# ANNUAL REPORT

## WOOL EMPOWERMENT TRUST

## SHEARER TRAINING SERVICES REPORT

## REPORTING PERIOD

1 July 2025 to 30 June 2026


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## Executive Summary

This report presents the outcome and impact assessment of the National Wool Growers' Association of South Africa (NWGA) Shearer Training Services delivered under contract to the Wool Empowerment Trust for the period 1 July to 30 June 2026. The reporting period coincided with the main shearing season and focused on strengthening shearing capacity, improving shearing standards, and mitigating risks related to animal welfare and clip quality across communal and commercial production systems.

Training interventions covered blade and machine shearing at beginner, intermediate and advanced levels, supported by demonstrations, competitions and industry engagement. Delivery was aligned to approved Key Performance Areas (KPAs) and aimed at ensuring a sustainable, skilled shearing workforce capable of harvesting the South African wool clip to required quality standards.

## 1. Introduction & Context

NWGA's Shearer Training Services form a critical component of the Wool Empowerment Trust production support and transformation mandate. The contract period commencing on 1 July 2025 focused on maintaining and expanding national shearing capacity, improving shearing quality, and supporting animal welfare and clip preparation standards.

Training delivery occurs within a constrained seasonal window of approximately three to four months, requiring intensive planning, coordination and deployment of instructors and temporary staff. Despite seasonal, logistical and disease-related constraints, strong progress was achieved across all priority training areas.

## 2. Blade Shearer Training

### Objective:

To train, professionalise and retain competent blade shearers, particularly within communal production systems.

### 2.1 Beginner blade courses

A total of 35 beginner blade courses were presented where 300 new hand shearing recruits were trained.

### 2.2 Advanced blade courses

During the reporting period, 14 advanced blade shearing courses were presented in commercial shearing sheds, providing training to 65 intermediate and advanced South African blade shearers.

### 2.3 Advanced blade courses for Lesotho citizens

No advanced blade courses for Lesotho citizens were presented, but as part of in-service training presented, 14 Lesotho blade shearers were retrained.

### Impact:

Beginner training strengthened the skills pipeline and reduced quality risks, while advanced training improved professional standards and productivity. Collectively, these interventions contribute to more consistent clip quality and improved animal welfare outcomes, while also creating employment opportunities and supporting income generation for trained shearers within communal and commercial shearing systems.



## 3. Machine Shearing

**Objective:**
To maintain sufficient machine shearing capacity to harvest the South African wool clip efficiently and responsibly.

### 3.1 Beginner Machine shearing

Beginner machine shearing courses were delivered across three platforms:

1. On request from shearing contractors or farmer groups (1 course, 6 trainees),
2. Agricultural schools and colleges (5 courses, 53 trainees), and
3. Communal shearing sheds (5 courses, 28 trainees). This multi-platform approach supports both immediate industry needs and long-term workforce development.

### 3.2 Advance Machine Shearing

In-service advanced machine shearing training included 33 courses for South African shearers (112 trainees) and 14 courses for Lesotho shearers (51 trainees). In-service training focused on refining techniques, improving efficiency, reducing second cuts and mitigating animal welfare risks.

**Impact:**
Improved machine shearing competence directly contributes to improved clip quality, reduced injury rates and greater operational efficiency, thereby reducing risk for producers, contractors and buyers.





## 4. Machine Shearing Instructor's Course

**Objective:**
To maintain a competent, standardised and professional instructor base capable of delivering consistent training nationwide.

An Instructors' Training Course was held at Grootfontein Agricultural College from 29 June to 3 July 2026. The course was facilitated by Steve Thompson and Paul Hick**,** both of whom are highly respected figures in the machine shearing industry in Australia and New Zealand.
They previously formed part of Shearing Industry Consultants, an organisation that provided machine shearing training in Western Australia under the management of Peter Black**.**

Fourteen of the programme's top machine shearers were identified and invited to participate in the training. Paul Hick led the shearing equipment component of the course. He trained participants in the preparation and maintenance of shearing combs to minimise skin cuts and improve wool entry during shearing. These techniques are expected to enhance shearing rhythm, improve wool quality, and increase the productivity of shearers.

**Impact:**
Progressive instructor development strengthens institutional memory, improves training consistency and ensures sufficient capacity to meet seasonal training demand.

## 5. Industry Engagement and Demonstrations

**Objective:**
To promote shearing and wool handling as viable careers and reinforce correct shearing practices.

### 5.1 Agricultural Shows

The relocation of the Royal Show, together with the recent outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease, resulted in the cancellation of the planned shearing demonstrations. The Royal Show has since been rescheduled as a five-day event, to be held from 7 to 11 October 2026, with shearing demonstrations scheduled for the weekend of 9 to 11 October 2026. In addition, the Royal Show organisers are planning to host another event during their traditional show period at the end of May 2027**.**

Due to the restrictions on the movement and exhibition of livestock, no live shearing or wool handling demonstrations were conducted at NAMPO Harvest Day. To ensure that visitors could still experience the shearing process, a large-screen television was installed on the shearing board to display recorded shearing demonstrations. While this provided a valuable alternative, it did not achieve the same level of engagement and educational impact as live demonstrations. It is anticipated that normal live demonstrations will resume in 2027.

Similarly, no shearing demonstrations were conducted at the Bloem Show, as the exhibition of sheep and cattle was prohibited because of the prevailing animal health restrictions.

### 5.2 Schools and Tertiary Institutions

Shearing demonstrations were presented at Potchefstroom Agricultural College from 22 to 24 July 2025**,** where 75 students attended. Further demonstrations were held at Grootfontein College of Agriculture in Middelburg on 5 and 6 August 2025**,** with 60 attendees. In addition to observing the demonstrations, students were given the opportunity to try their hand at shearing under the guidance and supervision of the NWGA shearing instructors, providing them with valuable practical exposure to the industry.

### 5.3 Central University of Technology and Peritum Agri Institute

Shearing demonstrations were presented at CUT on 4 September 2025 and Peritum Agri Institute on 21 May 2026. More than 75 students were exposed to practical shearing demonstrations and potential skills development routes in the shearing industry.

### 5.4 Schools

Shearing demonstrations at schools were planned to take place during February 2026 but were cancelled due to the outbreak of FMD in Edenburg district in the Free State.

**Impact:**

Demonstrations strengthen the future skills pipeline, improve awareness of animal welfare standards and promote shearing as a professional career. Top students from the tertiary institutions are recruited by wool brokers like BKB and OVK to work as sheep and wool technicians in the rural farming areas of South Africa. Others get involved in the shearing contracting businesses. The exposure that these young students get due to shearing demonstrations and participating in student shearing courses make them aware of the physical nature of shearing as a career and contribute to a better working relationship with shearing teams. Their exposure to shearing shed designs also contributes to a better working environment for our shearing teams.

## 6 Shearing and Wool Handling Competitions

**Objective:**

To use structured competitions as a tool for skills benchmarking, motivation and continuous improvement.

### 6.1 Regional championships were held in the following communal areas:

- Cofimvaba 23 hand shearers competed
- Maclear 33 hand shearers competed

### 6.2 Provincial championships were presented in:

- Middelburg 73 competitors
- Mooreesburg 62 competitors
- Prince Albert 38 competitors
- Philippolis 90 competitors
- Victoria West planned in February 2026, but cancelled due to FMD
- Riversdal planned on 21 February 2026
- Ermelo planned on 17 March 2026, but cancelled due to FMD
- Trompsburg planned on 17 April 2026, but cancelled due to FMD
- Steytlerville 39 competitors

### 6.3 National Shearing and Wool Handling Championships

National shearing and wool handling competition was planned to take place on 24 & 25 April 2026 at the Bloem show, but was cancelled due to FMD.

### 6.4 World Shearing and Wool Handling Championships

The machine shearers and wool handlers travelled to New Zealand early January to familiarise themselves with the different sheep breeds and wool types that would be encountered during the World Championships. As blade shearing activities are limited in New Zealand between January and March, it was decided that the blade shearers would remain in South Africa to continue their preparation and maintain their fitness levels. During the final three weeks of preparation, Samuel Nkomoyi, the NWGA Blade Shearing Instructor, worked closely with the blade shearers in South Africa to ensure they were adequately prepared for the World Championships.

The team met in Wellington, New Zealand on 23 February 2026 before travelling to Pahiatua. They were responsible for all aspects of the shearing operation, from preparing the shed, managing the catching pens, and organising the workflow, through to wool handling, pressing, and closing wool bales. The four shearers, two wool handlers, judges, and team manager worked together to fulfil all the required duties within the shearing shed, ensuring that the team was exposed to the complete shearing process and the standards expected in New Zealand.

The team used this period to adapt to the coarser wool types and plain body conformation of the Perendale and Romney sheep, which were the breeds to be shorn during the World Championships. This preparation was essential to ensure that the shearers were familiar with the characteristics of the sheep and could adjust their techniques accordingly.

The wool handlers**,** who were exposed to challenging conditions and a completely different working environment, performed commendably under difficult circumstances. Despite the pressure of competing at an international level, they adapted well and demonstrated resilience and commitment throughout the World Championships. Lungani Maqakalana achieved 18th place and 15th place in his two competition rounds, while Janco Botha placed 23rd and 20th respectively out of a field of 36 competitors**.**

In the machine shearing competition, Team South Africa showed encouraging progress, with Hans van Schalkwyk improving his ranking from 43rd to 30th place, while Dumisani Xhasa improved from 36th to 32nd place**.**
The South African blade shearers, Bonile Rabela and Teboho Nyatsa, demonstrated their exceptional skill and composure from the outset of the competition. Both shearers comfortably qualified for the semi-finals and finals of the New Zealand Open as well as the World Championships**.**



Teboho Nyatsa claimed victory in the New Zealand Open Championships, with Bonile Rabela securing third place. However, the current World Champion, Bonile Rabela, once again proved his ability to perform under pressure by winning the World Championships title**,** with his teammate Teboho Nyatsa finishing a close second. Their outstanding achievements are a testament to their dedication, skill, and commitment, and the team is extremely proud of their remarkable performance.

The team is looking forward to the 2029 World Championships, which will be hosted in Australia. This event will provide South African wool handlers and machine shearers with the opportunity to demonstrate their skills on Merino sheep and high-quality Merino wool for the first time in 24 years. The use of familiar sheep breeds and wool types is expected to provide a more favourable environment for our competitors and may create a sense of a home-ground advantage.

**Impact:**
Competitions reinforce quality standards, promote professionalism and contribute to risk mitigation through continuous skills improvement.



## 7. Conclusion and Way Forward

The 2025/26 financial year delivered strong outcomes across the Shearer Training Services programme, expanding the pool of skilled blade and machine shearers, improving technical standards and supporting employment opportunities within the shearing sector. The programme also strengthened instructor capacity and used competitions and industry engagement to promote professional standards and continuous skills improvement.

In 2026/27, the programme will build on these achievements with greater emphasis skills progression, retention and improved reporting. The Shearer Training team will coordinate the rollout of the Shearing App, while the newly appointed Shearer Training Admin Manager will focus on expanding the capabilities of the web-based system. Her primary focus will be to ensure better data collection and information management and correct and relevance of data inputs into the web-based system which will in turn help the Shearer Training manager to compile more informative reports on retention and shearer tracking.

Information from both the Shearer Instructor Team and Communal Production Advisors will be used to populate the web-based system to help the Shearing management team improve the tracking of trained shearers, their activity in the industry, skills progression and retention. This will provide WET with clearer and more reliable information on the performance and longer-term impact of the shearer training programme.

The programme will also strengthen employment linkages and progression opportunities for experienced shearers, including the development of contractor-level skills. Training planning will take greater account of seasonal, weather and animal-health constraints to improve delivery and continuity.

The overall focus for 2026/27 will therefore be to move beyond training numbers alone towards a better-managed and measurable shearing workforce, with improved information on skills development, retention, employment and progression within the industry.

Signed at Bloemfontein on **31 July 2026.**



IJ Klopper
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