us, which is very encouraging even if possibly only customers who like us will respond to the survey.




- 67 people answered this, though some did not answer all of it or marked not applicable. The graph is not very useful: the data indicates the areas that customers are most happy with are: information given, quality and customer service.
- They are less happy with the turnaround time and pricing.
- 67 people ranked us for *information given*, with 67% saying very good and another 30% saying good, so only 5% thought we were poor or terrible,
- 59 people ranked us for *turnaround times* and here the results were less favourable with 27% saying very good and 61% saying good, while 12% said poor
- 62 people ranked us for *pricing*, with only 16% saying very good, but 74% saying good, and 10% saying poor or terrible
- 60 people ranked us for *quality*, with a wonderful 70% saying very good and another 27% saying good, with only 4% saying poor or terrible
- Finally 63 people ranked us for *customer service*, with 67% saying very good, 25% saying good and only 8% saying poor or terrible.
- 2 people ranked us as poor and terrible so, even though the results are generally pretty pleasing, we know we still need to improve!

# The Natural Fibre Company 2017 Customer Survey Analysis of responses

Q8 Please use your own words to say what you find good or bad about our services

- Of the 68 responses that jumped out, as well as the word cloud above: being grateful for business advice.
- There were many responses praising the customer service and information available on the website including: “The whole process was completed with old style customer service, do not change that please”.
- Areas we could improve: the turnaround time.
- Overall: 63 people said what we are good at, with 87 things mentioned:
    - almost a third said our staff are good and helpful
    - another 14% found the advice and information helpful
    - 7% liked our information and newsletter
    - 15% praised our quality
    - 6% were pleased that we responded quickly
    - 5% like our collection service
    - 3% felt turnaround was good
    - 3% were just generally happy!  And so are we!
- 48 people said we are less good, with 50 things mentioned:
    - However 50% said they could not actually think of bad points!
    - 10% felt our prices were high and another 2% mentioned carriage costs
    - 8% complained of poor communication or quality, with another 12% mentioning specific issues, while 8% mentioned slow turnaround or lack of communication on turnaround.
    - A few people mentioned wanting smaller batches, which we cannot do due to the size of our machines, and one person mentioned spinning for weavers, which in fact we do.
    - Generally, we seem sometimes to compound errors, so once a person is unhappy we do not do enough to resolve things for them and this is something we will work on.
- 54 people mentioned things we can improve on:
    - 20% of these actually said they could not think of anything to improve!
    - 16% said they wanted better turnaround and another 12% wanted better information on this.
    - 10% mentioned price or quality, including a request for loyalty pricing which in fact we do – another communication issue!
    - The biggest area for improvement at 22% was various suggestions around communication, which adds to the bad points noted above, so this is our main area to work on.

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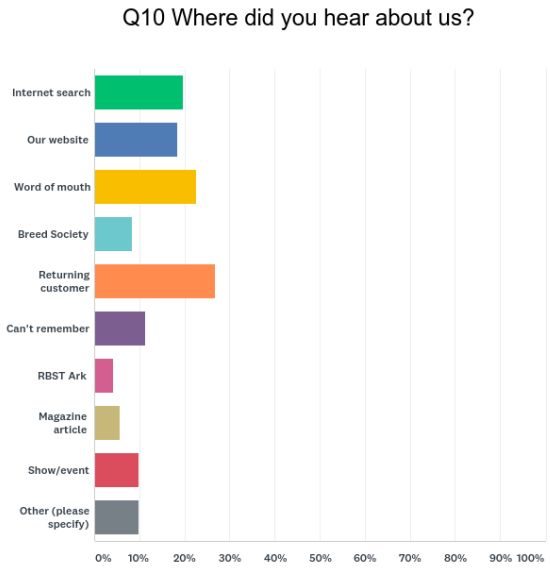


- 71 people responded with 95 specific responses:
- If we assume that 'internet search' and 'our website' mean the same thing, that's 31% of responders who have found us via the internet.
- 'Word of mouth' is encouraging, in that it suggests our customers are indeed recommending us and 18% of the responses mentioned this, with 7% not remembering where they heard of us, though a couple of these were long-term customers.
- 7% came through the breed societies, with another 7% through magazines or the RBST Ark and 9% through shows or events.
- Perhaps the nicest is that 24% were returning customers, so we are pleased with this – particularly as some of these have been with the business from when it was in Wales.

Blacker Sheep Limited, trading as The Natural Fibre Company, Blacker Yarns and Blacker Designs.

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