

final report

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Prepared by: Kate Perkins
Kulu Pty Limited
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Intercollegiate meat judging competition: An industry winner

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Abstract

The Intercollegiate Meat Judging Competition (ICMJ) is a long standing institution in the red meat industry. Over the last 18 years, it has involved several thousand young Australians, many of whom have gone into the industry and some of whom are now industry leaders. This review shows that the ICMJ's four day residential format offers a unique opportunity to extend participants' knowledge of all aspects of the industry. It also brings companies together with a group of promising young people who already see the industry as an attractive career path and who are keen to find their way into it.

The study has also identified areas in which the competition is vulnerable, and opportunities for the future that may ensure the ICMJ's sustainability, and also extend and/or enhance its impact. The report provides information and ideas that could be taken into account as the ICMJ decides where to direct its limited resources, and to influence the decisions of industry members and industry bodies when deciding where to invest, and how to help the ICMJ take advantage of synergies with other programs without undermining the ICMJ's autonomy and the commitment of its volunteers.

Executive Summary

The Intercollegiate Meat Judging Competition (ICMJ) was founded in 1990, as a not-for-profit incorporated body with the aim of providing:

‘an opportunity for students to learn and grow to build a pool of intelligent young meat industry representatives, fired with enthusiasm, who will give the Australian meat industry the expertise and drive to compete in the meat quality world of the future through programs such as Meat Standards Australia’. (ICMJ 2008)

To date, the competition has involved over 1300 young people from 21 institutions, with up to 80 participants per year. Each year, the top ten are involved in an intensive training and industry orientation program in Brisbane hosted by Meat Standards Australia (MSA), and the top five students are selected to compete in the National Western competition at Greeley, Colorado in the United States. The Australian ICMJ has sent 82 students to the US since 1994. Many of those who compete in the US subsequently coach ICMJ teams and/or put themselves forward for election to the volunteer committee. For many years, the competition took place over 1 day, but it has changed dramatically since 2006, when it became a four day residential event, offering training and industry speakers and intensive meat judging training prior to the competition itself.

While the ICMJ is well established, and present indications are that it will continue for many years to come, the Committee was interested in extending its impact further, and considered it timely to undertake an independent evaluation of the program’s current strengths, identify ideas that might be pursued and risks that may need to be addressed. The ICMJ was also interested in ways of collecting ‘hard’ evidence of the program’s impact. At the same time, sponsors MLA and AMPC were exploring the potential for greater synergies between a range of industry sponsored programs with similar aims, including the ICMJ. While there was no suggestion that the independence and autonomy of the association be challenged, one aim of the review was to explore potential links and consider how these might add value to the experience of ICMJ participants, contribute to the long term sustainability of the competition and collectively increase the number of young people who enter the industry.

The review found clear evidence that the ICMJ is achieving many of its objectives, and while data on the career destinations of the majority of participants is not available, there is evidence that many have indeed gone into the industry. However, this may not be simply because they participated in the ICMJ. The study found that although some people had changed career direction as a direct result of their involvement, for the majority, participation is more likely to confirm, revitalise or redirect an existing interest.

The competition acts as a magnet for a group of young people who are prime candidates for a career in the red meat industry. They are predisposed towards the industry, and about to make decisions about their careers. Most have some exposure to a part of the industry, most are from regional areas and keen to pursue careers away from the city and many are nearing the completion of their courses, and focused on getting a job. They are actively looking for assistance on how to make contact with employers. From an industry investment perspective, the program offers peak bodies and companies access to a highly motivated group of potential employees, who have self-selected and are gathered in one place at one time. In 2008, the pre-competition program went some distance towards capitalising on this, but as the committee recognises, even more could be done.

In planning for the future, there are many strengths upon which the ICMJ can build, including:

- The knowledge, passion, enthusiasm and input of its volunteers, including committee members and coaches
- The commitment of team members who go to the US which leads them to remain involved with the competition and ensures a supply of experienced coaches and dedicated young committee members
- The self-selecting nature of the participant cohort- these are young people who already know something about the industry, are interested in extending their knowledge and are genuinely interested in the red meat industry as a career.
- The expanded residential format which offers a range of new opportunities to add value for all participants- students, companies and industry bodies
- The often life changing experiences offered to the top 10 and top 5 in the Brisbane training week and on the US trip
- The wide distribution of alumni throughout the industry with numbers that may be approaching a critical mass
- The competition's international links, including the involvement of two international teams in the Australian competition
- The organisation's commitment to continuous improvement

Critical issues to be taken into account include:

- The current size of the competition, and factors that may undermine the continuing participation of some institutions
- Availability of suitable facilities for training, and for the competition itself
- The continuing availability of knowledgeable, skilled and committed volunteers with the time to focus on both the maintenance and development aspects of the competition
- The need to maintain or increase the support of current sponsors and/or extend the sponsorship pool
- The potential to extend benefits for participants and the industry by exploiting synergies with other groups and programs without compromising ICMJ autonomy.

Before deciding on specific options, the Committee will need to agree on whether to pursue a strategy of consolidation or of growth. Within either type of strategy, the coaching role is critical and offers scope for development, the idea of the coaching clinic in particular being strongly supported by those coaches interviewed. Greater formal synergies with other industry programs should also be vigorously pursued, but this development work may put increasing strains on a volunteer group that is already stretched to maintain current offerings. New approaches to the day to day management and development roles may be required in order to exploit opportunities to educate young people about the industry, and attract them to all parts of the supply chain.

Recommendations

- Decide on a growth or consolidation strategy and select options accordingly
- Develop the coaching role through strategies such as coaching clinics
- Develop self perpetuating teams by changing the rules regarding competing only once
- Develop and actively implement industry promotional strategies
- Identify what would motivate ICMJ participants to visit the ICMJ website (or a website connected to the Young Leaders' program) and to update their contact details over time
- Link ICMJ participants and coaches into the emerging MLA/AMPC Young Leaders' programs as an integral part of the program

- Explore ways of contributing to a shared data base maintained centrally using a range of contact details nominated by young people
- Seek financial support from an external to appoint a development officer to project manage the implementation of new initiatives intended to maximize the numbers of ICMJ participants entering the industry directly through companies or as part of the leadership programs

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1 Background

1.1 The context

The Intercollegiate Meat Judging Competition (ICMJ) was founded in 1990, with the aim of providing:

‘an opportunity for students to learn and grow to build a pool of intelligent young meat industry representatives, fired with enthusiasm, who will give the Australian meat industry the expertise and drive to compete in the meat quality world of the future through programs such as Meat Standards Australia’.

The competition attracts between 60 and 80 young people each year. Over the last 18 years, over 1300 young people from 21 tertiary institutions have participated, with the top ten winners from the main competition being involved in an intensive training and industry orientation program in Brisbane hosted by Meat Standards Australia (MSA). The top five students from this week are selected to compete in the National Western competition at Greeley, Colorado in the United States. The Australian ICMJ has sent 82 students to the US since 1994.

The Association has received sponsorship for the competition from various sources over the years, with MLA and AMPC currently providing a total of \$30,000.

While the ICMJ is well established, and present indications are that it will continue for many years to come, there are always potential threats to the longevity of any volunteer organisation, so the committee considered it timely to undertake an independent evaluation of the program’s current strengths and risks and to identify new ideas and opportunities that might be pursued. A key aspect of the ICMJ’s mission is to encourage young people into the meat industry. However, although there is anecdotal evidence to suggest that it has a positive impact in this regard, the committee was also keen to discover what ‘hard’ evidence was available and to consider ways of gathering this more effectively in the future. Such information was also of interest to sponsors such as MLA and AMPC.

At the same time, MLA and AMPC were also looking for ways of achieving greater synergies between a range of industry sponsored programs with similar aims, including the ICMJ. While there was no suggestion that the independence and autonomy of the ICMJ be challenged, one aim of the review was to explore potential links with other programs and consider how these might add value to the experience of ICMJ participants, contribute to the long term sustainability of the competition and collectively increase the number of young people who enter the industry.

1.2 Project Objectives

- To identify current strengths, weaknesses and factors contributing to or threatening ICMJ sustainability
- To identify impacts of the ICMJ over time, and where possible to measure these against the competition’s stated mission and goals
- To identify options for the future
- To develop ideas for a system for on-going monitoring and evaluation
- To consider possible synergies with other industry programs

1.3 Methodology

1.3.1 Design factors

In designing the project methodology, the following points were taken into account:

- Although it was important to provide an independent perspective where required, the process was highly facilitative and consultative, involving the Chair and key committee members from the outset
- There was a perception that the competition had invested a lot in its winners but had not exploited the potential associated with other participants. Therefore, efforts were made to gain insights into the impact on those who did not get to Brisbane or the US as well as those who did, and to consider opportunities to add value for the full cohort of participants
- While the review aimed to identify participants' career destinations there was very limited information available to provide evidence of measurable impacts, so greater emphasis was placed on ways of collecting data in the future.
- Although the program had been running for 18 years, the competition format changed markedly in 2006. In planning for the future, it was decided that the experiences and ideas of participants since that time were most relevant. The young people involved were of a similar generation and the institutions involved were those whose support would be most important, at least in the near future.

1.3.2 Process

The project involved the following stages:

- Interviews with key stakeholders from ICMJ, MLA and AMPC to establish agreed aims
- Desk top review of available documentation and identification and analysis of existing data
- Attendance at the Armidale meeting in June 2008
 - Observation of the program in action
 - Interviews with individual participants, coaches, lecturers and committee members
 - Conduct of feedback workshops with coaches and student participants
 - Attendance at Coaches' debriefing meeting
- Analysis of student resumes 2007, 2008
- Follow up interviews with selected coaches, Committee members, industry and company sponsors
- Email surveys to 2007 participants and 2008 coaches
- Development of a range of options for discussion
- Preparation of draft report for feedback
- Submission of final report

1.3.3. Scope

The major focus of the review was on the impact of the competition on participants in terms of the achievement of the ICMJ objectives, and on the strategic aspects of the competition rather than on the conduct of the competition itself. Therefore, while some of those interviewed provided comments on the detail of program content and on specific operational issues these have only been included in the report where they appear to have some bearing on strategic decision making.

1.3.4. Acknowledgements

The author wishes to thank all those who have provided input into this report, They have given freely of their time, and provided a wealth of ideas for the on-going development of the ICMJ. I would particularly wish to thank John Carter, founder and Chair of the ICMJ, Rebecca Austin, Sarah Strachan, Jason Strong and Alix McFarlane.

2 A snapshot of the ICMJ

This section provides an overview of the competition structure and participation, incorporating those details considered most relevant to the subsequent discussion.

2.1 A brief history

Intercollegiate Meat Judging was established by a group of Meat Science professors in the USA in 1927 and since then the US competition has grown to involve students from most of the country's 60 Land Grant Colleges. Each year, their teams travel all over the US to compete. While on his 1983 Churchill Fellowship in Meat Marketing, John Carter (current Australian ICMJ president) realised the enormous contribution that the program made to the US meat industry, and established the Australian Intercollegiate Meat Judging Competition in 1990, after he became Chairman of the NSW Meat Industry Authority. Four years later, the first Australian team competed in the US. Since 1994, the ICMJ has sent 82 Australian students to compete in the National Western ICMJ contest at Greeley, Colorado. Their tour includes an intensive two week tour of abattoirs and University meat science facilities where team members judge the quality and yield of beef, lamb and pork carcasses. The Australian competition became international in 2006, when a Japanese team founded by a former ICMJ participant and US team member joined the Australian competition, and the following year the first US team competed in Australia. (ICMJ, 2008).

1990	The first contest held at Glenmore Meats, Glebe, Sydney
1993	The competition held at Rockdale Beef
1994	1st team competes in the US at the National Western ICMJ contest in Greeley, Colorado
1997	Korea/Japan trip introduced
2000	The competition held at Cargill Wagga Wagga
2006	Japanese team joins the competition
2001	Schools competition developed
2006	Introduction of 2.5 day workshop prior to the competition.
2007	A US University (University of Illinois) competes in the competition for the first time.

Table 2.1 Australian ICMJ time line (ICMJ 2008)

The competition is run by the Australian Intercollegiate Meat Judging Association Inc, a not-for profit organisation administered by a committee of twelve. The Committee has been chaired since its inception by the ICMJ's founder, John Carter. This position and two executive positions are elected at the ICMJ AGM. While there is a mix of age groups represented on the committee, most members are former ICMJ participants and are in their mid to late twenties.

Over the last 18 years, nearly 1400 young people from all over Australia have learnt about meat education through their training for, and participation in, the competition. Although participating institutions have changed over time, the ICMJ has a solid track record in attracting between 60 and 80 participants per year. Apart from a dip several years ago, numbers in most years have been steady, and are currently near the maximum that can be catered for at the Armidale venue.

Cargills makes its Tamworth chillers and a selection of carcasses available for the Saturday competition. Until 2006, the competition was a one day event, but in response to a plateau in numbers, it expanded to incorporate 2.5 days of presentations and training workshops prior to

the competition itself. It was hoped that this would help to address a range of issues that had been identified, including difficulty in students accessing abattoirs, dwindling coach support and a lack of time to expose students to the opportunities available in the meat and livestock industry. It also provided an opportunity to provide greater impact for sponsors. (ICMJ MLA Report 2006).

A secondary schools' competition is held in November. Since 2007, the top five school students have been invited to participate in the senior competition in the following year (but are not eligible for the US team).

MLA has been the major sponsor for the last 8 years, and currently contributes \$55,000 annually, which is used largely to support the US trip. AMPC have sponsored the competition for the last 4 years. Their sponsorship is matched by MLA to make a total of \$30,000, and this covers most of the Armidale workshop costs, along with student entry fees of approximately \$180. The industry sponsorship makes it possible to keep student fees at a manageable level, and without this support, it is unlikely that many students would be able to attend the competition. Presenters and participants are responsible for covering their own travel and other costs.

2.2 The competition

2.2.1 Eligibility

The competition is open to students enrolled in a recognised college or university and to apprentices still involved in a trade certificate course, or who have completed such a course within 2 years of the competition date and who are involved in a post trade certificate course. A college may enter one or more teams with a minimum of four members, but if a college cannot make up a full team, students may still compete for individual prizes. Students may only enter one competition. However, a team may nominate one observer who is able to participate in the competition for experience only, and compete in a subsequent year. (ICMJ 2008)

2.2.2 Required knowledge and skills

The Australian ICMJ Operations Handbook (ICMJ 2008) identifies the range of skills seen as the requirements of a proficient meat judge and assessed as part of the competition. These include the ability to:

- identify the 5 beef wholesale (primal) cuts
- effectively evaluate beef, lamb and pork carcasses
- recognise the importance of different markets and interpret their specifications
- apply appropriate weighting for trimness, muscling and quality for each class

It is also necessary to be able to:

- apply a fast, accurate and concise method for taking notes
- report observations accurately in appropriate industry terminology and with correct spelling
- demonstrate oral and written communication skills with a high degree of accuracy

2.2.3 Pre-competition training

Each team has a coach who is usually, but not always, a former ICMJ participant. The majority of coaches have been members of an Australian ICMJ team that has competed in the USA. Most, but not all, are in their final year of university or completing post-graduate studies. In 2008, however, two of UQ's three coaches were former participants who were now working in the red meat industry, and Tocal was coached by the college farm manager, who had no background in meat judging, but took on the role 'because no-one else was interested... and I thought it was a great opportunity for the students'.

To supplement the knowledge of the coach (and of the college based lecturer where available), the ICMJ makes available:

- an Operations Handbook and a detailed training manual
- on-line resources, such as trial classes with photographs of carcasses and training notes (a 2008 innovation with the advent of the new website)
- access to Committee members who are experienced meat judges themselves

2.2.4 Competition week structure and focus

For the past 3 years, the competition has been held at the University of New England, Armidale over approximately 4 days. (See Box 2.1). Participants are accommodated at Duval College and lectures and training are held in UNE's Wright Lecture Theatre and chillers. The size of the chillers (and to a lesser extent of lecture theatres convenient to them) places limitations on the numbers of participants who can be involved at any one time.

The Armidale Meet

Tuesday night: Teams arrive. Dinner.

Wednesday/Thursday: Pre-competition program
(approximately 9 hours per day with breaks)

Friday: The formal competition begins

Saturday: Competition day

5am start. Travel to Cargills, Tamworth for major part of the competition
return to Armidale for a formal dinner and presentations to prize winners.

Sunday morning: The ICMJ AGM.

Participants are welcome to attend, and as members of the ICMJ they may vote for the new Committee (but most choose to head home around that time).

Box 2.1. Overview of Armidale program

Drawing on the extensive feedback that is collected each year from participants and coaches, the content and emphasis of the preparatory days has been adjusted each year. In 2008, the Armidale meet incorporated a mix of presentations and practical training. While almost half of the 2 days was devoted to competition-related meat judging training, nearly 30% focused on an overview of the Australian meat industry and insights into its diverse sectors. Nearly 12% focused specifically on career opportunities within the industry, including presentations by HR managers and former ICMJ competitors who were now working in the industry. MLA's undergraduate and graduate programs were also outlined. (See Table 2.1)

There was no 'free' time on Wednesday and Thursday, but some time was available on Friday afternoon. Socialising between teams was encouraged, with drinks and a progressive dinner on the first night providing an opportunity to facilitate introductions and generally break the ice, and a very successful trivia night on Wednesday consolidating connections between participants.

Category	Focus areas	Overall time spent (approx)	% of time
About ICMJ	History Aims	0.75 hours	5%
Australian meat industry	Overview – stats, markets, trends Role of MLA Beef feed lotting industry Beef/sheep/pork processing sectors Food safety Product branding Selling into export markets An industry perspective	4.25 hours	28.4%
International meat industry	Japanese industry US industry & ICMJ comp	1 hour	6.6%
Animal science	Animal nutrition	0.5 hour	3.3%
Meat industry opportunities	MLA professional development program Career opportunities	1.75 hour	11.6%
Competition Training	Evaluating beef cuts Identifying beef primal & retail cuts Evaluating lamb/pork carcasses MSA	6.75 hours	45%
		15 hours	99%

Table 2.2. The 2008 program emphasis

2.2.5 Selecting the winners

Each year, the top fifteen students in the competition compete in an oral results competition on the same day as the contest. Ten are chosen to participate in a week's intensive training in Brisbane later in the year. This training is designed to:

- allow the most promising students an in-depth insight into the industry
- encourage the leading students to consider a career in the meat industry through show casing the strengths and challenges of the industry
- ensure the best combination of students is selected for the US team.

Those who go to Brisbane are hosted by Meat Standards Australia (MSA). Their week includes:

- Industry presentations
- Site visits (in 2007, sites included Australian Country Choice, Killarney Abattoir and John Dee at Warwick)
- MSA on-site training
- Presentations on the MSA and USDA grading systems¹

The top five students from this week are then selected and coached to participate in the US competition. (See Appendix 2 for details of the selection rules). The Australian team competes at the national Western Competition in Denver in January and spends the two weeks prior to this in training for the competition at a variety of locations. Each competitor is also required to identify and undertake a specific project relevant to the US meat industry and of potential value to the

¹ While those in the Brisbane group and the US team learn about the US grading system, it is important to note that those competing in the Australian ICMJ competition learn about the MSA grading system only.

Australian meat industry. These are submitted to MLA. Some reports have been published or publicised through the ABA journal and the Rural Press.

In 2007, team participants' reports covered:

- The contrasts between beef cattle production in Australia and the USA
- A comparison of the USDA and MSA meat grading systems.
- Analysis of the economics of beef production in the US compared to that in Australia with regards to feeder prices, retail prices, export prices
- A comparison of the role of the sheep meat industry in USA and Australia with regards to product consumption, marketing, animal production and consumer expectations.”
- Beef marketing (Who markets beef best? USA vs Australia)

Team members who attend the ICMJ competition the following year also give a presentation about their experience.

2.3 Participants

2.3.1 Participant profile

A study of the 2007 and 2008 cohorts shows that almost all participants were university undergraduates studying in fields associated with agriculture and animal science. (See Table 2.2)

Qualification focus	Approximate percentage
Agricultural/rural science	30%
Bio/animal science degree	28%
Agri-business	24%
Veterinary science	13%
Other (Including Certificate III)	6%

Table 2.3. ICMJ Participants 2007: fields of study

A study of student resumes shows that the vast majority of participants were country born and bred. Many had occupied leadership positions at school and university, and had won scholarships during their school and university careers. Most had prior experience of the meat industry, and, given their backgrounds and courses of study, this tended to be at the 'front end' of the supply chain. They were likely to have studied agriculture at school (but seldom meat science subjects at either school or university), and many had been involved in live meat/wool judging, through farm, breeding society and/or school connections. Most had also had part time work in the industry (e.g. pastoral, feed lotting, working in the meat auction yards, meat processing).

2.3.2 Why do they come?

A detailed study was made of the 2008 cohort. When interviewed at the Armidale meet, the majority reported that they came for the experience, the opportunity to learn about the industry and, more specifically, about career opportunities in the industry. They also felt it would offer them general learning and networking opportunities. (Not surprisingly, a number of the overseas participants also said they wanted a trip to Australia!)

Although the Australian competitors would have welcomed a US trip, a significant percentage of participants were just as keen to make it to Brisbane. They had heard about the industry site

visits and training program and felt it would be a real prize. They were particularly enthusiastic about the opportunity the Brisbane training offered to meet company and MLA personnel, as they could see that this could provide valuable career pathways.

2.4 Participating institutions

2.4.1 Participation profile

Most participants come from a small group of Australian tertiary institutions (referred to collectively in this report as 'colleges'). Some colleges have had a long-standing affiliation with the competition, while others are relatively new. For some years, almost all competing institutions have been universities, but in fact when the competition began, most were agricultural colleges and TAFEs. (See Table 2.3 for an overview of college participation 2006-2008)

	2006	2007	2008
Number of colleges	8	12	9
Number of participants	75	91	74

Table 2.4. College participation 2006-2008

There were some changes in college participation. In 2007, Murdoch, University and the US team joined the competition. Two students from Melbourne University also competed but they entered independently of the university, which has never had a team in the competition. In 2008, Marcus Oldham and Charles Sturt (Orange) did not field teams.

Numbers of students per college fluctuated (sometimes markedly) between 2006 and 2008.

- In 2006, UNE had 26 participants. In 2007, this dropped to 17, and in 2008 to 11.
- In 2006, Sydney University had 13 participants. In 2007 this dropped to 7, but rose to 10 in 2011.
- In 2006, UQ had 14 participants. In 2007 there was only one, with 3 in 2008.
- In 2006, Charles Sturt Wagga had 10 participants. In 2007 this dropped to 5, but numbers rose to 14 in 2008.
- In 2006, Marcus Oldham had 1 participant. In 2007 this rose to 15. Marcus Oldham did not compete in 2008.

2.4.2 College support and interest

There are marked differences in the degree of official interest and support provided by each college.

- Only Sydney University has incorporated the competition into a course for credit towards a degree. Several others recognise participation as part of the work experience component of a course, but others do not recognise it as part of course work at all.
- Several colleges have staff members who are passionate about the competition. They promote it, seek sponsorship from the University and industry members, provide advice about the competition itself and attend the competition week. However, at other institutions, momentum is maintained largely by former participants who have taken on the coaching role.
- Some universities cover all competition costs, some make a contribution towards fees, travel and accommodation, and others provide no financial or in kind support at all.

2.4.3 Building college teams

There are marked differences in the ways in which teams are formed and trained e.g.

- The University of New England (UNE), the only participating university with a large meat science focus, has a long standing association with the ICMJ. Many students in Agriculture-related disciplines expect to compete at some stage of their degree – usually in their second year. For the last 3 years, the competition has been held at the Armidale campus so there are no travel expenses involved to act as a deterrent. (However, even so, numbers have fallen significantly).
- The University of Sydney offers the competition as a formal course elective in 4th year. In 2008, 15 students applied. Four subsequently dropped out due to other commitments or because they could not afford the fees, which are not covered by the university or by sponsorship.
- While the University of Queensland's Cattlemen's Club had traditionally fielded an ICMJ team, interest had waned, but several former US team members (two of whom were UQ graduates) felt the competition was 'too good to let go', so they promoted it. They found it a 'battle to get the lecturers interested' but were still able to attract 16 students who were keen to learn more about the industry and make industry contacts. However, 13 subsequently dropped out due to competing study commitments, the amount of time required for ICMJ training, and/or the 6 am training times.
- Murdoch University currently draws all of its team members from the Veterinary Science field.

While there were marked differences across colleges, a common factor was the presence of a committed lecturer and/or a passionate coach prepared to promote the competition. This appears to be the critical factor in ensuring sustainability from one year to the next.

Although the competition occasionally attracts someone from a non-agricultural/animal science background, this is rare. Besides the fact that there is a clear association between the competition and study in these fields, this self-perpetuating situation is a reflection of the very personal way in which the competition is promoted.

Committed lecturers and coaches operate without high level support from the university itself, and tend to focus their promotional efforts within their own faculties, and on their own campuses. They use a range of methods to promote the competition, including announcements at lectures, distribution of flyers and ads in faculty newsletters. However, the most effective means of attracting participants each year appears to be the personal invitation. Many of the students interviewed reported that they made their final decision based on a personal approach from a coach or lecturer. (In fact being singled out by a lecturer who suggested they would find the ICMJ interesting and useful prompted two Melbourne University students to take a chance and attend the ICMJ in 2007, despite their lack of a coach or any pre-training).

No colleges appear to place any major importance on having a winning team or on having a student selected for the US competition. There was a strong message from 2008 participants regarding the need to promote the competition and to raise university interest at higher decision making levels.

Comments included:

- *We really need the unis to advertise early in the year so we can plan and book in.*
- *We had to really find information, Uni didn't present it very well- only found it by chance!*
- *Support of the unis is an issue*
- *The comp needs more advertising- needs more people- needs extra Unis*
- *We need to get the comp information out there*
- *We need more promotion to maintain interest and grow the business*

2.5 Training

In 2008, there was a marked diversity in the nature and extent of training across colleges.

Many participants met regularly to train, with and without their coaches, and put in hours of study between training sessions. However, a minority had little formal pre-competition training. (One team in 2008 relied on the handbook alone). Some teams met regularly for 4 months prior to the competition in July. Others did not begin serious training until April, when the first major university assignment period was over. Those who met more often were able to invest time in training for presentation of oral reasons, an important selection criterion for those who make it into the final 15, but other coaches reported finding it difficult to cover the meat judging content, let alone spend time on public speaking.

A major issue for most teams was organising access to carcasses. Some were able to arrange visits to butchers, supermarkets and/or meat processors, These teams usually met very early in the morning, and possibly on weekends, to fit in with the down time of the business providing them with access. Two teams had virtually no exposure to carcasses before the competition, relied almost entirely on the handbook and the web site.

2.6 Coaching

15-20% of participants from each year elect to maintain their connection with the competition, and offer their services as coaches and/or sit on the ICMJ committee. The majority have been members of the US team or of the Brisbane ten, but this is not always the case.

They do not have any formal training for the coaching role, but are uniformly committed to maintaining the competition. The reasons they gave for taking on the role included:

- Enjoyed the experience myself and wanted to ensure future students could participate in the competition.
- Interest was waning (at our uni) but I thought the comp was 'too good to let go' –you have so many opportunities, make so many connections (companies, people, MLA, US contacts) and there's no way to make these contacts otherwise. (The ICMJ) is second to none. We needed to keep the flame burning!
- I'm coaching this year because I have a lot of respect for the comp and see its value. It gives a bigger picture of the industry you can't get anywhere else. (Certainly not from Uni!) This is really important because once they're in the industry, people just focus on the part they're in. (for example, breeders can't imagine steak on a plate). I also wanted to give coaching a go, to add to my life experiences!

Most coaches are volunteers. The University of Sydney provides a paid coaching position, which can be seen as the equivalent of supplying a tutor, given that meat judging is a course elective. Each year there are likely to be several coaches who participated in the same US team, so there

is a strong sense of camaraderie within the group, even though they want their own teams to win!

Each year, the coaches meet with committee members while the Saturday competition is proceeding to review the event and make suggestions for changes. Most of these have been incorporated in subsequent years.

2.7 Industry support and sponsorship

The Association has received sponsorship for the competition from various sources over the years, with MLA and AMPC providing the bulk of current funding.

Most teams have also organised some type of industry sponsorship, although again, there are marked differences in the nature and extent, with some companies providing funding to cover aspects of participation costs, others team jackets and others access to carcasses/chiller time.

At least two companies have released employees who are involved as coaches and committee members so that they can attend the competition week in Armidale. Companies presenting during the Armidale week also cover the travel costs of their representatives.

Sponsorship companies in the past two years include:

- Meat producers and processors such as Cargills, Harvey Beef, Angus Beef, Ralphs, Picton Abattoir, Beak and Johnson, Australian Agricultural Company, Australian Country Choice, JBS Swift.
- Local butcher shops
- Local supermarkets, such as IGA and Woolworths.

Although there has not been a consistent ICMJ policy on the nature of follow up, in the main, teams have provided their own sponsors with reports on the activity and outcomes. Some have also provided plaques and certificates. One coach observed that he had not provided detailed feedback to the sponsoring company in the first year of his coaching, but had learned a hard lesson, as this had caused problems when it came time to approach the company for funds in the following year.

3 Measuring impact

The following section considers the impact of the competition against its own objectives as outlined in Box 3.1.

The objective of the Intercollegiate Meat Judging Competition is to provide an opportunity for students to learn and to build the pool of intelligent young meat industry representatives, fired with enthusiasm who will give the Australian meat industry the expertise and drive to compete in the meat quality world of the future.

This is done through:

- Exposing students to the fundamentals of meat quality education.
- Demonstrating to students how and why markets perceive meat quality differently and highlighting the various carcass specifications required by these markets.
- Exposing students to different systems of meat identification and classification
- Providing training and a non-threatening competitive environment to assist students develop confidence and communication skills.
- Providing an opportunity for students to acquire and apply knowledge of practical aspects of meat science.
- Raising students' awareness of career opportunities that exist in the meat industry.
- Exposing students to the requirements of the end-user (consumer)
- Exposing student to new technologies within the meat industry.

Box 3.1. ICMJ Objectives (ICMJ 2008)

3.1 How well does the competition meet its own goals?

3.1.1 Meat education

ICMJ Objectives

Exposure to the fundamentals of meat education

An opportunity for students to acquire and apply knowledge of practical aspects of meat science

Exposure to different systems of meat identification and classification

□ Participants' involvement goes beyond 'exposure'. The competition introduces them to market perceptions of meat quality, carcass specifications required by different markets and different systems of meat identification and classification, while educating them in the standards developed by Meat Standards Australia.

Some students spend hundreds of hours preparing for the competition. The breadth and depth of the knowledge they gain can be measured by their competition results, and the competencies they demonstrate align with those within some industry Certificate III qualifications.

Each year, a small cohort receives an additional week's training, and those selected for the US team continue to train. Those who attend the Brisbane selection week report that their understanding increases even further, and those who compete in the US also gain immeasurably

in general industry knowledge and in honing their judging skills. Some also report that learning the USDA system actually makes it easier to appreciate the MSA system. Many of this group in particular go on to coach a team in subsequent years, and may nominate for the committee. Not all are from the top 10, but they have a similar passion for the role. Coaches report that they develop a much greater understanding of the subject because they take on this teaching role.

A significant number of those interviewed for this study commented that they would never have been able to get this practical experience any other way. Few universities and agricultural colleges offer meat science courses, and they felt that the competition offered them a genuine opportunity to evaluate real carcasses. Indeed, it was one of the things that most participants identified as a highlight. Their comments included:

- *Learnt necessary technical information.*
- *Understand what makes a good carcass through age, marbling, quality, yield*
- *Understand where meat cuts come from*
- *Know that a well marbled steak will eat better than a lean steak*
- *I have a better idea of the importance that science has in transforming rural industries.*

Students from Tocal singled out the presentations on the meat industry and the Animal Nutrition presentation, as this gave them some of the theoretical background they did not get from their courses. Although they were getting a lot of practical experience as part of their courses they felt they were missing out on the Big Picture. One of the 2007 Tocal participants reported that the ICMJ was, 'One of the most useful courses I have ever done. I took away a lot of valuable information, I never know when I might need it'. She also reported giving her ICMJ handbook to one of her friends to read.

3.1.2 Market knowledge

ICMJ Objectives

Demonstrating to students how and why markets perceive meat quality differently and highlighting the various carcass specifications required by these markets.
Exposing students to the requirements of the end-user (consumer)

Given the competition's focus on recognition of cuts, pricing and appreciation of the factors that contribute to eating quality, participants cannot help but develop their market knowledge. Marketing issues were also covered as part of the 2008 program, and some students specifically identified 'marketing and brand insight' as a strength of what they had learned. Others commented:

- *I now know what leads to eating quality, necessary information for working in the meat industry*
- *Showed what people are looking for*
- *Assists in developing a better product for client*
- *Can use training to provide a better product*

Many students singled out the presentation by the CEO of JB Swift because it provided insights into the global market place, and the presentation on the Japanese industry by Professor Nishimura, which provided insights into one of Australia's key export markets.

- *The international perspective is good- it's different to the Aussie point of view*
- *Ian Marr's speech and presentation was very good and informing.*

3.1.3 Assisting students to develop confidence and communication skills.

The competition builds the ability of participants to make judgements backed by sound reasoning, providing information and reasoning processes as scaffolding. This helps competitors build their confidence in their judgements. Participants identified a range of skills areas as positive outcomes of their participation including Communication skills, note taking skills and Critical thinking and evaluating. In interviews, many highlighted the growth in their self confidence, and one commented, 'It broadens your mind'.

The ability to present confidently is a criterion for selection of the final ten and the US team, but it is also part and parcel of the whole competition Public speaking is an important life skill that can only be learned through practice and observation. The competition provides participants with opportunities to present to small and large groups, and they also experience high (and not so high) impact presentation skills being modelled throughout the 4 days. In 2008, they were asked to provide constructive feedback on what they observed. Several participants commented on the positive impression made by the final fifteen, and singled out the impressive debut by one of the Schools competitors.

The down side of focusing on a range of skills and attitudes as well as judging knowledge is that it opens up issues of subjectivity and favouritism. One potentially negative finding of the review was the existence of a perception that the selection of the top 10 and top 5 was biased towards a certain type of person, or against people pursuing certain professions. Although this was not a majority view, it was voiced by several different people in different year groups, and connected to the competition in diverse ways. It appears to have emerged partly in response to the fact that, on several occasions, the top scoring students had not been selected for either the top ten or the top five. Whatever its basis in reality, selection rules and their application is an area that should be revisited in order to avoid this becoming a serious issue.

3.1.4 Raising students' awareness of career opportunities that exist in the meat industry.

Prior to the 2008 competition, participants ranked their interest in aspects of the meat industry as part of their pre-competition applications. During the competition week, several kinds of feedback were obtained from students using interviews, small group facilitated process and analysis of individual feedback sheets.

Prior to the Armidale meet, the majority identified meat production as their main interest. By the end, there were strong positive about how broadening the experience had been.

Increasing understanding of the Industry

Student observations emphasised the importance they placed on developing their understanding of the industry:

- *I got a new perspective on the industry*
- *I gained new insights into the industry*
- *It was important to see the big picture*
- *Insight/provide background for people with little background of industry*
- *I now have greater understanding of all areas of the industry from growers to small goods*
- *Learning about benefits/weaknesses of the industry and what they are doing about it*
- *Differences between the Australian, Japanese and US industries*

- *New opinions, new industry perspectives*
- *Talking to industry bodies- insights, chemical processing, meat processing, meat science, feedlot, butchers*
- *Amazed by how big the industry is.*

Specific areas identified included:

- *Awareness of bigger companies*
- *Insight into family companies*
- *How small farms transform into big companies.*
- *Looked at all areas of beef industry*

Those interviewed commented on the fact that, although they may have been involved in the production side of the industry in the past, they had had little idea of where their meat actually went, or of how other parts of the supply chain operated. They felt it was very important for producers to have this understanding. They also welcomed knowledge about the role of industry bodies such as MLA and MSA. A number reported that this information had extended their horizons in regard to career options, particularly in relation to meat processing and marketing. Some were also keen to find out more about working for MLA.

Career opportunities

Most participants in 2008 identified the career information included in the program as a positive benefit.

- *Career opportunities and how varied they are*
- *Showed us what is available in the industry*
- *Information on scholarships and the Undergrad programs*
- *Told us about job opportunities*
- *Raised awareness about the jobs that are out there.*

One student commented, 'I really enjoyed both 'Swift' speeches-really opened my eyes to the possibilities of my future'. However another felt that the company presentations, 'seemed to spend a lot of time plugging their business looking for employees- not particularly relevant and way too long.' This did not appear to be a widespread view. In fact, six participants submitted applications to ACC soon after the competition, and others sent in applications to Swift some time later. ACC's HR manager commented on the high quality of the applicants and reported being very satisfied with the company's involvement.

A group noted that there was a lot of information on career opportunities for Australian students, but not so much for overseas students, and suggested that more should be provided in this regard. Others suggested that the focus be extended beyond agricultural science careers to include veterinary and animal science.

A pathway into the meat industry

It was clear from interviews and analysis of the small group feedback that participants recognised and valued participation in the ICMJ as a potential stepping stone into the industry. Virtually all participants identified the connection between ICMJ participation and their own career prospects. Comments included:

- *It gives people a head start into industry*
- *Knowledge provides a step in the door for the future*
- *Being involved creates a quick reference*
- *Looks good on the CV*
- *Offers career and travel opportunities*
- *Good for career advancement/prospects*

They identified the need for networks and personal connections as very important, and felt that the competition has given them these, with the following benefits:

- *It's a step into the industry, you have connections, and you know where to look for jobs and what people are looking for.*
- *Contacts for future opportunities*
- *Introduced to people in industry*
- *Networking*
- *Industry partners, knowing industry people*
- *Knowing contacts from other countries*
- *Good on resume for alumni in meat industry*

Where will they go?

Some said the ICMJ had confirmed their pre-existing interest in the industry. When asked at the end of the competition about future carer plans, responses included:

- *I feel impatient to start my career!*
- *Can see my place in the industry*
- *I can see myself getting involved in the industry*
- *Has helped us identify our role in the industry*
- *Working in industry!*
- *Yes it's a possible career*

Others felt it had caused them to reassess their future directions:

- *Has rekindled my interest in agriculture i.e. back on track*
- *The vibrancy of the week rekindled my interest in the industry*
- *It was good to find out about other parts of the industry, especially processing, and see opportunities you weren't aware of and hadn't thought about.*

3.1.5 Exposing students to new technologies within the meat industry

Student feedback suggested that they appreciated hearing first hand about the challenges and opportunities facing the industry, and that they valued presentations by industry members.

3.1.6 Other benefits

Although not tied specifically to the ICMJ's goals, participants identified other benefits of their participation. An important aspect was the opportunity to establish new friendships and contacts, particularly with students from overseas.

- *National/international bonding*
- *Combining cultures*

- *Meeting other people from other countries*
- *Key strengths- the contacts made*
- *The big strength is networking*
- *Friendships and networking are important*
- *New friends*
- *Different perspectives of each person*
- *Diversity of contestants*
- *Hearing people's different perspectives and ideas*
- *Will reconnect with people met*

The chance to learn was highlighted throughout the feedback. While some students made a direct connection between their new knowledge and their university course work, others seemed to be interested in gaining new knowledge, whether it was immediately applicable or not, and were sure it would be useful in the future. When asked why they chose to come, some said:

- *New experience/opportunity*
- *Learn something new and different*
- *Another dimension of learning*
- *Broaden horizons*
- *Gain knowledge/learn new skills*

One group said, "The competition maintains a focus on learning, and creates professionalism you otherwise would not have.' A participant also commented that there were benefits 'producer wise and teaching wise, (that enable) you to encourage others'.

3.2 Does the ICMJ attract young people to the industry?

Most ICMJ participants already have a connection with the industry through their family backgrounds and have selected a field of study that may lead them into some sort of agricultural/animal science field, although not necessarily within the meat industry itself. Thus, the ICMJ may not be attracting new recruits to the industry, as much as affirming a career path for those who are already committed, and providing them with more information and awareness about the industry as a whole.

One interesting finding is that ICMJ participation seems to redirect some participants who might have been thinking of agronomy to production, feed lotting or processing. This was the case for several of those interviewed towards the end of the 2008 meet. It was also the story of one 2005 student interviewed. Her involvement in the training and what was then a one day competition was a deciding factor in her decision to go into the beef industry. This in turn raised her awareness of the availability of MLA undergraduate projects and led her to apply. She completed a project for ACC and has worked in the beef industry since graduation. For family reasons, she is soon to move and reports that she has been forced to take up an agronomy role, but hopes to return to the beef industry as soon as possible!

There are also some participants for whom the ICMJ is a life changing experience in terms of career choices. Four past competitors interviewed for this project who had been selected for the Brisbane training and/or for the US teams had other career plans until they entered the competition. Their experiences, and the contacts they made, caused them to change their minds, and all are now in this industry, with every intention of remaining. At the same time, several past participants reported that the ICMJ had been a very positive experience it had made no difference to their career choice. They saw it as simply part of a range of experiences, and cautioned that it would be simplistic to try and suggest a clear cause –effect relationship.

Unfortunately, contact details for the majority of competitors since 1990 were not available, but the Committee is in the process of compiling a list of those who are known to have entered the industry. To date, nearly 100 people have been identified, (but the real number is likely to be much higher). Of these:

- 32% are in research and extension
- 25% are in production
- 13% are in processing
- 12% are in retail, working as agents, or in sales and marketing (4% in each category)
- 7.5% are in agricultural education in schools and TAFE colleges.

Many ICMJ alumni run their own properties. Others can be found in a range of companies and industry organisations, including:

- Teys Bros
- Cargill's
- Nippon
- Australian Country Choice
- JB Swift
- Australian Agricultural Company
- Sanger
- Elders
- Twynam
- Catapult Genetics
- Rangers Valley feedlot
- Smithfield feedlot
- Food Science Australia
- Department of Primary Industries
- Australian Angus Society
- Primo
- Meat and Livestock Australia

3.3 Does the industry support the ICMJ?

It was outside the scope of this project to conduct a comprehensive survey, but indications are that some leading industry members are aware of the ICMJ and recognise its value. Evidence includes:

- The number of companies across the supply chain who are prepared to provide support to the competition and to individual teams.
- The companies that provide leave with pay for committee members to attend the Armidale meet.
- The number of companies that have accepted invitations to speak at the 2008 competition and covered their costs. (All speakers to date have covered their own travel costs and in some cases this adds up to thousands of dollars).

Several company managers interviewed confirmed that they rated ICMJ involvement highly on a resume, seeing it as an indicator of interest in, and commitment to, the industry, and of an ability to work hard and persist over time. Those who had been involved with participants in the Brisbane week reported finding it an excellent way of recruiting high quality, enthusiastic young people into the industry – and had signed on ICMJ participants as a result.

Current industry members who have been involved in the ICMJ themselves confirmed what the 2008 participants believed –they felt that the ICMJ experience had given them a head start in the industry, providing them with knowledge and contacts that had been invaluable.

However, some members of industry peak bodies had a very limited awareness of the competition. Few of those who had not been to the competition itself had any inkling of what was involved, and there were also some misconceptions about its nature. For example, several people believed that the competition focused on the US grading system, and was therefore irrelevant to Australia. There was also a perception that it only involved people who went into production, and so was irrelevant to meat processors.

Although AMPC reported strong support from members of its Board for continued funding of the ICMJ, there appeared to be limited knowledge of the content of the competition and questions were raised about how it contributed to the industry. The reviewer provided an overview of the ICMJ aims and approach, plus feedback on the 2008 competition to MLA, AMPC and Mintrac representatives who had not been directly involved with the ICMJ. They expressed an interest in getting a better sense of how many participants entered the processor side of the industry, and a better understanding of how the competition aligned with MSA and Ausmeat requirements.

4 Building and sustaining the competition

The ICMJ has considerable strengths that can be built on. While there are also risks to its sustainability, these can be managed, and could be at least partly addressed, through implementation of some of the ideas that have been put forward by committee members, coaches, academic support staff and participants.

4.1 Current strengths

ICMJ's major strengths include:

- The knowledge, passion, enthusiasm and input of the volunteers, including committee members and coaches
- The commitment of team members who go to the US which leads them to remain involved with the competition and ensures a supply of experienced coaches
- The degree of genuine interest of participants in meat quality judging and in understanding more about the meat industry generally
- The high degree of participant enthusiasm
- The expanded residential format
- The experiences offered to the Top 10 and top 5 in the Brisbane training week and on the US trip
- The wide distribution of alumni throughout the industry that may be approaching a critical mass
- The international links, including the involvement of international teams in the Australian competition

Another strength is that, despite its success, the ICMJ committee knows it can never afford to rest on its laurels. Each year it reviews the competition, and implements program innovations. Its vibrant young committee of past competitors is also constantly developing new ways of adding value to the experience for all concerned. Recent innovations include the new website and a newsletter.

While other industry sponsored programs such as the Undergraduate Projects actively seek to attract young people who might not otherwise come into the industry, it is significant that the ICMJ attracts a group who are already strongly predisposed towards the meat industry:

- Most have some exposure to part of the industry
- Most are from regional areas and keen to pursue careers away from the city.
- The majority of participants are nearing the completion of their courses, focused on getting a job and looking for assistance on how to make contact with meat industry employers.

The extended program offered over the last 3 years has made it possible to directly address all of the ICMJ's goals in a way that could not have been achieved when it was a one-day competition. The introduction of more information on MLA's professional development programs revealed a high level of participant interest and demonstrated the potential to use the ICMJ to promote a range of industry opportunities to an ideal target audience.

4.2 Critical issues

4.2.1 Maintaining viable numbers

The competition works on the basis of attracting institutions that will maintain continuity over time, rather than seeking to attract individual participants. However, the number of colleges involved is small, and the loss of even one could affect viability.

There are a number of factors that might lead to the withdrawal of a college. For example:

- A supportive lecturer may retire or move or decide to follow other interests
- A coach may not volunteer
- The emphasis of an academic program may change
- Sponsorship may be lost

All of these things have happened in the past. In fact, there has been an almost complete change in the profile of competing institutions since the start of the competition in 1990.

Once the link is lost it has proven very difficult, although not impossible, to reconnect.

The fact that links with institutions tend to be relationship based is both a strength and a weakness. The lack of knowledge of, or interest in, the ICMJ by senior decision makers at most of the competing universities leaves it vulnerable. Given the vagaries of university decision making, the risk of a university withdrawing funding is quite real, and could happen at short notice. Most 2008 teams identified lack of support as a serious threat to the on-going viability of the competition at their university.

While there may be some opportunity to extend into other faculties less obviously associated with meat, this is likely to be high energy/low return. Current lecturers and coaches report having little time or traction in other parts of their universities to make this work- and even find it difficult to work across campuses within the same discipline.

A supportive lecturer clearly makes a difference, especially when it comes to maintaining university and local industry sponsorship. However, the availability of a coach appears to be even more pivotal in ensuring continuity from one year to the next, and a major barrier to the entry of a new institution is the lack of knowledge about meat judging and associated lack of a coach with ICMJ experience.

Even if the ICMJ does not adopt a growth strategy, there is a need to keep trying to maintain the teams it has, and to attract several more, if only as insurance. Yet, while the Committee continues to seek new colleges to join the competition, it is in a catch-22 situation. The Armidale venue imposes logistical limits on participant numbers, largely in terms of access to the chillers for the practical training component that participants value so highly. Therefore, if the ICMJ wishes to remain at Armidale, and to hold only one competition a year, it cannot afford to be too successful in attracting new institutions.

For some committee members, the venue issue has been a major factor limiting development options. Armidale offers many positives, and there are few alternative venues available – the main one being in Victoria. While opening up new possibilities, a move to another venue has associated risks. It would change the dynamics of the competition and could place new travel burdens on teams that did not have them in the past.

4.2.2 To grow or not to grow?

This raises some key questions:

- Does the ICMJ in fact wish to grow, or can it increase its impact by maintaining numbers and focusing more effort on the students it currently has in the system?
- If the competition does grow, will it be able to maintain the quality of the event?
- What is the most effective use of resources? How much further can current resources (especially committee time and energy) stretch?

Decisions about whether to actively adopt growth or a consolidation strategy will make a significant difference to the relevance and usefulness of various options for the future that are outlined later in the report.

4.2.3 Maintaining industry support

'Industry' supports the competition through the contributions of individual companies and through industry funding.

MLA and AMPC currently provide funding for the competition, yet there appears to be a somewhat limited understanding about what the competition does and of its impact. Although there was no indication that this was of immediate concern, it does pose a risk. A change of personnel on a decision making board, for example, could leave the ICMJ needing to find a new sponsor, possibly at short notice. Although new sponsors may well be found, it could require considerable time and energy, and even put that year's competition under threat.

Another related issue is the belief by some in the funding organisations that sponsorship should be seen as seed money, and as such only be available for a limited number of years, with an associated belief that the competition should more actively seek direct industry input. However this view could take on a different complexion if the ICMJ is able to develop aspects of the pre-competition program that have been emerging over the last 2 years. If the ICMJ can work closely with MLA, AMPC and participating companies, the June meet could become a significant industry event designed to attract young people into the industry and/or to show them specific pathways. While participating companies could provide increased sponsorship in exchange for being brought to contact with a promising group of young people, it might also be appropriate for MLA and AMPC to continue direct support, while working with the ICMJ to use the event even more skilfully as a pathway into all parts of the supply chain.

Thus, it may be more useful for current and potential sponsors to see the ICMJ as a targeted, cost effective marketing and education exercise, rather than as a needy but worthy cause being supported out of the kindness of someone's heart! The key now will be for the ICMJ to build an appreciation of the impact of the competition in those areas where it does not yet exist, and to work closely with all sponsors to ensure that the event is designed to achieve maximum benefit for the students, the companies and the industry as a whole.

The cost of competing is an issue for participants, who rely on university and industry sponsorship to help cover costs. This is obviously a particular concern for teams that must travel long distances, and there is anecdotal evidence that costs do keep some students from entering. However, establishing industry sponsorship for a team is quite challenging. Although it has been done successfully, most 2008 participants believed it would be very difficult to approach a company themselves without the assistance of a lecturer who could speak for the institution – yet several teams do not have such a person involved.

Existing team sponsorship by industry members is often based on personal relationships, and could lapse with a change of company personnel - or a perception that a company is not getting

anything useful from their annual commitment. The recent global economic downturn is affecting the bottom line and could lead to cost cutting. Do all contributing companies currently have enough information to appreciate the value of the ICMJ and to encourage them to maintain their financial and/or in-kind support?

4.2.4 Monitoring impact

The committee identified measurement of the competition's impact as a major issue, and interviews with some industry decision makers suggests that evidence of career destinations in particular would go some way to managing any future risk to industry funding arrangements.

The ICMJ is keen to monitor its long term impact by gathering such data. However, this is not currently possible. The organisation collects application forms and resumes from potential participants. These may be referred to as part of the selection process at the end of the competition, but in the past, little use has been made of the information supplied. Indeed, until recently, the forms were destroyed at the end of each year. There is no data management system to enable this information to be maintained efficiently and effectively.

While it would be very useful to be able to maintain contact with ex-participants, particularly to track their career destinations, a perennial problem for all organisations and institutions working with undergraduates is that graduates become highly mobile.

The ICMJ has been relying on student emails. However these are somewhat unreliable as a means of contacting their owners while they are still at university, and become unusable as soon as the student leaves. (Of 60 emails sent to the 2007 cohort as part of this project, 24 bounced back immediately as undeliverable. Only a handful of the others were ever answered.). Mail-outs to family addresses are cumbersome and expensive and may still not reach their recipients in a timely fashion. While it may be possible to use the ICMJ website, and to set up an interactive Facebook style feature, this entails ex-participants being interested enough to access it to interact, and to keep their details current.

The lack of response to the email surveys, plus specific interview feedback suggest that those participants who do not make it to the final ten think well of their ICMJ experience – but would still need a very good reason to go to the trouble of maintaining long term contact with the ICMJ. At the moment, that reason does not exist.

4.2.5 Exploiting industry synergies while maintaining ICMJ autonomy

There are a host of potential synergies between the ICMJ and other industry programs that aim to attract promising young people into the industry, while building their knowledge and skills.

The MLA undergraduate, scholarship and post graduate professional development programmes are already being promoted at ICMJ. Individual companies such as Australian Country Choice (ACC), Australian Agricultural Company (AACo), JB Swift and Angus Beef offer various scholarships. Breed societies run a number of programs for young people. These could also be promoted at the competition and on the website.

However, how far should these links go and how formal should they be? The ICMJ places a high value on its autonomy and having operated independently for so many years, has no wish to become burdened by bureaucratic requirements and driven by external expectations. A loss of autonomy (perceived or actual) would undermine the commitment of the volunteers who provide so many unpaid hours and whose passion maintains the competition's vibrancy and attractiveness to young people. No option should be considered if it threatens to undermine the enthusiasm of this group who give so freely of their time and expertise.

In building connections and exploiting synergies, there are several factors to consider:

- The perspective of the young people themselves. What do they want? What do they value?
- Who, if anyone, is in 'control'? How can communication be coordinated and facilitated?
- Does it threaten the soul of the competition?
- Does it threaten the enthusiasm and interest of the volunteers?
- What data will be shared? How will it be managed and maintained?

4.2.6 Human resources

Some volunteer organisations find that there is a waxing and waning of the quality and commitment of committee members. There is little evidence of a waning on the ICMJ. The committee has been instrumental in building and maintaining links with universities and sponsors as well as in doing much of the behind the scenes work required to organise the event itself. However, some of those most pivotal to the organisation have indicated that they may be moving on to new challenges. Is there a clear succession plan in place? Are those in key positions training others to step in if, and when- the need arises?

On a related front, all committee members are busy people with many other commitments. They make time, and do much, but there is a limit, and most of those interviewed felt a need to draw a line at some point. The on-going maintenance of the status quo is in itself a major commitment. Any new projects are likely to require more time – and on occasion being able to access other skills. If growth is planned, this could act as a limiting factor.

4.3 Ideas for consideration

The ICMJ Committee is very aware of the range of opportunities open to them, and also of the risks. Many of the ideas proposed in the following section come from members of this group, with others emerging from consultations with coaches, industry members and participants, past and present. These options are proposed as a basis for further consideration by the Committee in light of their decisions regarding goals and priorities, and are not presented as final recommendations. While some of the ideas put forward have been considered in the past and rejected for various good reasons, it may be appropriate to reconsider them in light of changing circumstances.

Some of the options described could be incorporated into current arrangements, and would be managed by the ICMJ committee, as part of 'business as usual', but others would require changes to the current approach and/or resources. It is envisaged that some could be treated as self-contained 'modules'. These could be developed with separate funding to achieve specified outcomes - and would be, in a sense, 'bolted on' to existing arrangements. This would maintain the ICMJ's ownership and oversight of the competition, while providing flexibility to enhance and expand various aspects of the competition by importing appropriate resources as required.

4.3.1 Develop the coaching role

The coaching role is pivotal to ensuring the ongoing participation of most universities. The quality of the coach also impacts on the standard of the competition overall. Although ex ICMJ participants stepping into the coaching role may have extensive knowledge of the judging process, (although this is not necessarily the case), it is almost certain that they will not have extensive knowledge and experience in regard to how to coach others in this context. It is all very well to learn from experience, but this could be facilitated with the introduction of some formal scaffolding.

The ICMJ could offer a Coaching Clinic (in February before the University year begins), involving experienced coaches and newcomers. An experienced industry trainer working with an experienced meat judge could run the clinic. Its aims would be to:

- identify key content to be covered and share approaches that have worked
- provide practical advice about effective training and coaching practices
- facilitate the development of tailored plans on how to promote the competition effectively, with a consideration of scheduling and pacing so that participants don't lose interest or feel overly pressured due to study commitments

Experienced coaches could reflect on what they have learned to date, and share their understandings with others. The clinic would also help to draw new coaches into the network. This is particularly important for those who have not been part of the Brisbane or US teams.

To facilitate continuity within a college from one year to the next, it might also be helpful to encourage retiring coaches to organise a formal hand over in which they spend time with the incoming coach, sharing what they have discovered about the act of coaching, as well as explaining some of the more mundane aspects of the role. For those who are liaising with university and industry sponsors, introductions to the key people concerned could also be critical. Although some coaches do some of these things, a simple hand over pack and check list could ensure that valuable knowledge and networks are not lost.

Coaches are people who have shown a particular interest in the competition, and may also be keen to enter some part of the meat industry. As such they are a group who should be given as much support as possible to do so. At the coaching clinic, or during the competition week, interested coaches could be offered the option of being interviewed for MLA scholarships, places in MLA/AMPC graduate program or for other company placements. They could also be linked into other industry scholarship programs (such as the Angus Youth Scholarships).

4.3.2 Add further value for participants

4.3.2.1 Offer smaller competitions in the lead up to the main event

Most participants wanted to learn more about meat judging, and to improve their judging skills, partly in the hope of winning a prize, but also from a genuine interest and to gain a sense of accomplishment. There was strong support for the ICMJ to hold smaller competitions in the lead up to the main event. Some suggested a circuit similar to that in the US but on a smaller scale, where points accrued, but realised that this would eliminate all those who could not afford to travel. The consensus was to arrange some formal competitions between two or three teams in relatively close proximity to each as a practice run. Even though this might not be possible in all regions, where it could be done, the practice competitions also offered an opportunity to involve interested observers from schools or colleges who might then set up a team of their own.

4.3.2.2 Offer industry recognised qualifications

Participants and coaches strongly supported the idea of gaining some sort of recognition as part of their involvement in the competition. While some proposed persuading their universities to offer course credits, discussion with lecturers suggests that trying to change courses at individual institutions is likely to be a long and tedious process with a limited chance of success.

However, participants were generally familiar with the vocational education and training system, (VET) and recognised the value of an industry recognised qualification on their resume (as opposed to subsuming their ICMJ participation in their degree). They were strongly supportive of any move to gain part or all of a VET formal qualification.

Although there are no longer industry endorsed units that are closely aligned to the ICMJ, there is potential to identify a 'skills set' of competencies across several existing qualifications at Certificate III level, although endorsement under the current Training Package arrangements might take several years. This would not be enough to constitute a full certificate but would receive an official Statement of Attainment, which would have some value within the industry in its own right, and could be built on to achieve a full certificate.

From there, the major issues to be addressed would be logistical and financial. The assessment would have to be carried out by an appropriately qualified person from a Registered Training Organisation and there would be a fee attached. Given the amount already packed into the competition week, it may not be feasible to offer such an opportunity as part of the Armidale week. Other options include:

- holding a weekend assessment session in several locations, soon after the competition. This would depend on interest.
- incorporating assessment into the Brisbane training week as an additional reward for the top ten
- incorporating assessment into the 'meat industry package' described below.

For those who could not attend an assessment, it may be possible to offer some aspects of the assessment on line or even to provide an assessor for each team post-competition, if the fees could be covered or at least off-set.

A similar 'skills set' approach could be offered to coaches, particularly through the coaching clinic where they could be introduced to a skills set aligned with the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment (TAA). With coaches spread out across Australia, arrangements for assessment would need to be made with local Registered Training providers. However the TAA is offered by many organisations, so this could be done. This would be of most value if done in concert with MLA and MINTRAC as part of ICMJ participation in other industry oriented graduate and leadership programs. It would enhance the emphasis on the coaches, a group who are already demonstrating a high degree of leadership capability, industry interest and commitment, and could be seen as an investment in these promising young people that will keep them linked to, and focused on, the industry.

4.3.2.3 Develop a 'meet the meat industry' package

Many participants were excited by the possibility of being selected to join the Brisbane training week because they had heard that it offered an entrée to specific companies and an opportunity to meet key personnel in the industry, including MLA staff. Without detracting from the value of this prize, it might be possible to offer a shorter weekend experience. These could be held in several locations and might include:

- hosted site visits
- an opportunity to interact with industry representatives
- assessment in the meat judging skills set
- interviews for MLA scholarships or cadetships.

Participants interviewed were strongly supportive of this concept, and said they would definitely find a way to attend.

This opportunity would only be open to former competitors (from the current or from previous years). It would provide an added incentive for students to join—and perhaps to persevere with - the competition. It would also identify those most keen to join the industry, and create an opportunity to involve more industry sponsors. If the Certificate III skill sets were offered, funding could cover the provision of a Registered Training Organisation to provide assessment.

Locations could be selected on the basis of accessibility and availability of facilities for the assessment and site visits. Some financial support could be offered to support the attendance of students facing financial hardship. Although ICMJ might contribute to the development of these packages, it would be appropriate for MLA to organise and fund such an event.

4.3.2.4 Establish a meat industry careers fair

The 2008 ICMJ feedback demonstrates the high degree of interest of ICMJ participants in meat industry careers. Almost all said they would welcome a full careers fair. This is a familiar concept, and others that are already held attract large numbers of people. The fair could be offered as part of the ICMJ Armidale meet, or as a separate event at another time. In either case, this would be an ideal example of an event that should be run in close consultation with industry, and with direct industry funding.

4.3.3 Go for growth: attracting new institutions

If the Committee decides the competition must aim for growth, this could be achieved by expanding the number of participants from existing sources and/or by expanding the number of sources supplying teams.

4.3.3.1 Expanding team sources.

A major barrier to the entry of a new institution is the lack of knowledge about meat judging and lack of an experienced coach. Some ideas for reducing this barrier include:

A 'Come and Judge' day

A 'Come and Judge' day could be held in Melbourne at the TAFE College facilities in Essendon, with lecturers and students from various Victorian, South Australian and Tasmanian universities and TAFE colleges invited to attend. During the day, ICMJ members could provide introductory training and background on the competition, plus a 'Meat the industry' opportunity involving local meat producers and processors. Past participants and coaches could be invited to host, train and promote the benefits of the competition.

Similar programs could be held in WA to attract at least one new team from University of WA or the TAFE colleges (or perhaps to build a composite team), and in Queensland, where participation levels are not commensurate with the degree of industry concentration, and to provide additional support for the UQ group. It might also be possible to schedule shorter 'Come and Judge' sessions in conjunction with live meat judging competitions. This might help build teams from breeder associations or attract individual participants who could join a 'virtual' team.

Even if institutions chose not to join in the following year, this could be a way of attracting more individuals to participate- with ICMJ offering an online coach to assist a virtual team that might be spread across the country or established teams adopting interested individuals.

An online coach for new and virtual teams

The ICMJ already makes people available to provide advice as required. This idea is merely an extension of the current approach. An 'online' coach could be appointed with a particular brief to support institutions new to the competition, and perhaps to coach individual participants as members of a virtual team. New and/or virtual teams could perhaps come together a day earlier than others before the competition itself to work with this coach.

Teams from breed associations

Many participants are members of the youth branches of breeder associations and have experience with live judging. Some associations meet regularly and one has already expressed

an interest in forming a meat judging team. Eligibility criteria could still be met as long as team members were tertiary students or apprentices as outlined in the rules.

Develop a marketing strategy for current and potential institutions

The ICMJ could focus attention on ways to raise the profile of current teams to draw the attention of decision makers in participating institutions. This might include production of 'ready made' materials for alumni magazine and websites, information for career counsellors, destination statistics etc.

The ICMJ has limited capacity to market to institutions. So where to put effort? Regional universities may be keen to use performance by their undergraduates as a promotional tool. They also welcome opportunities to promote career destinations and the performance of old scholars in Alumni magazines and on their web sites. TAFE colleges are pushing to establish closer relationships with individual companies – and those who offer meat training already work on site. (e.g. South Western Tafe based in Victoria). While using contacts with lecturers may yield results, tailored marketing plans could also be developed and pitched at senior decision makers in those colleges that stand to gain the most from participation. This could be particularly effective if the competition decides to re-engage with the VET sector.

4.3.3.2 Provide support for new entrants

Once an institution decides to compete, it will still face many difficulties. Tocal College provides an example of what a college faces when it does not have access to an experienced coach. The ICMJ could design a way to provide this team with extra pre-competition support in 2009. While ensuring that entering a team becomes part of the Tocal tradition, this process could also be treated as a pilot study, providing insights into what other new colleges may need to help them get over the initial hurdles.

4.3.4 Go for growth: Build from within

4.3.4.1 Build strong, self sustaining teams

One way of building numbers within existing teams that would have other benefits would be to change the rules of participation to enable students to compete more than once. While only some students would take this opportunity, it would encourage team members to recruit new members, offer the potential for second year participants to act as assistant coaches (and thus increase the pool of possible coaches over time), develop the internal team dynamic, encourage longer contact with the ICMJ and ultimately raise the overall standard of knowledge and competition.

The intention of the 'one year only' rule was to ensure that students who could only afford to compete once were not disadvantaged. However, although this might occur, it could be argued that a competitor who does well the first time may well be able to attract extra assistance for a second time. There are also many other aspects to the current arrangements that could be seen as disadvantageous to those wanting to enter- for example, students from UNE are clearly at an advantage regarding travel costs, particularly when contrasted with those who come from Murdoch, and disparities in sponsorship generally mean that some students pay more from their own pockets than others. The advantages of having several team members with some experience and an investment in finding new members for the next year's team may well outweigh the negatives, and take the pressure of a lecturer and/or coach to keep the flag flying.

If this option became really popular, it would require the ICMJ to consider expanding the competition- and possibly moving to a new site. The difficulties associated with this have been a major stumbling block in the past, but again, it is time to ask whether growth is a real option.

4.3.4.2 ICMJ show bags

If the rules are not changes as outlined above, lecturers and coaches wanting to promote could be assisted with an ICMJ show bag that might include:

- catchy information about the career building benefits of participating (including special options available only to ICMJ participants and a set of steak knives!)
- 'Where they are now' examples of past ICMJ participants (and not only the US team members) who have gone into the industry
- information about opportunities across the supply chain
- pictures of the Brisbane and US groups immersed in their experience.
- application form, web site information and
- handy hints on how to write an effective resume

4.3.5 Support development

If the ICMJ adopts a growth strategy, resources will be stretched. It could be beneficial to consider the appointment of an ICMJ Development Officer who would focus on facilitating growth, and might also assist with some aspects of 'business as usual'. A version of this arrangement is already in place, to provide extra support to volunteers for the time consuming maintenance role, but current provision could be significantly enhanced to support the implementation of new strategies.

There is no suggestion that the development officer should take over from the committee, or from those who have volunteered for particular roles. He or she would act as a facilitator and coordinator, or do the leg work with a clearly defined role, and would only take on projects and tasks by negotiation. The role might involve:

- supporting current business
- maintaining data bases (and perhaps contributing to the development of a centralised MLA data base if this goes ahead)
- developing information/promotional packs tailored to different audiences
- ensuring publicity on the competition and its winners is sent to key stakeholders- such as participating institutions, industry peak bodies, companies
- driving the implementation of new strategies e.g. coaching clinic, post competition packages (outlined below)
- liaising between ICMJ, MLA/AMPC and other industry bodies to build links into a range of industry wide programs

Ideally, the coordinator should be a former ICMJ participant, or bring industry knowledge and comparable experiences to the role. This is the sort of role that could be funded through industry sponsorship or through a contractual arrangement, such as MLA has with Food Science Australia to develop and facilitate Engineering network meetings.

4.4 Knowledge management

4.4.1 Maintaining contact /building a monitoring and evaluation system

The basis of any monitoring system will be the ability to track former competitors over time.

Ways of maintaining contact with past competitors have been explored, including the distribution of a short email survey to all 2007 participants. This yielded far more bounced emails from non-addresses than it did actual replies. This suggests that email addresses alone are not a reliable means of ongoing communication with young people who are likely to be making major moves within a year or two of competing in the ICMJ.

While future data bases may need to include parents' home address/email, thinking needs to go further than this, to consider why a student would necessarily *want* to remain in contact with the ICMJ anyway, and for how long such contact might be valuable to them.

For those who do not make the top 10 or top 5, or who do not go on to become coaches and/or committee members, it is unlikely that the ICMJ will figure strongly in their priority list. This is not to suggest that they do not value the competition, but it will not be as important to many of them over time as it is to the smaller group who are passionate about it.

Interviews with competitors suggest however, that most participants would value receiving industry information, particularly in relation to employment opportunities. This could provide an incentive for staying in touch, at least until they settle on a career destination and get a job.

Future participants could be asked if they are interested in receiving such information, and if so, if they could provide a contact address that they believe will be valid for three years.

Having set this up, the ICMJ would need to ensure that career information was regularly provided. However, this does not mean that the ICMJ would have to do it all. It could be organised in conjunction with MLA, and/or involve sponsorship companies who could use this avenue to reach a group that has already shown interest in, and some level of commitment to, the industry.

Some ICMJ participants who signed up for this service might also be altruistic enough to volunteer for a longitudinal career destinations survey. They could be surveyed each year, and each time, asked to update their contact details if they were prepared to remain part of the study. There would still be an attrition rate through lost contact, but it would be interesting to see how many people would be prepared to maintain the connection, and for how long.

A parallel venture might involve an interactive face book page that would keep participants in touch with each other after the competition. This could certainly help to support the networking aspect of the ICMJ, although again, it would need some on-going management. How far it might be used for other purposes is unclear, but it would be an interesting experiment to test this out!

4.4.2 Maintaining a data base

Data bases such as that described above require regular updating and this can be fiddly and time consuming.

One option would be for participants to sign on with the ICMJ, but for MLA to establish and manage a central data base that would be designed so that it could also provide ICMJ with the

information it seeks about its participants, while linking them into an industry wide network. Competition participants would of course be made aware of what they were signing up for, and would have the option to remove themselves from the list at any time.

This idea was canvassed with participants from 2007 and 2008 and received strong support. Noone interviewed saw any problems with joining an industry wide data base. MLA is interested in building such a centralised data base of all young people who express an interest in a red meat industry program, and who give permission to be placed on a data base so that they can receive industry information/employment opportunities.

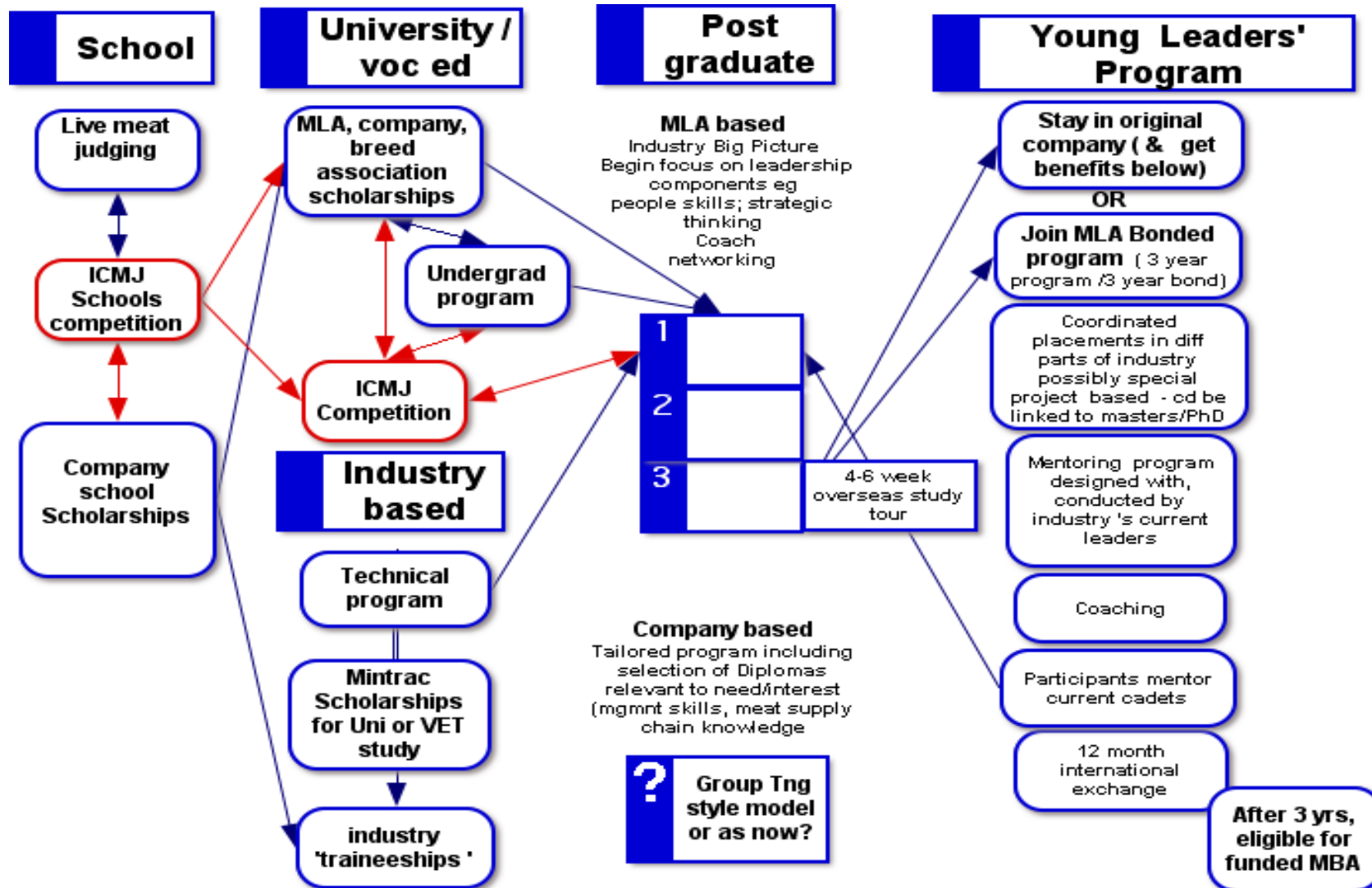
Thus, ICMJ has several options:

- ICMJ establishes and maintains its own data base, liaising with MLA and others for careers material as required
- ICMJ maintains its own data base, but also provides these details to MLA (with the necessary competitor permissions). ICMJ uses its data base as it wishes, including advertising employment opportunities from sponsorship companies. MLA ensures that those on the ICMJ data base receive regular industry information.
- MLA builds and maintains a sophisticated data base with an ICMJ component. ICMJ can add/change data, request reports and provide information for mail outs, just as if it were maintaining its own data base, but without the expense of setting it up or maintaining it, and with the bonus of regular, industry wide information for those who apply to be part of this industry information net.

4.5 4.5 Developing synergies with other programs

MLA is currently developing a more cohesive approach to the provision of programs that will attract, retain and develop young leaders in the industry. This is a work in progress, and while not wishing to pre-empt the outcomes, Box 4.1. provides a diagrammatic overview to give the ICMJ some ideas on what might be possible.

As can be seen, the ICMJ connections are not very different to those already in place. The issue would be one of emphasis. How much further could the connections be developed and utilised, possibly through the provision of some of the ideas outlined in the previous section. The effectiveness of the whole will also depend on the way in which MLA coordinates its programs internally, extends industry buy-in and links in with other company and breed society programs. ICMJ could choose to contribute to the development of this holistic approach, or decide to stay somewhat on the outside. Either way, it is critical to recognise that there is no suggestion of any plan to attempt to influence the ICMJ's operations. This would be counter productive, costly and unworkable. However, from the perspective of the young people who participate in the ICMJ, close liaison between the ICMJ and other industry programs can only be of benefit. And the more the ICMJ has to offer, the easier it will be to maintain and/or increase participant numbers. Closer ties with other programs may also mean that the ICMJ can also provide more without having to increase its volunteers' workloads.



Box 4.1. Attracting, retaining and training young people: Draft overview of a cohesive red meat industry approach

5 Success in Achieving Objectives

The project has achieved four of its five objectives, these being to:

- identify current strengths, weaknesses and factors contributing to the ICMJ's sustainability
- identify options for the future
- develop ideas for a system for on-going monitoring and evaluation
- consider possible synergies with other industry programs

A further objective was to identify impacts of the ICMJ over time, and where possible to measure these against the competition's stated mission and goals. While some aspects of this were achieved (as outlined in section 4), lack of longitudinal data, including contact details for past participants, made it difficult to ascertain measurable impacts in some key areas. This was disappointing, as there are indications that quite a large number of young people who have participated in the ICMJ over the last 18 years have been involved with the red meat industry in some capacity – and that some of these are now in leadership positions. While the ICMJ alone cannot be held responsible for their entry into the industry, it has certainly contributed to their industry education.

6 Impact on Meat and Livestock Industry – now & in five years

This study provides ample evidence that the ICMJ has become an integral part of the education of students in a small number of institutions round the country. The ICMJ has developed its own traditions, and contributes to those of participating colleges. Its alumni recognise its value and network with other participants. It shows that participants are promising young people, with an interest in the industry, and that the ICMJ can fan that interest, and provide new perspectives that are not available through other channels.

The study has also identified areas in which the competition is vulnerable, and opportunities for the future that may ensure the ICMJ's sustainability, and also extend and/or enhance its impact. The report provides information and ideas that could be taken into account as the ICMJ decides where to direct its limited resources, and to influence the decisions of industry members and industry bodies when deciding where to invest, and how to take advantage of synergies with other programs.

7 Conclusions and Recommendations

7.1 Conclusions

The ICMJ is achieving its objectives. It provides opportunities for young people to learn and grow in many ways while providing specific education relevant to all sections of the red meat industry. Those who attend enjoy the experience. While many already intend to have a career in some part of the industry, they report that the ICMJ experience reinforces, revitalises or even redirects their focus to another part of the supply chain. Whichever part of the industry they choose, they value the insights they have gained into other parts of the supply chain, and the opportunity to make contact with industry members. From an industry investment perspective, the program offers peak bodies and companies cost effective access to a highly motivated group of potential employees, who have self-selected and are gathered in one place at one time.

The ICMJ has many strengths, one of which is the organisation's commitment to continuous improvement. However, the Committee will need to agree on whether to pursue a consolidation or a growth strategy before deciding on specific options. Within the context of this decision, any

moves to build the competition's sustainability and enhance its impact will need to address issues related to:

- availability of suitable facilities for training, and for the competition itself
- availability of knowledgeable, skilled people with the time to focus on both the maintenance and development aspects of the competition
- maintaining or increasing levels of financial support from different sources

While many of the options outlined have potential, the following conclusions are offered from the perspective of an independent observer, and should be treated as a provocation rather than an attempt to suggest a 'right' answer.

Within either a growth or a consolidation strategy, the coaching role is critical and offers scope for development in any of the ways suggested, the idea of the coaching clinic in particular being strongly supported by those coaches interviewed. If a growth strategy is to be pursued, the lack of a coach with an understanding of the competition and/or knowledge about meat judging is a major barrier to entry. There would need to be some provision to raise interest and to help overcome this problem. Invitations to Armidale for potential lecturers and school teachers do not appear to have been very successful, but some kind of 'come and try' event, perhaps linked to an industry/careers fair, might ignite interest more easily in both potential participants and lecturers.

However, the first step towards growth could be to increase numbers within current institutions. developing self sustaining teams offers many potential benefits but would require a change of the rules. If this, or another growth option begins to have impact, the ICMJ would be forced to tackle one of the major things in its 'too hard' basket-namely the difficulty of expanding at Armidale. Although perhaps not a short term strategy, putting on some sort of demonstration/careers fair in Essendon in conjunction with other industry bodies could be a way of testing the waters without a full commitment, while also promoting the red meat industry to a new cohort of students.

If consolidation is the aim, there are a number of ways of adding value for existing participants who do not get into the top 10, such as offering a Careers fair during the competition, or making a short version of the Brisbane experience available post competition. However, interestingly, these too may act as attractants for future participants, so addressing the Armidale logistics issues may be hard to avoid no matter which paths are taken.

Whatever the path, building a stronger industry and institutional profiles will be critical. While those within the ICMJ are well aware of its benefits and impact, it would be a mistake to assume that someone who has not been to the competition and experienced the event or seen the students' enthusiasm will have the same sense of the ICMJ's worth. The Committee needs to invest time in selling the competition in new ways to key people- particularly those who currently provide support. This includes making it easier for individual teams to attract and maintain their local company and institutional sponsors.

7.2 Recommendations

The following are suggested as those actions that may have the highest leverage for impact:

- Decide on a growth or consolidation strategy and select options accordingly
- Develop the coaching role through strategies such as coaching clinics
- Develop self perpetuating teams by changing the rules regarding competing only once
- Develop and actively implement industry promotional strategies

- Link ICMJ participants and coaches into the emerging MLA/AMPC Young Leaders' programs as an integral part of the program
- Explore ways of contributing to a shared data base maintained centrally and using a range of contact details nominated by young people
- Identify what would motivate ICMJ participants to visit the ICMJ website (or a website connected to the Young Leaders' program) and to update their contact details over time
- Seek financial support from an external to appoint a development officer to project manage the implementation of new initiatives intended to maximize the numbers of ICMJ participants entering the industry directly through companies or as part of the leadership programs

8 References

ICMJ 2006: MLA Report 2006

ICMJ 2008: ICMJ website www.icmj.com.au

Appendix 1: Overview of methodology

Focus	Tasks	Approach
Set scene	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understand context Refine aims, focus, scope Finalise plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interview key stakeholders (ICMJ Chair, committee members, , MLA/AMPC representatives)
Develop overview of program and data availability	<p>Desk top review</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Which institutions have participated? Which could participate but have not? Which staff? Which types of student – course, yr level, location, city/country? Student applications & any post competition feedback Knowledge of who entered the industry /is still there? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review/analyse documents, records Identify patterns, gaps Develop questions for Armidale
Map the terrain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Snap shot of current situation through key stakeholders' eyes Establish contact with C & coaches so can get follow up data as required 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attend competition week Armidale 2008 Pre/post interviews with cross section of students Interview with coaches and committee members Run workshop/meeting/interviews at 2008 Competition
What attracts institutions to the competition?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Factors influencing institutional participation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interviews at competition with coaches & lecturers
What benefits do students get from participation?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What were students looking for from the experience? What did they get? Learning/ experiences/understanding of the industry Who went into the industry? Did the competition have any influence on this? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Email survey plus phone follow up with sample of students from 2007 and 2008 as earlier years' contact details not available or no longer valid
What do other stakeholders think?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The ICMJ currently receives funding from MLA and AMPC and some companies provide sponsorship and participate in the ICMJ. What are their perceptions and what do they hope to get from the association? What have the outcomes been to date? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interviews and discussion with key personnel Interviews with sample of industry decision makers
Measures of impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop criteria for measuring impact. 'What would convince you one way or the other of the competition's impact?' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Criteria based on ICMJ mission and goals, plus key stakeholders' response to question' Participant evaluation of 2007/2008 competitions Participant interviews and group feedback at 2008 competition Analysis of participants application forms /resumes
Identifying possible synergies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explore MLA/ AMPC/ Mintrac programs aimed at attracting and developing young people Identify other programs with similar goals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Joint meeting with AMPC. MLA. Mintrac personnel to identify perceptions/knowledge of ICMJ, and consider potential for links to other programs and proposed programs Web search and Interview with Angus Youth rep
Ideas for further development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop range of options as basis for discussion prior to identification of areas for further development as recommendations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discussions with ICMJ Chair, Committee.
Develop overview for MLA/C'tee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Draft report for discussion and further input Final report 	

Appendix 2: Selection of US Team

4-5 students are selected at the end of the Brisbane training week to represent Australia as the National ICMJ team. (All scores are reverted to zero at the commencement of this week).

The selection panel consists of:

- Coaches for the US trip
- Training co-ordinator

Selection criteria

The students will be selected based on:

- Ability to work as a team
- Ability to grasp new concepts
- Future career aspirations in the red meat industry
- Demonstration of a strong work ethic
- Attention to detail
- Personal presentation and communication skills
- Understanding and application of the Australian and US grading systems
- Willingness to learn

The students must also meet the following criteria:

- Hold an Australian passport
- Be willing and able to travel to the US
- Cover the cost of a team blazer and travel insurance (approximately \$650) in addition to meals while travelling