

Arboricultural Association

APPROVED CONTRACTOR (AC) HANDBOOK



Arboricultural
ASSOCIATION

trees.org.uk

The home of tree care

CONTENTS

1. Introduction

The Arboricultural Association	3
The Approved Contractor Scheme	3
Approved Utility Contractors.....	3

2. What, why, who, how?

What is an AC?	5
Why become an AC?	5
Who can become an AC?	5
How to become an AC?.....	6
How much does it cost?	6

3. The Standard

Summary	7
Technical requirements	7
Business size	7
Insurance	8
Managers	8
Other accreditations	8
Non-compliance	8

4. Applying for AC status

Summary	9
Assessors	9
Assessment duration	9
Application.....	9
Outcomes	10
Appeal.....	11

5. Maintaining AC status

Summary	13
Reassessments.....	13
Outcomes	14
Additional and early Reassessments ..	16
Online Reassessments	16
Desktop Audits.....	16
Spot checks	17

6. Non-compliance

Summary	18
Expectations of an AC	18
Identification of non-compliance	18
Logo misuse	18
The Code of Conduct & Ethics.....	19
The Complaints Procedure.....	19

Arboricultural Association,

The Malthouse, Stroud Green, Standish, Stonehouse, Gloucestershire GL10 3DL

Tel: +44 (0)1242 522152
Email: arbac@trees.org.uk
Web: www.trees.org.uk

Version 1 – May 2023

Arboricultural Association Ltd.
A company registered in England at The Malthouse, Stroud Green,
Standish, Stonehouse, Gloucestershire GL10 3DL, UK.
Company number 4070377.

The Arboricultural Association is a registered charity no. 1083845.

Copyright © Arboricultural Association 2023. All rights reserved.

Cover image: Sam McCree, Boward Tree Surgery (Oxford) Ltd.

Inner images: Simeon Balsam, except on page 6 which comes from

Technical Guide 1: Tree Climbing and Aerial Rescue

INTRODUCTION

Arboriculture:

“the science and practice of the cultivation, establishment and management of amenity trees for the benefit of society”.

- The Arboricultural Association
- The Approved Contractor Scheme
- Approved Utility Contractors

The Arboricultural Association

1.1 As the leading voice on all matters arboricultural in the UK, the Arboricultural Association (the Association) provides a home and membership for all those employed within the sector. The Association's vision is ***Inspiring, supporting and promoting the tree care community for a society that better appreciates and cares for trees.*** The Strategic Plan can be downloaded from the Association's website at www.trees.org.uk.

1.2 The Association provides the standards, training, support and recognition that put our members, in the UK and overseas, at the peak of their profession. We work in partnership with other organisations and stakeholders to achieve successful results for our membership and the wider profession.

1.3 In addition to being a professional membership organisation and industry standards body, the Association is also a registered charity with the aim of educating and informing the general public in matters related to trees, the environment and conservation, providing advocacy and advice and undertaking research for the benefit of the public.



The Approved Contractor Scheme

1.4 The Association administers the Approved Contractor (AC) Accreditation Scheme. The purpose of the AC Scheme is to

raise standards in arboricultural practice across the profession by encouraging contractors to meet robust requirements that relate to the quality of tree work, health and safety, professional standards, and good business and customer care practices. The accreditation is applied to a business (with a named Manager: see Section 3) and not an individual arborist.

1.5 It is important to recognise that there are many very good arboricultural contractors all over the country who do not hold AC accreditation; the fact that a contractor is not an AC should not be seen as an indication that they are not a good contractor. However, it is only good contractors who make it onto the AC Scheme.

1.6 The AC Scheme is managed by the Association's Business Development Manager under the direction of the Chief Executive Officer. The AC Scheme and its management processes are ISO 9001 (2015) certified.

1.7 The key values of the Scheme are:

- High-quality tree care.
- High-quality customer care.
- Compliance with current health and safety legislation
- Compliance with the law.
- Good business practice.

1.8 The requirements of the AC Scheme can be simply defined as high-quality tree work, undertaken safely and legally, combined with high-quality customer care.



Approved Utility Contractors

1.9 Some arboricultural contractors work predominantly in the utility arboriculture sector, working on railways, highways and waterways, or alongside electricity or telecommunications infrastructure. Whilst utility arboriculture requires many of the same skills as amenity arboriculture, there are some specific additional considerations to be taken into account whilst working with utilities.

1.10 To reflect this fact, some ACs are designated as Utility Approved Contractors and go through a specific assessment process to reflect the nature of their work. The differences between utility and amenity arboriculture mean that there is a separate Standard for Utility ACs. However, unless otherwise stated, when this Handbook refers to the AC Scheme or the Accreditation Scheme it should be regarded as applying to the Amenity and Utility sides of the Scheme.

1.11 For the purposes of the AC Scheme, the utility arboriculture sector includes five sectors: rail, electrical, waterways, telecoms and high-speed roads. ACs working in the utility sector can seek accreditation in as many of these elements as they require. The increased complexity of achieving accreditation in multiple elements is reflected in the duration and cost of the assessment process for these ACs.



WHAT, WHY, WHO, HOW?

- What is an AC?
- Why become an AC?
- Who can become an AC?
- How to become an AC?
- How much does it cost?

What is an AC?

2.1 Arboriculture in the UK is not a directly regulated profession. Tree work is a highly technical job which requires appropriate skills, knowledge, attitudes, training and experience. The Association believes that it would be in the best interests of arboricultural contractors, the general public, tree owners and managers, and the trees themselves if arboriculture were to be effectively regulated by government. However, this is not currently the case.

2.2 In the absence of regulation, in the UK the AC Accreditation Scheme is the only recognised way of identifying arboricultural contractors who have achieved the required professional standard in health and safety, customer care and tree work.

- 2.3 An AC is a business that:
- has been successfully assessed by the Association;
 - has agreed to comply with the rules and procedures of the Scheme;
 - has met and continues to uphold the Scheme Standard; *and*
 - has met and continues to uphold the Association's Code of Conduct & Ethics.

Why become an AC?

2.4 There are many benefits to the AC Accreditation Scheme – for contractors, for tree owners and managers, and for the trees themselves and the communities which benefit from them.

2.5 The benefits to the contractor:

- A mark of quality for contractors.
- A way of ensuring you maintain high standards and follow good practice.
- Peace of mind, knowing you are performing to the required standard.
- Being able to charge a professional fee for a professional service.
- Access to tender for contracts which are only available to ACs.
- Qualify as a Registered Business with TrustMark (Government-endorsed scheme).
- SSIP (Safety Schemes in Procurement) accreditation.
- Use of the appropriate AC logos.
- A listing in the Association's 'Find a professional' online directory.
- Other benefits associated with membership of the Association, such as discounted insurance and Association training.

2.6 The benefits to tree owners and managers:

- Peace of mind when engaging an arboricultural professional.
- Guidance and support when tendering in an unregulated profession.
- Recourse to the Association's Code of Conduct & Ethics if required.

2.7 The benefits to trees and wider society:

- The importance of amenity trees to society is increasingly understood by the general

public, politicians and industry. We know that trees bring a multitude of environmental, social and economic benefits, but they need to be cared for appropriately in order to fulfil this potential. The AC Accreditation Scheme helps ensure that these important assets are treated with the professionalism and care that they require, helping them to survive and thrive now and in the future.

Who can become an AC?

2.8 AC status is awarded to many different types and sizes of business working in professional arboriculture and undertaking tree work. To be eligible to apply to become an AC a business must meet all of the following criteria:

- Comprise a minimum of two people (which may be a sole trader and a subcontract labourer). There is no maximum size.
- Undertake most of its work with its own staff, whether employed or self-employed. Subcontracting work to other businesses is acceptable as long as work is normally undertaken in-house.
- Employ at least one manager (likely to be the main point of contact for the Association and the individual accountable for compliance and any complaints).
- Have appropriate insurance.
- Have been trading for a minimum of two years (under certain circumstances this may not be required, at the discretion of the Association).



- Comply with the Scheme Standard.

2.9 In order to confirm whether or not a business is eligible to apply to join the Scheme, it may be necessary to contact the Association at arbac@trees.org.uk.

2.10 Before a business applies to join the AC Scheme and requests an assessment, there are ways to help ensure that it is ready. These include attending an AC preparation workshop (where available) or asking the Association for a pre-assessment visit. Contact the Association for details of availability and costs.

2.11 Please note that an existing AC which changes its trading name may normally continue as an AC operating under the new name. However, if an AC goes into liquidation or otherwise ceases trading and the owner/Manager then sets up a new company, that company must apply for AC Accreditation as if it was a first-time applicant.

How to become an AC?

2.12 Initial enquiries about the AC Scheme can be made to the Association's office by email or phone. However, all applications for AC accreditation must be made through the Association's website.

2.13 An application from a prospective AC (the Applicant) is processed as follows:

- a) The Association receives the application and acknowledges receipt.
- b) The Applicant's payment must be received in advance of the start of the Assessment process. Please note that payment of this initial fee does not constitute acceptance onto the AC Scheme.
- c) The Applicant's references (ideally including at least one from a local authority) will be checked, along with the Manager's CV and details.
- d) An Assessment date will be arranged to the mutual

convenience of the Applicant and the Association. Assuming all of the documentation has been submitted correctly, the Assessment date will usually be 8-10 weeks from the date of application.

2.14 Full information about the Assessment process can be found in Section 4 of this Handbook.

How much does it cost?

2.15 In general terms, the fees for the AC Scheme can be broken down as follows:

- Prospective ACs pay an initial Assessment fee.
- Successful Applicants are charged an annual subscription fee (based on business size).
- Unsuccessful Applicants may make a new application. They will be charged for each application and assessment.

2.16 Please check the Association's website for current prices.

THE STANDARD

- Summary
- Technical requirements
- Business size
- Insurance
- Managers
- Other accreditations
- Non-compliance

Summary

3.1 This section summarises the key aspects of the AC Scheme Standard. The full Standard is available on the Association's website. The Standard is updated annually so please check that you are referring to the current version. If you are in any doubt, contact the Association.

3.2 The Standard comprises four modules:

Module 1: Work site safety inspection

Module 2: Work quality inspections and arboricultural knowledge

Module 3: Customer care and office procedures

Module 4: Health and safety management and workplace inspection

3.3 During an Assessment, the depth of investigation in each module can vary according to the size of the business. For example, smaller businesses have to demonstrate fewer work sites than large businesses. Further details can be found in Section 4.

3.4 The Scheme Standard does not include assessment of tree reports because the provision of advice or opinion (other than that involved in the preparation of quotations) is excluded from the AC Scheme. However, where an AC does provide tree reports as part of its business, it will be required to hold appropriate professional indemnity insurance and to submit evidence of this as requested.

3.5 Contractors achieving AC status will normally be audited annually

and reassessed (on site) every other year. The process and the cost of Assessment and Reassessment are linked to business size.

Technical requirements

3.6 The technical requirements of the Scheme can be found in the current Scheme Standard which can be downloaded from the Association's website.

Business size

3.7 The AC Scheme recognises that the requirements for health and safety management and compliance will vary for different sizes of business, although the Association does of course insist that all businesses, irrespective of size, operate safely and within the law.

3.8 As a consequence of this there are two different technical Standards for the Amenity side of the AC Scheme: one which applies to businesses with fewer than five staff, and one which applies to businesses with five or more staff. Details relating to this can be found within the Standards, which are available on the Association's website.

3.9 There are four categories of business size in the Amenity side of the Scheme (Micro, Small,

Medium and Large) and three categories of business size in the Utility side of the Scheme (Small, Medium and Large). Table 1 shows the staff numbers for each business size.

3.10 When determining which size category relates to your business, please note that the number of staff includes everyone engaged in delivering the arboricultural service, that is:

- the owner/employer/ manager;
- employed arborists and ground staff;
- employed or self-employed administration or office staff; *and*
- labour-only subcontractors (such as freelance climbers).

3.11 If you are in any doubt about who should be included as staff in your calculations, please contact the Association for clarification.

3.12 Where an AC is part of a multi-disciplinary practice – for example, a business which also undertakes landscaping or ecological work – then for the purposes of calculating business size, only those people who work on delivering the arboricultural service will be included in staff numbers.

Table 1: Staff numbers for each business size category.

	Amenity AC	Utility AC
Business size	Number of staff	Number of staff
Micro	1-5	N/A
Small	6-9	1-9
Medium	10-19	10-29
Large	20+	30+

Insurance

- 3.13 An AC must hold, as a minimum:
- public liability insurance of £5m (or higher, if advised by an insurance broker);
 - employers' liability insurance to an appropriate level, commensurate with the size of the business (usually £10m);
 - professional indemnity insurance (where applicable); *and*
 - motor vehicle insurance appropriate to its business use and drivers.
- 3.14 The type of cover in each area must be applicable to arboricultural businesses and must not include any unreasonable exclusion clauses.

Managers

- 3.15 Considerable importance is placed upon the role of the person (or people) in the business who controls the tree work (referred to in the Scheme Standard and this Handbook as the Manager). The Association will hold the Manager responsible for quality control, for employed and subcontracted labour, for the overall control of subcontractors and for the operation of the business in general. This person is also responsible for ensuring compliance with the Scheme Standard at all times.
- 3.16 Depending on its size, the business can nominate up to four Managers. Each may be a director, sole trader, employee or partner.
- 3.17 A Manager **must**:
- be capable of controlling the business/staff and upholding the Scheme Standard; *and*

- have a minimum of five years' experience in arboricultural contracting.

- 3.18 Ideally (but not essentially), a Manager will also:
- be a member of the Association (Technician, Professional or Fellow); *and*
 - hold arboricultural qualifications up to at least QCF Level 2.
- 3.19 Because of the importance of the Manager role, if the named Manager leaves the AC business, the Association must be informed within 28 days and must be given an alternative contact who meets the requirements of a Manager as stated above. Failure to do so may be regarded as non-compliance with the Scheme Standard.

Other accreditations

- 3.20 Upon successful approval as an AC, contractors have the option to access additional accreditations as follows:
- SSIP (Safety Schemes in Procurement) accreditation will automatically be awarded to the AC on successful completion of the annual audit process (please note that this does not apply to ACs working in utility arboriculture).
 - For a small additional fee, ACs can also be registered with TrustMark.
- 3.21 When an AC ceases to be a member of the AC Scheme, it is the responsibility of the contractor to notify the other accrediting bodies to inform them about the business's change in status.

Non-compliance

- 3.22 The Association takes the integrity of the AC Scheme extremely seriously. Any AC found to be in breach of the Scheme Standard or the Code of Conduct & Ethics will be subject to the Association's Complaints Procedure.
- 3.23 Any upheld regulatory breaches (such as successful prosecutions) must be reported to the Association within 28 days of the decision having been reached.
- 3.24 Potential sanctions in the event of a complaint being upheld include suspension or expulsion from the Scheme. The Association reserves the right to remove any AC from the Scheme should it be judged that the Scheme Standard or the Code of Conduct & Ethics has been breached.
- 3.25 Any business falsely claiming to be an AC will be asked to cease and desist the use of the Scheme's logo and name and will be reported to its local Trading Standards department. This includes contractors who have never been part of the Scheme as well as former ACs who have left the Scheme for any reason. Legal action may be taken.
- 3.26 Non-compliance may also result from failure to provide necessary documentation or updates (such as changes to the named Manager) within the required timescales, for both Assessments/Reassessments and Desktop Audits.
- 3.27 More about non-compliance can be found in Section 6 of this Handbook.

APPLYING FOR AC STATUS

- Summary
- Assessors
- Assessment duration
- Application
- Assessment
- Outcomes
- Appeal

Summary

4.1 A key aspect of becoming an AC is the initial Assessment to check compliance with the Standard. Once a contractor becomes an AC, maintaining AC status is achieved through a combination of Reassessments and audits, which are covered in Section 5 of this Handbook.

4.2 The Assessment criteria for the Standard comprise four modules:

Module 1: Work site safety inspection

Module 2: Work quality inspections and arboricultural knowledge

Module 3: Customer care and office procedures

Module 4: Health and safety management and workplace inspection

Assessors

4.3 The success of the AC Scheme is dependent on a network of Assessors who undertake Assessments and Reassessments on behalf of the Association. Assessors are experienced and knowledgeable arboricultural professionals who are trained accordingly, and who aim to be friendly and helpful. The purpose of an Assessment is not to catch a business out, but to help it improve – even if that business does not ultimately achieve AC status.

4.4 Assessors may provide general advice and guidance during an Assessment or Reassessment, or as part of the written report if they think this would be of use. Please note that in order to avoid any perceived conflict of interest,

an Assessor is not allowed to act as an advisor to, or consultant for, the business during an Assessment or Reassessment, and any Assessor who is engaged by an AC in an advisory or consulting capacity will not be allowed to be involved in the Assessment or Reassessment process for that business.

4.5 Assessors are appointed to the role through a system of application and interview. As a minimum requirement, it is expected that Assessors will have:

- a minimum of five years' experience working in arboriculture;
- a strong understanding of the contracting side of arboriculture;
- risk assessment training/experience;
- a health and safety qualification to a minimum of L3 (e.g. NEBOSH NGC);
- an arboriculture qualification to a minimum of L3 (e.g. ND Arb, Tech Cert);
- a good understanding of the AC Scheme and the core criteria requirements of SSIP;

- the potential to work across the amenity and utility sectors;
- a driving licence and their own transport;
- good communication skills;
- good organisational and self-management skills;
- flexibility and approachability; *and*
- good IT skills including report production using MS Word.

Assessment duration

4.6 The duration of an Assessment or Reassessment depends largely on the size of the business and the number of Assessors involved. Table 2 shows the expected duration of an Assessment or Reassessment based on business size, although this should only be regarded as a guide.

4.7 Multiple Assessors may be used where appropriate in order to reduce the total number of Assessment or Reassessment days.

Application

4.8 Before the Assessment stage is reached, an application from a prospective AC (the Applicant) is processed as follows:

Table 2: Expected duration of an Assessment or Reassessment.

Business size	Amenity AC		Utility AC	
	Number of staff	Assessor days	Number of staff	Assessor days
Micro	1-5	1	N/A	N/A
Small	6-9	1	1-9	Minimum 1*
Medium	10-19	2	10-29	Minimum 2*
Large	20+	3	30+	Minimum 3*

*Minimum assessor days for Utility Assessments and Reassessments assume a single element is being assessed. Assessment of multiple elements may require additional Assessor days.



- a) The Applicant applies online.
- b) The Association receives the application and acknowledges receipt.
- c) The Applicant's payment must be received before the Assessment process begins. Please note that payment of this initial fee does not constitute acceptance onto the AC Scheme.
- d) The Applicant will submit the necessary documentation for the Desktop Audit portion of the Assessment. This will include the Applicant's insurance questionnaire.
- e) The Applicant's references (ideally including at least one from a local authority) will be checked.
- f) An Assessment date is arranged to the mutual convenience of the Applicant and the Association. Assuming all of the documentation has been submitted correctly, the Assessment date will usually be 8–10 weeks from the date of application.
- g) On the day(s) of the Assessment, the Assessor(s) will determine the Applicant's compliance with the Standard. This will require access to:
 - the Applicant's office systems and associated paperwork;
 - the Applicant's stores, workshop and yard (if there is one);
 - work sites previously completed by the Applicant; *and*
 - work in progress at a live site.
- h) At the end of the Assessment day(s), the Assessor may choose to inform the Applicant's Manager of the recommendation they will be making to the Association. This is not confirmation of the final outcome and should not be regarded as definitive. Only when the final report is received by the business should the outcome be regarded as final.
- i) The Assessor's report and recommended outcome will be submitted to the Association for review, amendment and/or final approval. Once the outcome is confirmed, the Association will issue the final report to the Applicant, usually within 10 working days.

Outcomes

4.9 Applicants will be notified of the outcome of the Assessment as soon as is reasonably practicable after the date of the Assessment. The intention is to inform the Applicant within 10 working days of the Assessment. (If the Assessment takes more than one day, this 10-day period starts with the final day of the Assessment.) There are three potential outcomes to the Assessment:

- **Pass**
- **Pending**
- **Fail**

4.10 These outcomes and potential next steps are summarised in Table 4 in Section 5.



Pass

- 4.11 A successful Applicant will be informed of the decision and sent the relevant logos and documentation within 28 days of the date of Assessment. New ACs will be added to the online directory and the Association will announce the new AC through social media and the ARB Magazine as appropriate.
- 4.12 As part of the Assessment report, new ACs will be provided with a list of areas for potential improvement which will be referred to during the AC's first Reassessment. This helps ensure that standards are continually improving in the business.

Pending

- 4.13 In some cases the Applicant will fall just short of the Scheme Standard at the time of Assessment, but in such a way that the Assessor and the Association believe the issues can be rectified. Any improvements which are required will be included in the Assessor's report, and the hope is that compliance

with the Scheme Standard will be demonstrated without the need for a new application and repeat Assessment.

- 4.14 For a Pending outcome at Assessment, it is likely that the issues will be rectified purely through the submission of documentation, with no need for a site visit. The Applicant may be charged a fee if an additional Assessment or comprehensive review of documentation is required.
- 4.15 In cases of a Pending result, failure of the Applicant to address required changes within the agreed timescales will result in a Fail.

Fail

- 4.16 If the Applicant has not met the Scheme Standard then they will not be awarded AC status. As part of the Assessment report the Association will seek to offer guidance to assist the business with applying for AC status again in the future.
- 4.17 If the Assessor witnesses anything during the course of an

Assessment which causes them immediate concern, for example dangerous working practices, then they are entitled to stop the Assessment. Depending on the nature of the concern, it may be appropriate for the Assessor to complete other aspects of the Assessment and then report back to the Association about the item of concern to agree a way forward. Alternatively, the concern may be so significant that the Assessor will stop the Assessment in anticipation of a Fail.

Appeal

- 4.18 If a contractor wishes to appeal against a decision then they can do so through the Association's Appeals Procedure, available on the Association's website.



MAINTAINING AC STATUS

- Summary
- Reassessments
- Outcomes
- Additional and early Reassessments
- Online Reassessments
- Desktop Audits
- Spot checks

Summary

- 5.1 The AC Scheme operates on a repeating two-year accreditation cycle. In year one there will be either an initial Assessment or a Reassessment, depending on whether the contractor is an Applicant or an existing AC. In year two an AC is required to participate in a Desktop Audit. In the third year of accreditation the AC will be reassessed, and in the fourth year it will receive a Desktop Audit, and so on. See Table 3 for the schedule.
- 5.2 After successful completion of an Assessment or Reassessment the AC will be issued with a certificate with an expiry date one year after the date of issue. Renewal of the certificate is dependent on successful completion of a Desktop Audit in year two. Extension of AC status for another two-year cycle is dependent on a successful Reassessment prior to the expiry of the certificate.
- 5.3 Passing an Assessment or Reassessment is just one part of being an AC. An AC is expected

to meet the requirements of the Standard every day, not just when they are going through an Assessment or Reassessment.

- 5.4 The process for maintaining AC status, once achieved, includes:
- a) Demonstrating compliance with the Standard through Reassessments.
 - b) Demonstrating compliance with the Standard through Desktop Audits.
 - c) Payment of the appropriate annual AC Scheme fee.
 - d) Adhering to the rules of the AC Scheme Handbook (this document).
 - e) Adhering to the Association's Code of Conduct & Ethics.
 - f) Conducting business professionally at all times as a representative of the Association and the Scheme.

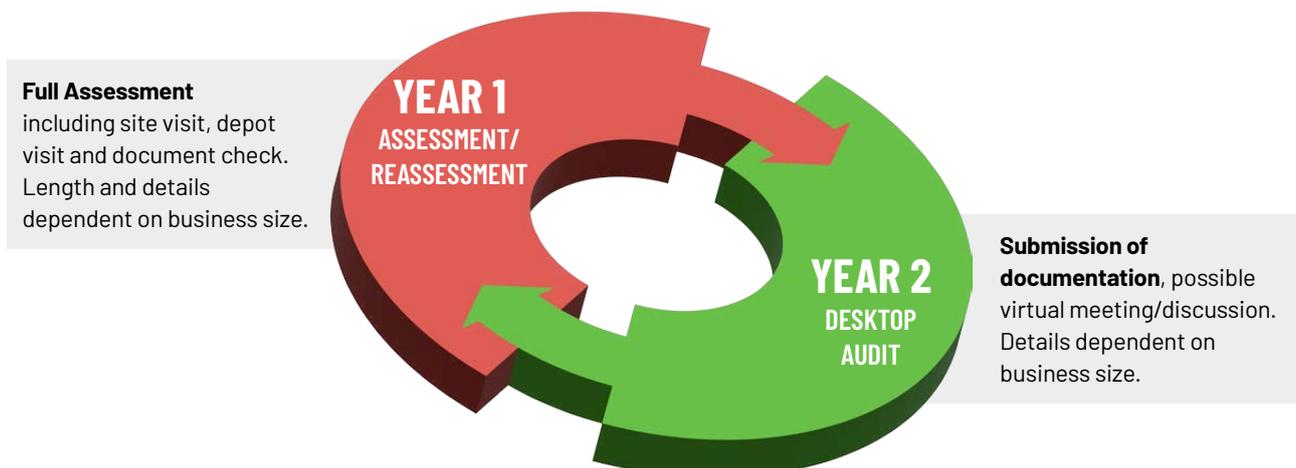
previous one. Once set, these dates should be regarded as non-negotiable except in exceptional circumstances.

- 5.6 The process for Reassessments is as follows:
- a) The Association will contact the AC and notify them that a Reassessment is due, requesting all necessary documentation.
 - b) A Reassessment date is arranged to the mutual convenience of the AC and the Association. Assuming all of the documentation, including for the Desktop Audit, has been submitted correctly, the Reassessment date will usually be approximately one month before the existing certificate's expiration date.
 - c) On the day(s) of the Reassessment, the Assessor will determine the AC's compliance with the Standard. This will require access to:
 - the AC's office systems and associated paperwork;

Reassessments

- 5.5 The Association will endeavour to arrange Reassessments and Desktop Audits at approximately the same time of year as the

Table 3: Assessment/Reassessment and Desktop Audit two-year cycle.



- the AC's stores, workshop and yard (if there is one);
 - work sites previously completed by the AC; and
 - work in progress at a live site.
- d) At the end of the Reassessment, the Assessor may choose to inform the AC's Manager of the recommendation they will be making to the Association. This is not confirmation of the final result and should not be regarded as definitive. Only when the final report is received by the AC should the result be regarded as final.
- e) The Assessor's report and recommended outcome will be submitted to the Association for review, amendment and/or final approval. Once the outcome is confirmed, the Association will issue the final report to the AC, usually within 10 working days.

Outcomes

- 5.7 Reassessment outcomes are broadly the same as for the initial Assessment, but with some differences. These potential outcomes and next steps are summarised in Table 4.

Pass

- 5.8 In the case of a successful Reassessment, the AC will continue to be able to refer to itself as an AC and will continue to enjoy all of the benefits of being an AC with no break in its accreditation.
- 5.9 As part of the Reassessment report, the AC will be provided with a list of areas for potential improvement which will be referred to during the next Reassessment. This helps ensure that standards are continually improving in the business.

Pending

- 5.10 In some cases the AC will fall just short of the Scheme Standard at the time of Reassessment, but in such a way that the Assessor and the Association believe the issues can be rectified. Any improvements which are required will be included in the Assessor's report, and the hope is that compliance with the Scheme Standard will be demonstrated without the need for a new application and repeat Assessment.
- 5.11 A new accreditation certificate will not be issued until the Association is satisfied that the required rectifications have been made. For a Pending outcome at Reassessment, it is likely that the issues will be rectified purely through the submission of documentation, with no need for a site visit. If an additional site visit is required in order to demonstrate compliance, then the AC will be charged at the appropriate rate.
- 5.12 Until the outstanding issues have been rectified, the following will happen:
- The AC will not be issued with a new accreditation certificate.
 - The AC will remain in the online directory, but an entry will be made next to their name to show the expiry date of their current accreditation certificate.
 - SSIP or other accreditations may expire during this period, depending on the scale of rectifications required and the timescales involved.
- 5.13 In cases of a Pending result, failure of the AC to address required changes within the agreed timescales will result in a Fail.

Fail

- 5.14 If the AC has not met the Scheme Standard and if the issues identified are so serious that they cannot reasonably be rectified then they will be deemed to have failed the Reassessment and their accreditation will not be renewed. The issues of concern will be listed in the Assessor's report.
- 5.15 In the case of a Fail outcome, the AC will be removed from the online directory immediately. It will be sent further instructions by the Association, including the timescales within which it is required to change its website, vehicle livery and stationery etc. Depending on the severity of the reasons for failure, the Association may decide it is appropriate to launch an investigation as part of its Complaints Procedure and/or suspend the AC from reapplying for the Scheme for an appropriate amount of time.
- 5.16 If the Assessor witnesses anything during the course of a Reassessment which causes them immediate concern, for example dangerous working practices, then they are entitled to stop the Reassessment. Depending on the nature of the concern, it may be appropriate for the Assessor to complete other aspects of the Assessment and then report back to the Association about the item of concern to agree a way forward. Alternatively, the concern may be so significant that the Assessor will stop the Reassessment in anticipation of a Fail.

Table 4: Assessment/Reassessment potential outcomes.

Outcome	Meaning		Next steps	Timescale
Pass	New applicant	Applicant has met the requirements of the Scheme Standard.	A new Applicant is registered as an AC with all of the associated benefits as specified in the AC Accreditation Scheme Handbook Opportunities for improvement will be included in the Assessor's report.	Within 28 days of Assessment
	AC Reassessment	AC has met the requirements of the Scheme Standard.	An existing AC continues on the Scheme as previously. Opportunities for improvement will be included in the Assessor's report.	Within 10 days of Reassessment
Pending	New applicant	AC approval is deferred pending the Applicant rectifying the issues which have been raised in the Assessor's report.	The Applicant and the Association will work together to identify next steps on a case-by-case basis.	Up to 3 months
	AC Reassessment	Renewal of AC accreditation is deferred pending rectification of the issues raised in the Assessor's report.	The AC will not be issued with a new accreditation certificate. The AC will remain in the online directory, but an entry will be made next to their name to show the expiry date of their current accreditation certificate. SSIP or other accreditations may expire during this period, depending on the scale of rectifications required and the timescales involved	Up to 3 months
Fail	New applicant	AC approval is refused due to significant non-compliance with the Scheme Standard.	A new Applicant who fails will not be accepted onto the Scheme.	Immediate
	AC Reassessment	AC approval is withdrawn due to significant non-compliance with the Scheme Standard.	An existing AC who fails a Reassessment will cease to be an AC and will be removed from the Association's online register. Any future attempt to become an AC will be regarded as an initial application.	Immediate



Additional and early Reassessments

5.17 Under some circumstances a Reassessment might be brought forward, ahead of the usual cycle, or an additional Reassessment may be undertaken. Grounds for early or additional Reassessment might include:

- Changes in business ownership, business name or any other material change which might affect health and safety, customer satisfaction or the integrity of the AC Scheme as a whole.
- A change in the named AC Manager(s).
- A change in an AC's business location.
- An ongoing investigation relating to a complaint.
- An upheld complaint against an AC.
- A successful prosecution against an AC.
- A borderline pass in an Assessment or Reassessment.

5.18 If an early Reassessment is triggered by any of the above criteria, then the AC will be liable to pay the standard Reassessment fee.

5.19 The Association also reserves the right to instigate a Reassessment or undertake spot checks to ensure compliance with the Standard at any time, without prior notification.

5.20 In most cases an early Reassessment is one which is brought forward to a month in the same calendar year as the Reassessment was originally due. An additional Reassessment is required in the year between the planned Reassessments.

5.21 Decisions about early and additional Reassessment are made at the discretion of the Association.

Online Reassessments

5.22 The Association has introduced the option of Online Reassessments, in which a combination of online meetings, document/video submission

and remote site visits and depot inspections are used instead of an in-person visit. It is fully acknowledged that it will not be desirable or appropriate for all ACs and Assessors to undertake Reassessments in this way. If you are interested in finding out more then please contact the Association.

Desktop Audits

5.23 In year two of the Assessment cycle, an AC is required to participate in a Desktop Audit. This involves the submission of a series of documents and evidence to demonstrate continued compliance with the Standard. Some of the documentation required is specified as part of the annual SSIP assessment and other elements are specifically for the AC Scheme.

5.24 The Desktop Audit process is as follows:

- Approximately one month before the certificate expiry date, the AC will be contacted via email and invited to complete its Desktop Audit.



Association. Failure to declare items of significance, such as prosecutions, can result in disciplinary sanctions including suspension or expulsion from the Scheme.

5.26 There are three potential outcomes for a Desktop Audit: Compliant, Pending and Fail. Please see Table 5 for more details.

Spot checks

5.27 The Association reserves the right to undertake spot checks of ACs at any time. Spot checks are undertaken at short notice or, if appropriate, without prior notice. This may involve a site or depot visit from the Association or an Assessor.

5.28 Spot checks may be randomly generated in order to monitor a percentage of ACs outside of Reassessment years, or may be triggered by a particular issue. This issue might be a concern raised by a member of the public, an employee or an Assessor, or a formal complaint made through the Association's Complaints Procedure.

5.29 Under some circumstances there might be a charge associated with undertaking a spot check. For example, if the findings of a spot check raise concerns that are sufficient to trigger an early Reassessment, then the AC would be charged for that Reassessment as normal.

- Documentation for the Desktop Audit must be submitted in the correct format as specified by the Association.
 - All elements of the Desktop Audit must be provided as requested, and all necessary declarations made.
 - The completed Desktop Audit must be signed and dated by the Manager(s).
 - Upon receipt of the required documentation, the Association will review the submission and determine whether or not it meets the required standard.
 - The result of the review will be communicated to the AC within 28 days of the decision being made.
- 5.25 Please note that incomplete, incorrect, late or unsigned Desktop Audit submissions may be rejected by the

Table 5: Desktop Audit outcomes.

Outcome	Meaning	Next steps
Pass	The AC has submitted all of the required documentation and evidence, in the correct format, and has passed the Desktop Audit.	The AC is informed that they have successfully completed the process.
Pending	Some documentation or evidence is missing from the submission, or it is not to the required standard, but this can be rectified by the Association and the AC working together.	The Association and the AC will work together to ensure that any outstanding issues are addressed within agreed timescales, and the Desktop Audit will be reviewed again.
Fail	The AC has failed to submit the required documentation, or the quality of the submission is sufficiently low to be rejected.	The Association will deal with these situations on a case-by-case basis. One potential outcome is that the AC will be required to undertake an early Reassessment. SSIP certification will cease at the time of AC certificate expiry.

NON-COMPLIANCE

- Summary
- Expectations of an AC
- Identification of non-compliance
- Logo misuse
- The Code of Conduct & Ethics
- The Complaints Procedure

Summary

- 6.1 The Association takes the integrity of the AC Scheme extremely seriously. Any AC found to be in breach of the Scheme Standard or the Code of Conduct & Ethics will be subject to the Association's Complaints Procedure.
- 6.2 Where it is possible and appropriate to do so, the Association's general approach will be to work with the AC in order to help them achieve the required Scheme Standard.
- 6.3 Potential sanctions in the event of a complaint being upheld include suspension or expulsion from the Scheme. The Association reserves the right to remove any AC from the Scheme should it be judged in accordance with the Complaints Procedure that the Scheme Standard or Code of Conduct & Ethics has been breached.

Expectations of an AC

- 6.4 Alongside the many benefits of being part of the AC Scheme comes a responsibility to uphold

the integrity of the Scheme. ACs carry the logo of the Association and must therefore remember that their actions will affect the reputation of the Association as well as their own company. An AC is expected to meet the requirements of the Scheme Standard and the Association's Code of Conduct & Ethics at all times, and not just during a Reassessment.

- 6.5 An AC is also required to proactively inform the Association about certain changes to its business. These might include:
- A change in business size.
 - A change in Manager(s).
 - A move to new premises.
 - Any prosecutions which have been upheld against the AC.
- 6.6 It is expected that the AC will inform the Association of matters of material importance such as these, and any other material change which might affect health and safety, customer satisfaction or the integrity of the AC Scheme as a whole, within 28 days of the incident/change. Failure to

do so may result in disciplinary sanctions against the AC.

Identification of non-compliance

- 6.7 There are a variety of ways in which non-compliance with the Scheme Standard or the Code of Conduct & Ethics might be brought to the attention of the Association. These include:
- During the Reassessment process.
 - During a Desktop Audit.
 - As a result of a complaint being submitted to the Association.
 - As a result of concerns being raised about the AC by a third party.
 - As a result of a spot check.
- 6.8 All reports of non-compliance will be taken seriously and investigated in accordance with the Complaints Procedure.

Logo misuse

- 6.9 Any business claiming to be a member of the AC Scheme which is not a member will be asked to



cease and desist in its use of the Association's logo/name and will be reported to its local Trading Standards department. This includes contractors who have never been part of the Scheme as well as former ACs who have left the Scheme for any reason. Legal action may be taken in some cases.

The Code of Conduct & Ethics

6.10 The Association expects all of its members and ACs to abide by the Association's Code of Conduct & Ethics, and it is necessary for all ACs to read, understand and accept the terms of the Code of Conduct & Ethics upon becoming an AC.

6.11 In summary, the Association requires its members to adhere to six core principles:

- Competence
- Honesty and integrity
- Independent professional judgement
- Due care and diligence
- Equality and respect

■ Professional behaviour

6.12 The full Code of Conduct & Ethics can be found on the Association's website. Failure to comply with the Code of Conduct & Ethics may result in disciplinary sanctions including suspension or expulsion from the Scheme.

The Complaints Procedure

6.13 If an individual believes that an AC has fallen below the standards expected of them and is failing to meet the requirements of the Scheme Standard and/or the Code of Conduct & Ethics, then they are able to submit a formal complaint to the Association using the Complaints Procedure.

6.14 There are three stages to the Complaints Procedure:

- **Stage One:** Initial evidence gathering
- **Stage Two:** Investigation and outcome
- **Stage Three:** Appeal

6.15 When a complaint is received, the Chief Executive Officer, in discussion with other members of the team if necessary, will

determine whether or not it should be validated. If the complaint is deemed to be valid then in most cases a response will be sought from the member who is being complained about, and the original complaint and response will be shared with the Chair of the appropriate Association Committee and/or the Board of Trustees, who will assign the complaint to appropriate individuals for investigation.

6.16 There are three potential outcomes from a validated complaint with regard to a possible breach of the Code of Conduct & Ethics:

- No breach
- Minor breach
- Major breach

6.17 The decision of the investigating panel, and any disciplinary sanctions, will be communicated to the member and the complainant as soon as is reasonably practicable.

6.18 The full Complaints Procedure can be found on the Association's website.



Arboricultural Association

The Malthouse, Stroud Green, Standish, Stonehouse, Gloucestershire GL10 3DL

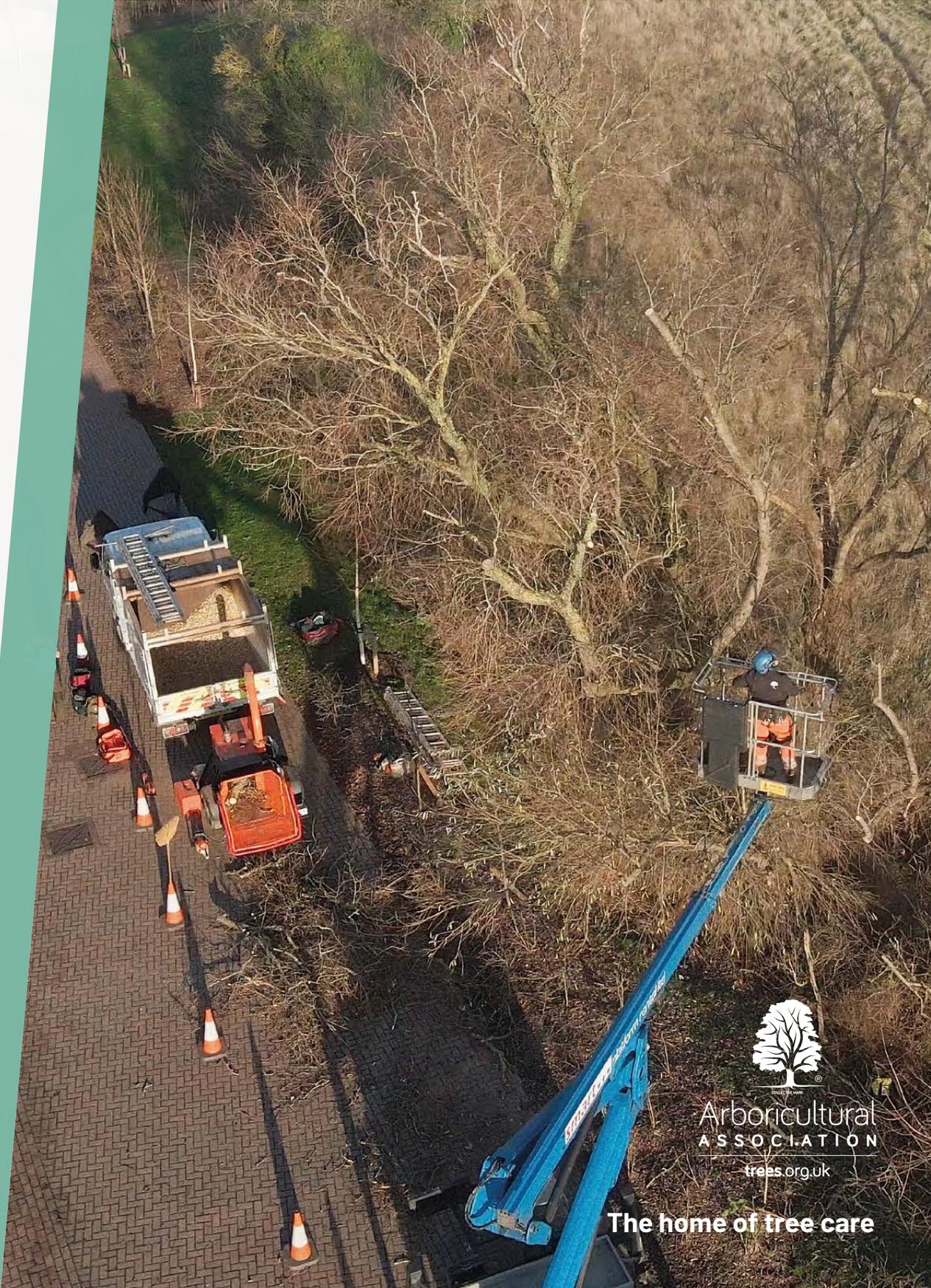
Arboricultural Association Ltd. A company registered in England at The Malthouse, Stroud Green, Standish, Stonehouse, Gloucestershire GL10 3DL, UK. Company number 4070377.

The Arboricultural Association is a registered charity no. 1083845.

Version 1: May 2023

Scan this QR code to find out more

or visit www.trees.org.uk/Become-an-ArbAC



Arboricultural
ASSOCIATION

trees.org.uk

The home of tree care