



Assurance System Change Protocol

About this document

The RJC provides instructions for accredited audit firms and auditors that establish minimum requirements for the audit process and accreditation programme. The key assurance scheme documents that capture the RJC's requirements are:

- [Assessment Manual v1.3, December 2020](#)
- [Accreditation Process and Criteria v1.0](#), October 2019
- [Auditor Application Form v1.0](#), October 2019

The following sections describe the RJC's procedures and processes for reviewing and updating these scheme documents. As an ISEAL alliance member, the RJC is committed to upholding the Credibility Principles, which are incorporated at every stage of our operations, whereby transparency and engagement are essential to the change process in assurance. The purpose of these changes is to improve the assurance system by increasing clarity, consistency, and effectiveness in the audit process and accreditation programme. This protocol is the equivalent for assurance to the RJC's [Standards Setting Procedure](#).

1. Recording known improvements

The RJC maintains two spreadsheets ("logs") for recording known improvements to the Assessment Manual and Accreditation Criteria. Known improvements to the assurance system may be suggested by any stakeholder, but usually are identified by accredited auditors and from within the RJC team. These spreadsheets are accessible to the entire RJC team, and the improvements are logged consistently using the layout provided.

2. Prioritisation

On a biannual basis, the Assurance Manager will review the known improvement logs and hold an internal workshop where necessary involving relevant teams that have logged substantive changes. The purpose of the internal workshop is to collectively review and agree on the prioritisation of all substantive changes. This also creates an opportunity for teams to collaborate on resolving cross-departmental improvements. Prioritisation of improvements is based on a criteria of business need, volume of feedback, strategic alignment to other projects, and internal capacity to address. The prioritised improvements are then summarised to the Executive Director, who conducts a final review and authorises the planning stage for all improvements that have been signed off.

3. Stakeholder consultation

Stakeholders are defined as members, member employees, accredited auditors, or third parties with a material interest in the Member Certification under the Code of Practices (COP), or Chain of Custody (CoC) Certification, such as community groups, non-government organisations, retailers, and trade unions.

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The prioritised substantive improvements should first go through consultation with the RJC Assurance Committee, who approve or suggest amendments to the proposed plan and solutions. At this stage, the Committee may also object to any of the improvements.

The RJC conducts Auditor Roundtables on a quarterly basis, and substantive improvements must be discussed through this forum at a minimum twice when the initial solution has been drafted, and when the document is in final draft.

Further targeted consultation with other stakeholder groups, or public consultation may be sought as agreed with the Assurance Committee.

4. Revision and document control

In order to maintain a clear and accurate record of all changes made throughout the review period, these must be carried out in accordance with the instructions described here.

4.1 Marking changes

Changes must be clearly and consistently marked in draft scheme documents, making full use of the tracked changes and comment functionalities in Word. The classification protocol detailed in table 1 must be followed, with the rationale, context, and impact for substantive changes recorded. This is illustrated below with an example.

| | |
|--|-----------------------|
| RJC audits except retail | |
| | Recertification audit |
| | 1 |
| | 2 |
| | 2 |
| | 3 |
| | 4 |
| | <u>4</u> |

LF **Leonor Fishman** November 05, 2020
SUBSTANTIVE CHANGE

IMPACT: New intent

RATIONALE: To capture retail site sampling within this table as there are currently no requirements, and thus creates inconsistency. This is also needed to fully conform to ISEAL Assurance COGP v2 criteria 5.1.3.

CONTEXT: The table largely follows a square root approach, as per IAF and ISO – so there is continuity.

Reply
 Resolve

Table 1 – change classification

| Change type | Impact | Change procedure | Example |
|-------------|--|--|---|
| Substantive | New intent or modification of previous intent of a clause, provision, or requirement | Stakeholder consultation and Assurance Committee sign-off required | New requirement that affects the audit process |
| Minor | No change to intent of the clause, provision, or requirement | RJC management review and approval only | Typographic error, revised phrasing for clarification that does not change intent |

4.2 Consistency checks

To avoid duplication and conflicting changes across the RJC’s scheme documents, all substantive changes must be reviewed by at least one other department that works with or is familiar with those requirements. Where the change to an assurance requirement affects or is conflictive to a requirement in Standards, Certification, Membership, or Impacts – this must be resolved. Where the other scheme

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documents are not under review, and therefore it is not possible to update to account for the change, the assurance change cannot go ahead and must be postponed until it can be implemented without conflicts.

5. Impact assessments

Impact assessments must be conducted for all substantive changes to account for unintended consequences and evaluate whether the intended beneficial outcome will be achieved. The RJC will develop a simple and straightforward framework for all impact assessments to follow the same approach.

6. Effective dates and implementation

The RJC will establish effective dates for when scheme documents come into effect. These effective dates will allow for stakeholders to become familiar with the changes prior to having to implement them. Where necessary, RJC can support stakeholders in understanding the difference between the previous and new requirements, which may be done through auditor training modules or virtual workshops. As a general rule, at least three months should be provided between the publication date and the effective date of any assurance document. Where the change affects the audit process, from the effective date all certification and recertification audits conducted must be against the new requirements. Where the change affects accreditation, all new submissions must be against the new requirements.

7. Stakeholder communication

Clear and simple messaging to stakeholders on forthcoming and effective changes to the audit process and accreditation is essential to the transparency and accessibility of the assurance system. A Summary of Changes will be published alongside the new document where substantive changes have been brought into effect. The Summary of Changes details the following information related to each substantive change to guide stakeholders:

- Clause or section
- Previous wording
- New wording
- Impact
- Rationale for change

8. Frequency of review

Given the speed of changes to technology, consumer expectations on sustainability, and the legislative environment on assurance, the RJC aims to review relevant scheme documents every three years. As detailed in section 2 above, prioritisation of known improvements takes place biannually – although the bigger substantive changes may require projects to fully understand and address and therefore take years to resolve. Additionally, it is more efficient to group changes and bring them in at the same time, both for the benefit of auditors and members (reviews that are too frequent can create confusion as to which requirements are in vigour). The RJC will make every effort to future-proof assurance scheme documents to avoid making changes on an annual basis, however, more frequent updates may occasionally be necessary.

For questions or feedback relating to the RJC assurance system, or to raise an improvement, please contact the Assurance Manager on +44 (0)20 7321 0992 or email accreditation@responsiblejewellery.com.

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