

TOPIC: Learning About Wool – All year levels

Scottish sheep are kept primarily for their meat with wool being a by-product of the industry.

For this lesson, you may wish to utilise the wool samples from your pack. You will also need access to the internet to view the various resources.

Need help? If you would like a presentation on sheep/wool in school, together with a finger knitting activity please get in touch www.rhet.org.uk or e-mail training@rhass.org.uk

As students will be designing a multi-functional outfit suitable for a particular end user, it is important that students learn about the journey wool takes as the type of sheep the wool comes from, influences the functional end use.

For this lesson:

- Give students a brief overview of Scottish wool – natural fibre sourced from different breeds of sheep
- Make the distinction to your students that different breeds of sheep produce different types of wool.
- Give the students an idea of the cost of shearing and the fleece payments for fleeces and compare this to the cost of Scottish woollen garments.
- Outline the sustainability of Scottish wool
- Discover more about some of the products produced using Scottish wool and the breeds of sheep they come from

Brief overview of the shepherds year

The [shepherds calendar](#) talks through how sheep are looked after throughout the year.

The story of [British wool](#) is a video of the sheep to garment story.

Sheep breeds

There are more than [90 different breeds](#) and crosses of sheep in the UK. Scotland has 6.83 million sheep, with numbers being highest in the Borders, Dumfries and Galloway and the Highlands. The location and climate dictates the breed of sheep kept in different areas and the colour and quality of the wool produced varies significantly.

Different wools and their uses

An adult sheep produces one fleece per year, which is skilfully removed by a sheep shearer. It costs the farmer anywhere between £0.90 - £1.10 per sheep for the shearing process, and they can get anything from £0.50-£3.00 per fleece in return.

Wools can be categorised on how they feel to handle, their colour, the fleece weight, the length of the wool fibres (staple length) and the micron range. A **micron** is the measurement used to express the diameter of wool fibre. The British Wool Marketing Board grades fleeces into categories. The lower the numerical range, the finer the fibre apart from Grade 554, [Bluefaced Leicester](#) which can often have a micron (u) range of 25-28u. The finest British wools are around 25u.

Fine wool has a low micron value and commands a higher price. Fine wools from lowland sheep like [Suffolk](#) receive £0.80 - £1.00/kg are processed for woven apparel, futons and hand knitting; through to mountain sheep wools from [blackface sheep](#) receiving £0.40 - £0.60p. In Scotland there are also a number of coloured breeds like [Hebridean](#), [North Ronaldsay](#) and [Zwartbles](#).

Find out how much farmers get for their fleeces, and what the different grades of fleeces will become: <http://www.britishwool.org.uk/producer-prices.php>

Wool sustainability

Students can find out about the [sustainability of Scottish wool](#) (p6) as an excellent carbon store, as well as information on the properties of wool.

Processing the wool

From there on, the [processing of wool](#) into finished product takes time and requires special skills and machinery. The technical terms involved in the industry are defined [here](#).

Woolly Scottish products

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| Wool myths | Dispel these seven woolly myths with help from the Wool Room, makers of luxury wool bedding: http://www.thewoolroom.com/blog/7-wool-myths-debunked/ |
| Scottish wool pillows | Sleep solutions from Scottish Wool Bedding Products |
| STEM and wool | Material World , a course of 8 lessons using Scottish textiles, leather and fashion products to explore science, technology, engineering and mathematics. There is an Introduction to Scottish textiles and a series of other presentations about the textiles produced in Scotland from iconic fashion fabrics, to exciting technical innovations such as body armour or knitted textiles used inside the body to save lives. |
| Wool clothing | Hebridian sheep undyed fleece is spun into yarn and then knitted or woven into a range of country clothing |
| Scottish wools | At New Lanark they work with fleece from the following breeds Swaledale , Cheviot , Hebridian , Kent Romney , Jacob and Merino. |
| Scottish yarns | Video of how sheep are shorn and wool made into yarn on Fair Isle |