

Client: Lindsay Ephgrave PR
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| Ethical Jeweller

Setting a good example

Harriet Kelsall Jewellery Design has just become the first independent jeweller in the UK to achieve RJC certification. No walk in the park... but well worth the effort on so many levels, as she is keen to explain.

During the past couple of years, almost every issue of this magazine has included a news story giving the names of businesses that have achieved certification from the Responsible Jewellery Council. The honourable roll call has included more than a few diamond manufacturers and some globally renowned retail brands... all very encouraging developments.

However, this might give the impression that jumping through the necessary hoops to achieve this recognition of ethical compliance is only possible if you're one of the 'big boys'. It might also seem as though RJC certification isn't something that a small, independent jeweller (or even a UK-based multiple) need concern himself with – particularly if the process is difficult or onerous.

Well, just to put a lie to this premise, it can be announced that last month Harriet Kelsall Jewellery Design, an independent business that cannot boast an outlet in

Bond or Sloane Streets, has passed the various appraisals and audits to achieve certification. It is, in fact, the first independent jewellers in the UK to do so and Harriet Kelsall herself is extremely keen that very many others will follow her lead. "I feel that I am trail-blazing something really important so that small businesses won't get left behind," she says.

"It isn't enough for a company which wants to be ethical to simply stock Fairtrade gold and think that is enough to tick their 'ethical' box," she adds. "It is important for us to do this – but we need to do even better than that. Holding your business up

against a set of guidelines, showing an example of a good company behaving well is also important – as are many other aspects of our behavior within this industry."

Call her evangelical, but Kelsall is so convinced that RJC certification is "an



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excellent initiative" that she is more than happy to do what she can to help other small businesses tackle the processes involved. "We would strongly urge other organisations in the industry to strive for it," she says.

"My feeling is that if we smaller businesses don't get involved in this, we put ourselves at a disadvantage because bigger ones will be able to say "look, we're responsible – we've had an audit to prove it".

"In fact the smaller companies might actually be more responsible and should, in theory, find it easier to prove," she adds. "My worry is that smaller businesses might get frightened off and left at a disadvantage because of this."

So, with the final audit and the preparation for it is still fresh in her mind (and in the minds of her whole team!) Kelsall offers this outline and guide to gaining certification in the sincere hope that others will be encouraged to follow her example.

No excuses

"I often hear people say things like 'Oh, I don't think the RJC thing is worth doing'. This is an utter cop-out!" she says. "They feel it's going to be too hard and don't want to think about it. They may have got as far as downloading the RJC documents and felt out of their depth – it's 'too difficult'.

"It's true that the documents are written in 'corporate speak' and appear complicated, but that's no reason not to do it. It's the sort of language that usually has people like me run screaming in the opposite direction – but I have proved that it's possible to do.

I know that the NAG and the BJA together are looking at ways to simplify the documentation... once they have gathered enough members from both organisations who are keen to get certified.

"There is also a body of opinion that feels the RJC was set up by many of the businesses which may have historically done the most 'ethical harm' in the jewellery industry. This is a different sort of cop-out. The fact, if true, isn't relevant. What does it matter who set it up? And if these companies are now taking steps in the right direction, that can't be a bad thing. Better late than never, surely?

"If you're reading this and thinking that we must be a company with time on our hands, having managed to achieve certification – think again! We're lucky enough to be incredibly busy, but I really wanted to check that we were behaving responsibly," Kelsall adds.

The process

"Essentially, all you have to do is think through your whole business and cover off all areas carefully," she says. "Things to check are:

- you have a 'procedure' where one is needed
 - you're obeying employment law
 - you are behaving responsibly in matters such as money laundering, bribery, conflict diamonds, health and safety, hazardous chemicals etc. Check all of these with a fine tooth comb!
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- you communicate with your team – make sure that everyone understands the important issues like conflict diamonds and product integrity. The latter includes issues like treatments – we hadn't been detailing exactly what treatment had occurred to a diamond for instance. We went through



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our stock and made sure this was more clearly described. I'm pleased we have done this because it's sensible – now we can be confident that we

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aren't accidentally misleading a customer into thinking that a colour-treated diamond is natural.

- training has been completed for all staff and it is properly recorded.
- you have a business partner protocol. For us this was a change from an informal understanding of which supplier has what ethics etc, into a

spreadsheet detailing who has what position. This is not insisted upon by the RJC – but our own approach.

A self-audit

“Ahead of the certification audit we needed to perform a self-audit which took our general manager a full working week to do. This was to check all 114 of the RJC's questions against what we had in place.

- The team were briefed in advance about who might be asked what by the auditor. This was helpful and served to really improve the understanding on these areas of the business.
- We checked and researched new changes to the law.
- Preparation is critical. Our general manager created a folder which took the auditor through each question and provided copies of evidence for them.

He also created his own working document for the code of practices, which was more 'user-friendly' than the RJC 'self-assessment' booklet

- We would advise a 'final countdown process' as this really helped build momentum and we felt a sense of everyone being 'up for it' and wanting to do well.

The audit

“This took a day in our HQ and another day in our second branch. For the latter the auditor chose a selection of questions, but you have to prepare everything as you cannot assume what will be asked. In our case a lot of attention was paid to HR and money-laundering (the non-jewellery areas) and less on product integrity and conflict diamonds – this was probably due to the auditor's expertise and comfort zone.

In all I would estimate that it took 10-15 working days from looking at the documentation to completing the audit. The cost of the audit was £1,200 and around £100 in expenses. It should also be stressed that most of what you have to do, genuinely needs to be done anyway.”

With all of the above in mind, Kelsall feels jewellers need to think about what they really want as a jewellery industry. “Do we want to make sure we are behaving as responsibly as we can? Yes”, she says. “Does it make sense for there to be a list of things about our business which I should look over so that I can check I am behaving responsibly – by comparing my business to examples of 'good practice' from responsible businesses. Yes. This is all that the RJC is about – it is as simple as that.”

It may have felt hard-going at times but in the final analysis Kelsall clearly feels that the effort has been worth it. “It is certainly a robust review of a business which has left me feeling much more confident about



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areas of the business which had previously been a bit woolly or which were reliant on information in my head rather than something simple written down showing how things should be done," she says.

And there's no doubt that the industry as a whole will ultimately benefit from the RJC's initiative. "The first independent jeweller achieving RJC certification is very important – especially within the current industry context," says BJA CEO Simon Rainer. "The last decade has seen considerable change in the jewellery sector. Many more miners, raw material processors, designers and jewellers want to act responsibly and ethically, and with due respect for the planet and the people that populate it," says Michael Hoare, the NAG's CEO. "In that time there has also been a flourishing of ethical initiatives touching on all levels and segments of the sector. However the supply chain is complex with a proliferation of companies and individuals playing their part in bringing products to market. The result is a web of sometimes complementary, sometimes conflicting, and often overlapping schemes, each with their own priorities, time scales, and ultimate objectives," he adds. "The RJC is the first to bring an integrated certification scheme from mine to retail, and Harriet is in the vanguard of UK retailers achieving that standard." ■

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The first British jeweller to receive the honour

The first UK-based retailer to achieve RJC certification was F Hinds. “We didn’t see any direct commercial benefit, but felt it was the ‘right thing to do’. Just because somebody is involved in business doesn’t mean they don’t have the same view of right and wrong as those looking in from outside. We felt that the RJC was an excellent initiative and were keen to support it,” comments Andrew Hinds, director and diamond buyer. “The whole thing was not too onerous given the scope of the RJC’s ambit – the codes of practice took some time to digest and process, but this was helped by the assessment criteria spreadsheet which was very easy to use, albeit somewhat lengthy.

“Our auditors were extremely efficient and friendly – a joy to work with, taking a lot of worry out of the process. Effective communication between the company and the auditors is very much a key to certification, and being organised prior to their visit. The RJC, in particular Anna Leach, were very helpful in the build up to certification and are literally at hand to answer any questions or queries,” he adds.

“There were some minor changes we had to make which have since been implemented. Many of these made sense and formed part of the auditor’s recommendations rather than the assessment criteria – more a case of someone with a fresh, untainted perspective looking at how we do business and suggesting a different way of performing certain tasks and functions. Overall, it was quite a positive experience.”



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Beaverbrooks also achieves certification

Another UK retailer to have received RJC certification is Beaverbrooks. "We were one of the first retailers to support the RJC when we joined in 2009. This was driven by our desire to play a part in building consumer confidence within the industry while purchasing diamond and gold jewellery," says buyer Phillip McBride. "In recent years we have spent a lot of time developing a greater understanding of the purpose of our business. We worked out which values we feel are key to our business – Integrity, Passion & Caring. We also developed a list of 'behaviours' giving people real clarity as to 'how people are supposed to act around here'. We quickly realised that being part of the RJC and working within their 'code of practices' complements and fits very nicely into our 'values and beliefs'. We actively encourage all of our suppliers to support the RJC code of practices too – we feel that achieving the accreditation can only further help strengthen this cause.

"Initially the idea of the self assessment was a little daunting and we thought it could be time consuming. However, once we had developed a strategy it was actually very interesting and enjoyable to analyse every area of the business and it was a good reminder of all the great things that we already do well," he explains.

"Having certification means we have a very strong message to give to all our customer-facing team members; they can now confidently say we work within the 'code of practices' of the RJC and we support ethical sourcing practices through the supply chain. We feel this is vital in order to build consumer confidence within our precious industry."