An independent service is available to abattoirs to classify their sheep carcases. MLCSL’s technically trained staff have been classifying sheep carcases since the early 1970’s.

**What does the service provide?**

The information provided by MLCSL’s sheep carcase authentication service provides information to form part of the basis of the transaction between producers and abattoirs.

MLCSL is a wholly owned subsidiary of the Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board.

The service offers the industry highly trained and regularly monitored staff to independently establish the important carcase information as the basis for the transaction between the buyer and the seller.

The MLCSL’s service includes:

- **Identification** – Producer lots of sheep are identified and recorded providing a vital link in the chain of traceability.

- **Category** – The category of the carcase: New Season Lamb (NSL), Old Season Lamb (OSL), Mature Sheep (MS), EWE and RAM.

- **Dressing Specification** – Monitoring of dressing specifications, these are recorded for suppliers reference (see page 5).

- **Carcase Weighing** – Carcases are weighed and recorded (see page 5 for hot weight rebates).

- **Conformation** – (see page 3).

- **Fatness** – (see page 3).

- **Verification** – Daily audit checks on documentation to verify the recorded carcase information for supplier confidence, supported by six monthly management checks.

**Category**

Clean sheep are classified into three categories: New Season Lamb (NSL), Old Season Lamb (OSL) or Mature Sheep (MS).

NSL are animals born and marketed within a year beginning on 1 January or born after the beginning of October in the year prior to marketing, OSL are other clean sheep with no permanent incisor teeth erupted and MS are clean sheep with one or more permanent incisor teeth erupted.
### Classification

**Conformation**

The conformation class is determined by a visual appraisal of shape, taking into account carcase blockiness and fullness of the legs. No adjustment is made for the influence of fatness on overall shape.

There are five main classes: E, U, R, O, P, but traders in ewe carcases may ask for class P to be divided into an upper (P+) and a lower (-P) band.

The conformation class is described first, followed by the fat class, eg R3L.

**Fatness**

The fat class is determined by a visual appraisal of external fat development. There are five main classes ranging from 1 (very lean) to 5 (very fat). Classes 3 and 4 are sub-divided into L (leaner) and H (fatter).

### Standardisation of Sheep Carcase Classification

To ensure consistency of application of sheep carcase classification standards by MLCSL staff, various procedures are strictly applied for the operation of the scheme.

- Training programmes in plant and at MLCSL’s training centre ensure that classifiers maintain the required standards of efficiency and accuracy.
- Classification checks are regularly undertaken by Managers, nominated checkers and other members of the management team including the Quality Manager providing a national link to ensure consistency of standards.
Sheep Carcase Classification

Conformation classes - E, U, R, O and P
Fat classes - 1, 2, 3L, 3H, 4L, 4H and 5
Dressing specifications

There are two industry agreed dressing specifications:

- MLC Standard
- Tail Removed

**MLC Standard specification** – What is removed/left in the carcase?

The following parts are removed from the carcase:

- Fleece, head, fore and hind feet, genitalia, contents of the abdominal and thoracic cavities.

The following are left in the carcase:

- Kidneys, kidney fat and diaphragm.

**Tail removed specification** – As above with the tail removed at the fifth sacral vertebra.

Any dressing specification that falls outside the agreed specifications is recorded as ‘Company Spec’.

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**MLC Standard Specification**

**Tail Removed Specification**

A ‘company spec’ sometimes used is ‘Excluding Kidney Knob and Channel Fat’.

This equates to an average reduction in carcase weight of 0.5kg.

Trimming of neck and belly flaps also affects carcase weight and can be part of a ‘company spec’.

Consistent Dressing Specifications are important, they have implications on the final carcase weight and the return to the supplier.

The Dressing Specification applied will be annotated on the MLCSL classification/kill sheets.

**Hot weight rebate**

Hot weight rebates are used to establish a ‘cold’ carcase weight. They are applied to the carcasses weighed hot (within one hour of slaughter). This produces a cold weight on which the producer is paid. Rebates table shows differences between different scale calibrations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scales calibrated to 0.2kg</th>
<th>Scales calibrated to 0.5kg</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hot weight (kg)</td>
<td>Rebate (kg)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25.4 and under</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25.6 and over</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Value of Independence

MLCSL’s Sheep Carcase Classification Scheme is an ideal tool to communicate clear descriptions of carcase specifications in the marketing chain.

MLCSL’s service is the only UKAS accredited national provider of independent classification services.

MLCSL’s UKAS accreditation gives the industry the following benefits:

- Provides assurance within the supply chain that the independent service follows a laid down code of practice.
- Gives confidence that its quality control systems operate to an agreed standard with regular monitoring, both internal and external.

The independent service also makes a major contribution to transparency throughout the supply chain providing confidence between producers and abattoirs. Regular performance monitoring ensures technical standards are delivered consistently across Great Britain by a dedicated team of Classifiers and Managers, providing confidence in the classification process thereby contributing to the effective marketing of the finished stock and the ultimate transaction between buyer and seller.

Computerised Data Capture Record

MLCSL Authenticated Classification Documents
SHEEP

CARCASE AUTHENTICATION AND VERIFICATION SERVICES

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