

Certification & Assurance Manager

Starting Date: As soon as possible

Contract type: Permanent

Salary: UK: £50,000- £55,000 per annum; Switzerland: CHF 93,000- 97,000 per annum (commensurate with experience)

Location: London or Geneva preferred; exceptional candidates in other locations will be considered

Application closing date: 27 November 2022. Applicants may be contacted on a rolling basis

Background

Are you a systems thinker, who tackles problems with logic and innovation? Are you able to find compromises, even when they seem impossible? Do you thrive on a balance of both analytical work and direct stakeholder collaboration? If so, read on!

Better Cotton, the world's largest cotton sustainability programme, is growing and we are looking for a forward-thinking **Certification & Assurance Manager** to join our team. Our mission is to help cotton communities survive and thrive, while protecting and restoring the environment. Through our network of field-level partners we have trained over 2.5 million farmers - from the smallest to the largest – across 23 countries in more sustainable farming practices.

The Standards & Assurance function forms a key part of the Better Cotton Standard System, which works together to drive field-level sustainability improvements. To ensure that Better Cotton farmers meet our standard for sustainable cotton, we operate a unique [assurance model](#) which balances rigour, flexibility, and value. Since more than 99% of our farmers are smallholder family farms, our assurance system does much more than assessments and licensing. It also aims to support farmers and Partners with key information and systems to drive improvements.

About this role

Better Cotton is in an exciting stage of growth and the Certification & Assurance Manager will play a key role in supporting the future evolution of our assurance systems. This includes:

1. Designing and testing innovations to improve credibility and efficiency of our assurance approach, including e.g. landscape level assurance, use of external data sets, combined audits or joint certification schemes, etc.
2. Leading the set-up of assurance activities for new country start-ups, where Better Cotton aims to establish new programmes (including West Africa, but potentially other regions)

3. Supporting our strategic benchmarked partners (in Brazil, Australia, and elsewhere) to establish and maintain alignment with the Better Cotton farm-level standard and assurance requirements

The ideal candidate will have experience in designing assurance, audit, or certification systems, and will be a strategic thinker with a pragmatic attitude to getting things done. This is an important role that will provide leadership and vision for the central assurance team (approx. 7 staff) and the Better Cotton assurance teams in country (approx. 40 staff).

Dependent on COVID considerations, this role will involve periodic long-haul travel to cotton growing countries (e.g., 2-3 trips per year), and occasional travel within Europe or between Better Cotton headquarter offices (London and Geneva).

Responsibilities

The main areas of responsibility include:

1. Supporting the further evolution of the assurance model, to ensure it remains efficient, credible, and innovative

- Assess current strengths and gaps in the existing assurance model; initiate recommendations to improve the efficiency, consistency, and credibility of this model
- Proactively engage with ISEAL members, auditors, and other stakeholders to follow developments and apply best practice concepts
- Initiate and lead specific projects to test, innovate, and improve assurance delivery; including project and budget management, stakeholder engagement and outcome reporting
- Initiate and/or collaborate with other colleagues to oversee projects to evolve Better Cotton's technology tools and databases
- Identify and build high-impact partnerships that will aid in the design or delivery of effective assurance

2. Ensuring consistent, high-quality assurance operations at a global level

This will include:

Operational management of assurance team for existing Better Cotton programmes

- For a designated set of countries, provide 'matrix management' to the Assurance teams in country. This includes supporting the teams to plan and deliver assurance activities, and working closely with them to anticipate local risks and design good solutions

Reviewing assessment reports and accountability for licensing decisions

- Be accountable for final licensing decisions for Better Cotton producers. This includes reviewing assessment reports, raising comments, and providing final oversight on licensing decisions

Capacity building and calibration of assessors

- Plan and deliver periodic training to verifiers and other stakeholders to ensure they have the skills and competencies required

- Design and implement improved processes to monitor assessor performance, recruit and retain good verifiers and improve auditing practices

Effective resourcing and planning of the assurance programme

- Feed into the annual planning and budgeting for assurance functions at headquarters level and support country-teams in planning/ budgeting process
- Oversee regular reviews of the assurance programme and identify investments needed to close these gaps

3. Leading the successful launch of assurance activities in Better Cotton ‘new country start-up’ regions

- Collaborate closely with Better Cotton programme teams and local Programme Partners (implementing organisations) to establish and monitor timelines and budgets for assurance set-up in new countries
- Build relationships with key stakeholders, e.g., third party verifiers, existing certification schemes, technical experts, etc. to support the set-up of assurance activities
- Lead the recruitment, contracting, training, and monitoring of third-party verifiers and Better Cotton assessors, including field-level shadow visits
- Identify specific assurance or implementation risks; identify and implement (with senior guidance) strategies to mitigate these risks

4. Supporting successful engagement with strategic benchmarked partners

- Oversee, with dedicated consultancy and internal support, the process to benchmark strategic partners against the Better Cotton farm level standard, including engagement with stakeholders and identifying gaps and potential solutions
- Support the Partnerships lead in regular communication and engagement with strategic partners, including identifying and addressing key risks or opportunities
- Lead efforts to monitor benchmarked partner assurance, to ensure any credibility risks are minimised. This includes periodic oversight of assurance reports and procedures developed by our partners, as well as potential field visits to observe assessments

The Certification & Assurance Manager will also be asked to work on other strategic and cross-functional projects and initiatives, as capacity allows.

Profile

The selected candidate will have the following skills, knowledge, and experience:

Skills, Knowledge, and Experience
<i>Essential</i>
University degree, or equivalent higher education qualification, in a relevant field

Skills, Knowledge, and Experience
<i>Essential</i>
Valuable work experience with a substantial timeframe in relevant field (standards and certification, auditing, sustainable development, etc.)
Fluent in English with very strong written and verbal communication skills
Experience of project management in an international context
Excellent understanding of what constitutes credible and scalable assurance in the context of global commodity value chains
Strong understanding of basic auditing approaches and principles
Balance of strategic thinking with attention to detail
Superior skills and aptitude to appraise arguments critically and logically, organise ideas in a clear manner, and draw conclusions and formulate arguments in way that is effective, concise, and specific
Experience in line management, especially across different cultures and geographies
Proven ability to collaborate effectively across different teams and cultures; strong relationship building skills and service-oriented attitude
Good communication skills with the ability to communicate clearly and concisely, as well as the ability to assimilate and process information for wide-ranging audiences.
Proven ability to work autonomously with a high level of personal effectiveness and ability to adapt to changing priorities
Excellent computer and IT skills, including Word; PowerPoint; Excel, Outlook (Microsoft Suite)
<i>Desirable</i>
Academic background in rural/agricultural development, sustainability, or related field
Direct experience working with farmers or farming communities
Advanced numerical skills and experience in analysing large data sets
Experience with Sharepoint, PowerBI (Microsoft Suite), and/or Salesforce
Competency in languages most relevant to Better Cotton countries, e.g. Hindi, Urdu, Mandarin, French, Portuguese and Turkish
Experience working on fundraising proposals and projects

Working arrangements

This is a full time (40 hours per week) position; part-time (i.e., 80%) positions can be considered. This is a permanent role with an initial three-month probation period. The position will likely be split between remote work and office, following government guidelines and in line with our flexible working policy.

Applications

Interested applicants with the required attributes are asked to send, in English, a detailed CV and a brief cover letter (2 pages maximum) to Better Cotton by applying [via this link](#).



Application deadline: 27 November 2022

Only candidates short-listed for a telephone interview will be contacted. Better Cotton is an equal opportunity employer and is committed to good practice and transparency in the management of natural, human, and financial resources.

Better Cotton has a zero tolerance approach to any attitudes or behaviours that put children or adults at risk of harm. Safeguarding incidents are acts of serious misconduct and are grounds for disciplinary action, up to and including, dismissal and referral to relevant authorities for criminal prosecution.