

British Hallmarking Council ("the Council")

Guidance on Fineness Description

BACKGROUND

During 2012 and 2013, the assay offices received an increasing number of consumer, trading standards and trade enquiries concerning descriptions being used in relation to articles consisting of gold, silver, platinum and palladium. These enquiries referred to descriptions such as 'gold', 'silver', 'platinum' or 'palladium' where there was no reference to the fineness of the metal. For example

- "Platinum wedding ring"
- "Palladium wedding ring"
- "Real silver earrings"
- "Solid gold ring"

These enquiries were considered by the Technical Committee of the Council. The precious metal content of articles (i.e. the fineness of the precious metal) can vary and is identified in a hallmark by reference to a numerical range ("millesimal" finenesses). For example, the fineness of gold articles ranges from 375/9ct to 999/24ct. Fineness can alternatively be identified in a hallmark by using an approved term, such as "Sterling". The fineness of the article determines the value of that article, which in turn determines the price. In the Council's opinion, therefore, descriptions used by retailers and others in the course of a business that do not include reference to a specific fineness standard are incomplete and potentially misleading. The Council has therefore issued this Guidance Note for all those in the supply chain.

GUIDANCE

2.1 The statutory provision relating to fineness

Schedule 1 of The Hallmarking Act 1973 ("the Act") makes specific provision for the use of the words "gold", "silver", "platinum" and "palladium" but does not stipulate that the precious metal description must identify the fineness standard of an article.

Schedule II Part 1, details the compulsory information to be provided in a statutory hallmark and the recognised millesimal finenesses for each precious metal. Schedule 1 Part III specifies the traditional fineness descriptions. The following finenesses and traditional descriptions are acceptable:

Precious metal name	Available fineness/Traditional fineness description
Silver	999/Fine Silver 958/Britannia 925/Sterling 800
Gold	999/Fine gold/24ct 990

Precious metal name	Available fineness/Traditional fineness description
	916/22ct 750/18ct 585/14ct 375/9ct
Palladium	999/Fine palladium 950 500
Platinum	999/Fine platinum 950 900 850

RECOMMENDATION

Although the Act does not require descriptions of precious metals to include information regarding the standard of fineness, the Council recommends the following good practice in the interests of protecting consumers:

3.1 Description

- When the word 'gold', 'silver', 'platinum' or 'palladium' is used in the description of a precious metal article, it should always be accompanied with a specific millesimal fineness or an approved fineness description as provided by the Act and listed in the table above.
- The millesimal fineness or approved fineness description must be accurate and consistent with the statutory hallmark.
- Other terms like 'real' and "genuine" may be used in addition to the metal type and fineness if they are accurate and appropriate, but a millesimal fineness or an approved fineness description must also appear within the article description e.g. 'real 18ct gold earring' or 'solid sterling silver pendant'.
- This guidance also applies to all gold, silver, platinum and palladium articles including lightweight items that are under the exemption weight and do not need to be hallmarked. In the circumstances, consumers have no means of knowing the precious-metal fineness standard if it is not included accurately in the description. The 'exemption' is an exemption from the requirement to be hallmarked, not from the requirements of the remainder of the Hallmarking Act 1973 as relevant, nor from consumer protection legislation.

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