

Evaluation of the efficacy of the units, mode of delivery and destination of students studying sheep and wool science

Introduction

A market review of the Sheep CRC units (Welsman, 2006) predicted the specialised wool units would struggle to approach critical mass of self-financing enrolments and should consider industry funding. A lecturer position at the University of New England was funded by the Australian Wool Education Trust in 2007 to support the delivering of the four specialised wool units; wool biology and metrology, wool processing, wool marketing and clip preparation and sheep production. The units are offered to undergraduate and postgraduate students using the 'hub and spoke' model. The University of New England provides the hub and the spokes; University of Sydney, University of Western Sydney, Charles Sturt University, University of Western Australian, Murdoch University, Curtin University, Adelaide University, University of Queensland, University of Tasmania and Melbourne University.

Aims

The aim of this research project is to use market research to determine if the Hub and Spoke method is effective. More specifically

- To determine what the drivers are for students to enrol in these units and their demographic
- To assess the level of student satisfaction with the units and factors influencing this

Method

Students studying the four wool units from 2010 to 2012 have completed the survey using the web-based tool, Survey Monkey. Human ethics was approved by UNE Human Ethics Committee approval No. No. HE12/093.

Results and Discussion

The student response rate to this survey was 61% (2010), 77% (2011) and 72% (2012). Within the students surveyed 71% had completed Sheep production, 15% completed Wool biology and measurement, 25% Wool marketing and clip preparation and 26% Wool processing. All students that completed the survey received a free "sheep" 2GB USB with unit and scholarship information saved on the device.

Results have been collated across all three years of collection. The students were initially asked questions to determine their interests and motivation for studying the wool units. The desire to work in the sheep industry was the highest response (54.8%) from students for reasons why they chose to study sheep and wool science. Interestingly 38% of students do not come from a rural property and 37% have less than 2 years work experience on a rural property.

Table 1: Why did you choose to study sheep and wool science

Why did you choose to study sheep and wool science?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Desire to work in the sheep industry on completion of study	54.8%	109
To manage family owned property	22.1%	44
Currently working in the sheep industry	20.6%	41
Recommendation from course advisor/lecturer at your University	13.1%	26
Recommendation from friend	19.1%	38
Scholarship holder	12.6%	25
Raised on a sheep property	36.7%	73
To see if I am interested in the sheep industry	25.1%	50
Other (please specify)		15

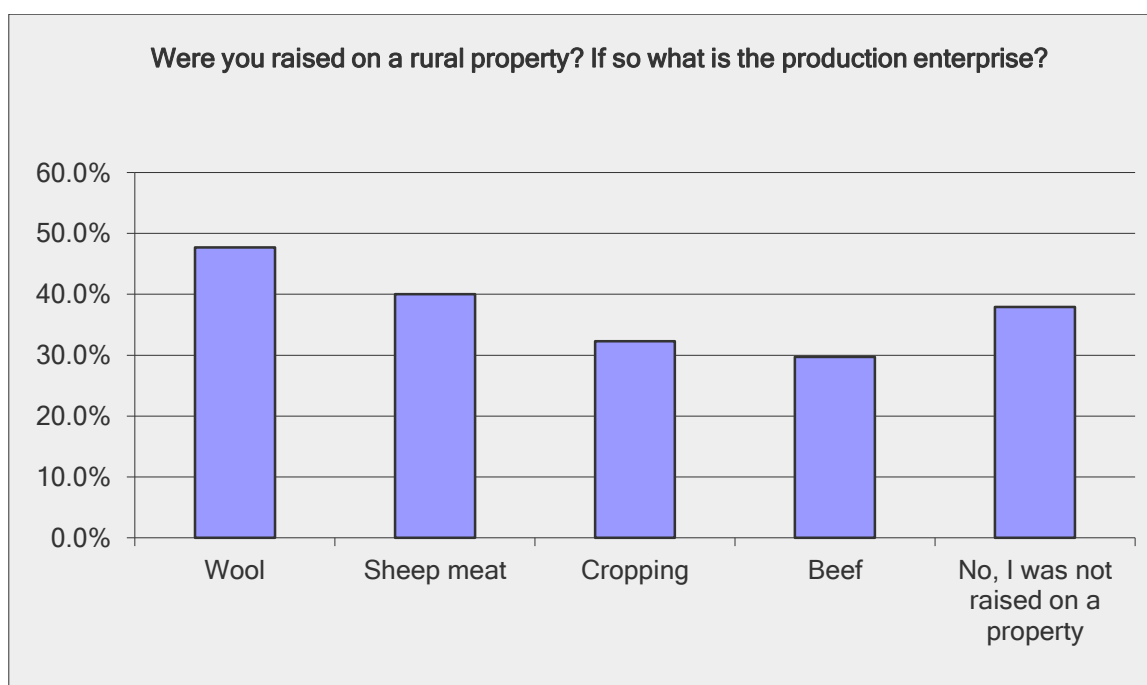


Figure 1: Were you raised on a rural property?

A series of questions were asked to facilitate the marketing strategies of the project. The main avenues students were informed of the UNE wool units were the website (29%) www.une.edu.au/wooleducation, their University course coordinator (22%), Wool lecturer visits (18%) and word of mouth (18%) (Figure 2). These are the key marketing tools that will be continued to be used and improved throughout the 2013-2015 project. The students were also asked how they found information when choosing their course/degree and 90% stated they used the University website. The current website has continued to be developed and more information added throughout 2012. Further updates are planned for 2013 to ensure that this continues to be an effective tool.

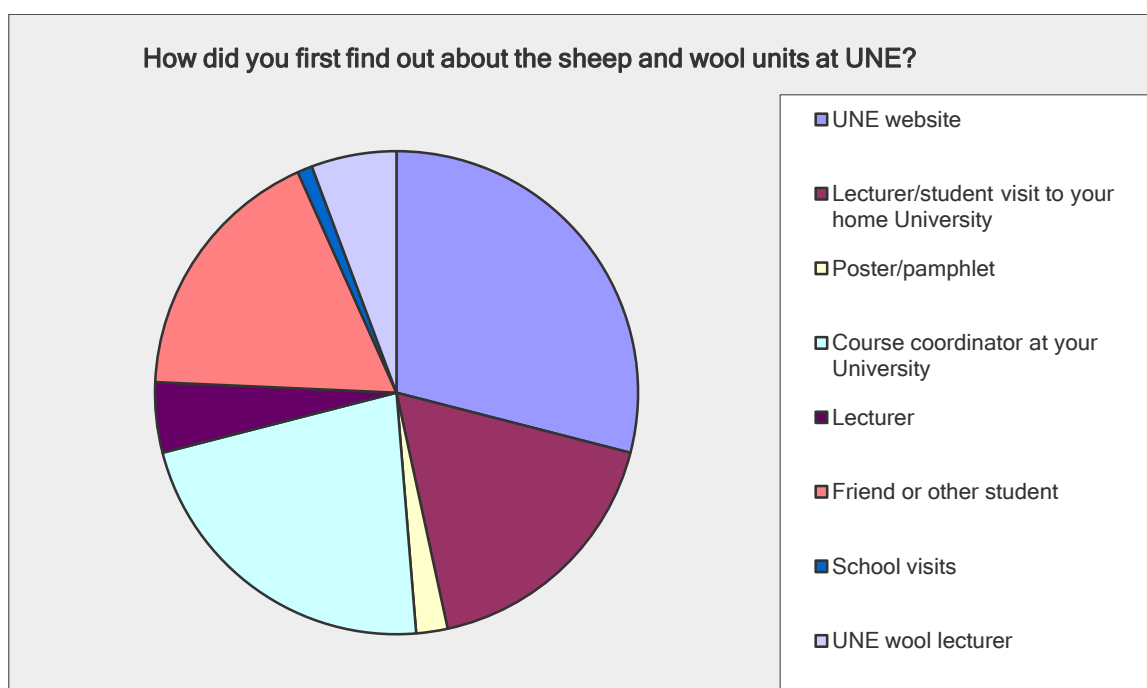


Figure 2: How did students find information about the wool units?

The future career aspirations of the students were variable (Table 2). Many of the students commented that they would like to work in industry and then return to family-owned sheep properties after 5 years. Nearly 50% of student perception of the sheep industry was there are jobs available, but they felt they were not readily advertised. Considering this response, it is proposed to develop better advertising of wool positions for our wool graduates. In 2013 enquires will be made about advertising positions either on the UNE wool website and/or the woolwise website.

Table 2: What are your future career aspirations?

What are your future career aspirations?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Work on family property	33.9%	61
Manage/work on sheep property	31.1%	56
Research	32.8%	59
Education	18.3%	33
Extension/consultancy	46.1%	83
Processing	7.8%	14
Sales	15.6%	28
Government department	23.9%	43
Business	15.6%	28
Not sure at this stage	19.4%	35
Other (please specify)		22

Students were asked to provide feedback on the content and structure of each wool unit. The intensive schools were mentioned as the most worthwhile section of the units. When asked on possible improvements to the units the inclusion of online lectures and difficulty completing the practical portfolio (one of the assessment tasks), were identified. Comments on possible improvements for the other units included free access to sheep and wool journal, updating the content in Wool

marketing and clip preparation, more online interaction between students and lecturer and reducing content of units to support the reduced time within the trimester system. All of these issues will be addressed in 2013.

When asked if the student would recommend the unit to fellow students, all of the units received 90% or more that they would recommend the unit. For students that only studied one wool unit and do not intend to study more, the main reason was due to completion of their study or no spare electives available to study more wool units.

The demographic of students surveyed over the course of the 3 year period was as follows;

The University in which the student is completing their degree is presented in Figure 3. As indicated in the milestone report approximately half of students are UNE and the cross-institute Universities make up the other half.

Age: 81% are between 18-24 years of age and therefore studying at an undergraduate level.

Sex: 60% female 40% male.

State students come from: 56% NSW, 16% WA, 9% QLD, 9% VIC, 10% TAS, SA, NT and ACT.

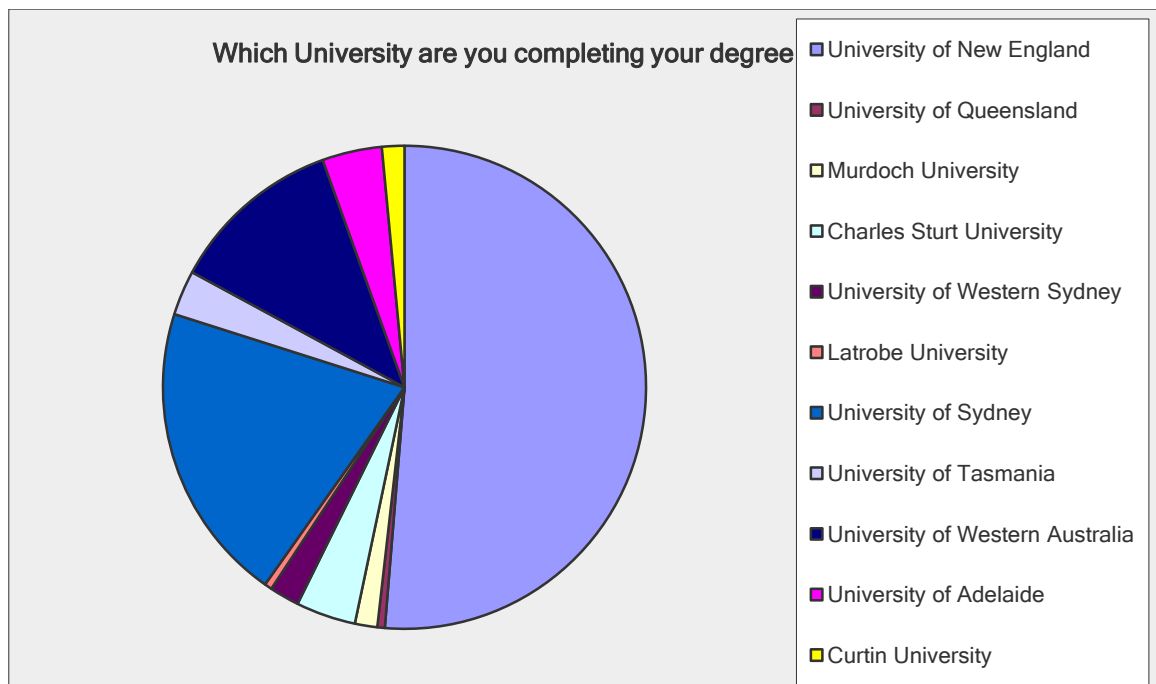


Figure 3: University student is completing their degree