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TRADING STANDARDS SERVICE

NOTES FOR GUIDANCE

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Changes to UK Hallmarking Law

Introduction

National Law on the hallmarking of precious metals changed in 1998. The new controls will have important implications for both businesses and consumers. This guidance note offers advice on a number of the most common questions prompted by the changes. Sources of additional guidance are given at the end.

Summary

Buyers and sellers of precious metals have long been able to place confidence in hallmarked goods. The new changes do not affect this but it does mean that both businesses and consumers will have to familiarise themselves with new hallmarking information. The key developments are as follows:

- items marked in another Member State under equivalent arrangements to our national controls can be sold in the UK. This is likely to lead to some new hallmarks appearing;
- where other Member States with equivalent marking arrangements permit additional fineness standards, for example 999 gold, these can now be lawfully supplied in the UK. Moreover, UK manufacturers can also produce articles to a wider range of fineness; and
- the precise form of UK hallmarks has changed in line with the approach taken in other countries to make them more readily understandable by consumers. For example, the date letter will no longer be required and the fineness must be marked in parts per thousand.

Common Questions

The new hallmarking legislation does not radically alter the way in which hallmarks work. However, if your business involves the buying or selling of hallmarked items you will need to be aware of, and understand, the relevant changes.

The questions and answers which follow give guidance as to the main effects of the changes.

Q1. Why has the law on hallmarking changed?

A1. The UK had to amend its national law, the Hallmarking Act 1973, to reflect developments in Europe. In so doing, a number of additional changes have been made to ensure that UK manufacturers are not put at a disadvantage.

Q2. What are the major changes I can expect to see?

A2. The new law permits the supply of items marked in other Member States under a hallmarking system similar to that in the UK. Over time this may mean that items will appear bearing marks from other countries.

As well as increasing the number of marks, the law will recognise a number of additional finenesses. This will include the following, which can be struck by UK assay offices:

	Parts Per Thousand											
Metal	375	585	750	800	850	900	916	925	950	958.4	990	999
Silver				✓				✓		✓		✓
Gold	✓	✓	✓				✓				✓	✓
Platinum					✓	✓			✓			✓

It is likely that other finenesses will be permitted if legally available in another Member State which operates hallmarking controls comparable with our own. The British Hallmarking Council (see address at the end) will maintain a list of all the recognised hallmarks and the relevant standards of fineness.

Q3. Will there be any other differences?

A3. The effect of the changes is to make it easier to supply items produced in other Member States. To ensure that UK manufacturers are not put at a competitive disadvantage the UK's own detailed marking requirements have been amended to reflect the approach generally taken in Europe. In future the mark struck on precious metal items will look different because:

- it is no longer compulsory to include a date letter;
- the fineness will invariably be marked in parts per thousand; and
- there will be no mark to distinguish British goods from imported goods marked here.

Q4. What about antiques?

A4. The final change made by the new legislation is the date at which an article can be described as 'antique'. The new date of 1920 (it used to be 1900) will mean that items of gold and silver produced in the first two decades of this century now enjoy exemption from hallmarking. Before now, the sale of these items would have been dependent upon their being hallmarked, a requirement that reduced the value of the goods.

Q5. Can the fineness of items still be described in carats?

A5. Yes. The law does not affect the way in which fineness can be described. The only change relates to the mark itself, which in future must give the fineness in millesimal form, i.e. in parts per thousand. Traditional fineness marks (e.g. the lion or the crown) can be struck alongside this - if requested by the manufacturer.

Q6. How are consumers going to learn about, and understand, the changes?

A6. The Department of Trade and Industry is publicising the changes. Others, such as trade bodies and the specialist publications, are also likely to want to raise awareness of the new measures.

The law also continues to place an obligation on dealer to exhibit a public notice describing the approved hallmarks. The form of this notice is controlled by the British Hallmarking Council and a new version has been prepared which explains the current position. In addition, the British Hallmarking Council will produce information on all EFA hallmarks it considers acceptable. Copies of this notice, and supplementary information sheets, are available from the British Hallmarking Council at the address below.

Q7. What should I do if offered goods with an unfamiliar mark, or if I have any other queries?

A7. Further advice and guidance will be available to business from a number of sources including:

Trading Standards Service

who have responsibility for enforcing both the new and the existing controls;

British Hallmarking Council
St Phillips House
St Phillips Place
Birmingham B3 2PP

a new guidance note has been prepared, as has an updated hallmarking notice for display by dealers;

<http://www.britishhallmarkingcouncil.gov.uk/publications/hallmarksprecious2.pdf>

Trade Associations

if you are a member; and

Assay Offices

Can be found in Birmingham, Edinburgh, London and Sheffield. The address for the Edinburgh Assay Office is:

The Assay Office,
28 Broughton Street,
Edinburgh EH1 3RH
Phone: 0131 556 1144
Fax: 0131 556 1177

This is not an authoritative document on the law and is only intended for guidance.

For a copy of this document on audio cassette, in large print or Braille, or if you require assistance in reading this, please contact the Council's Policy Unit.

Shetland Islands Council Policy Unit
Town Hall, Hillhead, Lerwick, Shetland ZE1 0HB

Tel: 01595 744537

Email: policy@shetland.gov.uk

This document is also available at www.shetland.gov.uk/tradingstandards

Do you require the services of an interpreter?

If you do, please contact **01595 744537** for assistance.

We will provide an interpreter, or we can supply the document in your choice of language.

你是否需要傳譯服務?

如果需要，請致電 01595 744537 尋求幫助。

我們會通當地為你安排傳譯人員或者提供你需要文字的文件。

ਕੀ ਤੁਹਾਨੂੰ ਕਿਸੇ ਇੰਟਰਪਰੈਟਰ (ਤੁਭਾਸ਼ੀਆ) ਦੀਆਂ ਸੇਵਾਵਾਂ ਦੀ ਲੋੜ ਹੈ?

ਜੇਕਰ ਤੁਹਾਨੂੰ ਲੋੜ ਹੈ ਤਾਂ ਕ੍ਰਿਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਸਹਾਇਤਾ ਲਈ 01595 744537 ਤੇ ਸੰਪਰਕ ਕਰੋ।

ਜਿਥੇ ਸੰਭਵ ਹੋ ਸਕਿਆ ਇੰਟਰਪਰੈਟਰ ਉਪਲਬਧ ਕਰਵਾਇਆ ਜਾਏਗਾ ਜਾਂ ਤੁਹਾਡੀ ਪਸੰਦ ਵਾਲੀ ਭਾਸ਼ਾ ਵਿਚ ਦਸਤਾਵੇਜ਼ ਭੇਜਿਆ ਜਾਏਗਾ।

আপনি কি একজন দোভাষীর সাহায্য চান ?

যদি আপনার প্রয়োজন থাকে তাহলে অনুগ্রহ করে যোগাযোগ করুন -01595 744537 যেখানে সম্ভব সেখানে একজন দোভাষীর ব্যবস্থা করা হবে অথবা আপনি যে ভাষাতে চা দলীলটি অনুবাদ করে আপনাকে প্রদান করা হবে।

کیا آپ کو انٹریپرٹری کی ضرورت ہے؟

اگر ایسا ہے تو پھر (انٹریپرٹری) مدد حاصل کرنے کیلئے فون نمبر 01595 744537 پر بات کریں۔

جہاں ممکن ہو اوہاں انٹریپرٹری کی سہولت فراہم کی جائے گی یا پھر (مطلوبہ) دستہ ویز کارترجمہ آپ کی

پسندیدہ زبان میں فراہم کیا جائے گا۔