

Selecting Rams for Breeding

Whether you are buying a ram or keeping a homebred ram for your flock there are many things to consider when choosing your next stock ram. These can be split into two main areas – the physical soundness which you can assess yourself and the ram's genetic merit that will be passed on to his offspring and can be assessed by the individual Estimated Breeding Values (EBVs).

Using Performance records to select rams

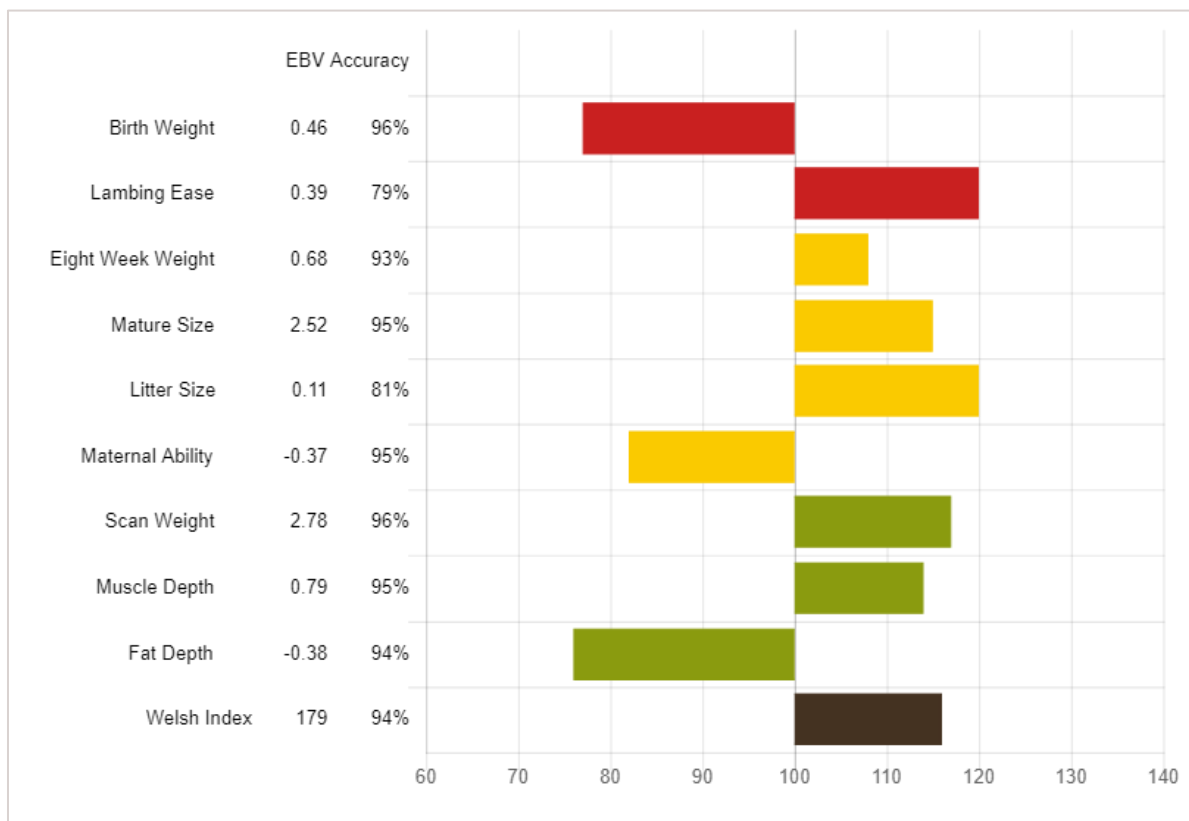
Before selecting rams for your flock, it's important to look at your production records to help identify what areas you would like to improve or develop and decide what your flock breeding requirements are.

Review your latest set of lambing records and numbers/weights of lambs produced. This information will help to inform the priorities for your flock.

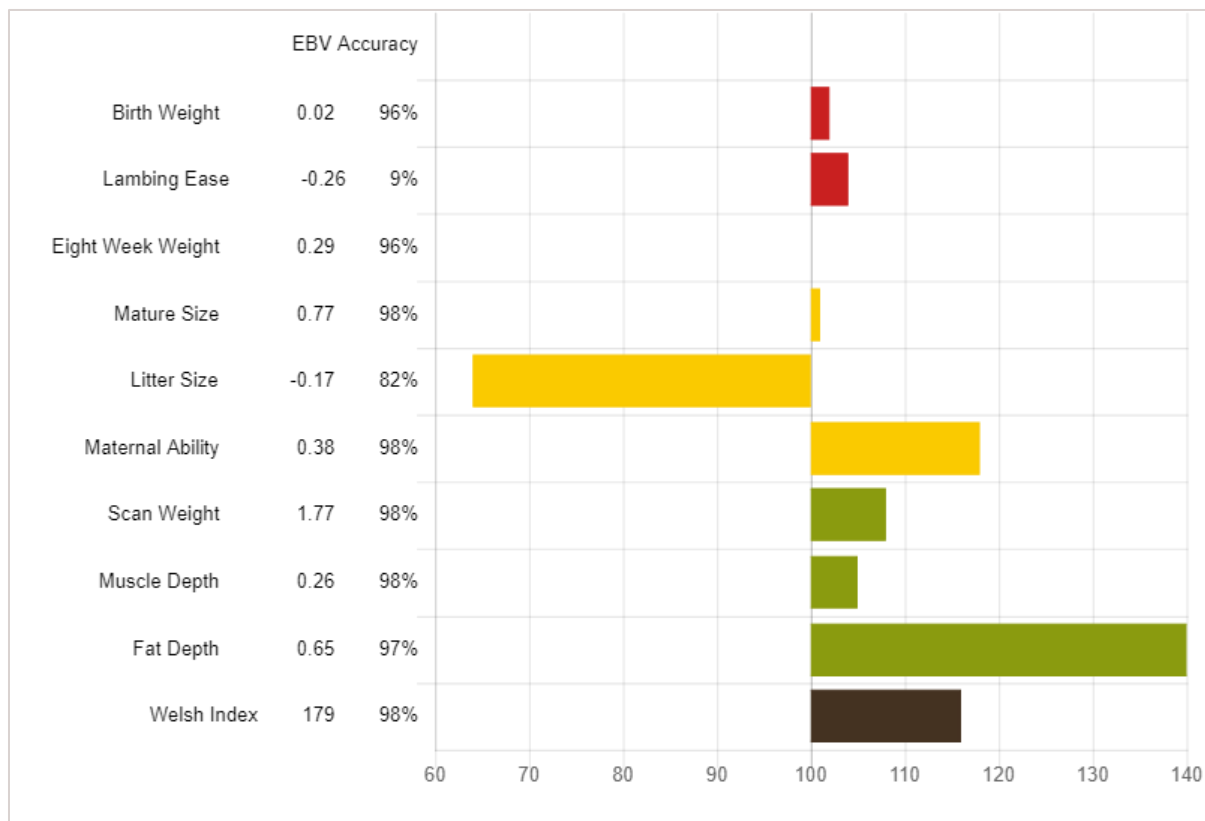
It is important to review the individual traits or EBVs to address your flock breeding objectives. Irrespective of the performance recording evaluators the calculations are carried out on a similar basis.

The EBV charts of the two rams below have an overall index of 179, but vary on their individual traits. By identifying the specific traits, you want to improve within the flock, you can select rams to that score highly in those EBVs to meet your breeding targets.

Example A:



Example B:



For example, if selecting for rams to produce more lambs at birth, litter size is an appropriate EBV. If selecting rams for faster growth rates, focus on 8-week weights and more importantly scan weight.

Physical soundness

It is vital that rams are physically sound - no performance record figures will compensate for a ram who is unable to work. The 5 Ts – teeth, testicles, toes, tone and treat - remain essential.

- **Teeth** – Teeth need to be short and square, in line with the grazing pad to maximise ability to graze. Especially in maternal and hill breeds where daughters are likely to be retained in the flock. Check for abscesses in the mouth and ensure no scarring or lumps and bumps along the jawline.
- **Toes** - Leg structure is crucial, especially around tupping season when rams will be more active. If a ram's mobility is compromised it will lead to fertility issues. When selecting rams, ensure that their legs and pasterns are correct. Check for any signs of lameness, and speak to the breeder about their lameness levels and ask them about their lameness control plan.
- **Testicles** - Testicles should be firm to touch, similar to a flexed bicep. They should be free to move within the scrotal sack, with no lumps or bumps present. Check for scarring or damage on the scrotal sack. Avoid rams with excessive wool on the scrotal sack, this can over heat the testes and cause fertility issues. Circumference will vary between breeds and age of ram, see below for a guide -

	Ram lamb	Yearling ram	Mature ram
Lowland	30cm	32cm	36cm
Hill	28cm	30cm	34cm

- **Tone** – The target Body Condition Score (BCS) of breeding rams should be 3.5 - 4.0. Avoid over fat rams, these could have poor libido and cause fertility issues. Try selecting rams that have been reared on forage-based diets as they won't melt away after working.
- **Treat** – The health status of rams is as important as the ewes, ask the breeder about any health accreditations. Do they screen the flock for iceberg diseases such as Johne's, Borders or Maedi Visna? Find out what vaccinations the ram has had and ensure you have and follow the bio-security plan for the farm. Ideally try to quarantine the ram for 4 weeks and consult with your vet on suitable quarantine treatments.

HCC's latest Ram Buyer's Guide is available to download from the website:

<https://meatpromotion.wales/en/industry-projects/red-meat-development-programme/rmdp-publications/hill-ram-scheme-publications>