



QUALITY ASSURANCE PROCESS FOR REGISTERED CONSULTANTS



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1 Introduction

- 1.1 The Arboricultural Association (the Association) operates a Registered Consultant Scheme. The aim of the scheme is to recognise excellence in the field of arboricultural consultancy, and it is promoted by the Association as establishing the highest level of attainment in this field available within Great Britain¹ (the Association's website, 2021).
- 1.2 The Registered Consultants (RCs) have attained a recognised standard of knowledge and experience and have demonstrated the ability to practise as an arboricultural consultant in the most complex and demanding situations.
- 1.3 To become an Arboricultural Association Registered Consultant (AARC), individuals must first reach the prerequisite level of qualifications and be able to demonstrate a clear understanding and working knowledge of arboriculture, and how it is practically applied in a variety of situations. The award of AARC status is made following a rigorous assessment process, and all applicants must meet the required professional standards² (the Association's website, 2021).
- 1.4 All AARCs are required to undertake a minimum of 25 hours of continuing professional development (CPD) on an annual basis. The intention is that this will ensure that all Registered Consultants maintain the required level of competence to preserve the integrity and high standards of the scheme.

¹ <https://www.trees.org.uk/Registered-Consultant-Directory>

² <https://www.trees.org.uk/Accreditation/Become-a-AA-Registered-Consultant>



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2 The objectives of the quality assurance process

- 2.1 The quality assurance process seeks to ensure AARCs continue to meet the required standards of the scheme over time; that they maintain levels of high-quality, clearly presented technical output; and that they maintain ongoing professional development, keeping abreast of changes in the wider industry. It seeks to identify areas where standards are being maintained, and where they are not it provides guidance as to how any shortfall can be addressed.
- 2.2 The quality assurance process demonstrates to the wider industry, end users and other interested parties that the standards of the scheme are being maintained and upheld. This assists in ensuring that the scheme continues to be regarded as the benchmark for arboricultural consultancy within the UK.

3 The quality assurance criteria

- 3.1 The quality assurance process reviews one sample report from each individual Registered Consultant every five years in order to confirm that they continue to meet the current scheme standards.
- 3.2 Each AARC is required to submit a total of four reports. The choice of reports is at the discretion of the AARC, but should reflect the range of subject fields they cover. The Scheme Manager selects one of the submitted reports for the reviewers to evaluate. Every AARC's work is reviewed on the basis of this report. The reviewers have the right to evaluate a second report if they so choose for any of the reasons set out in paragraph 6.5.
- 3.3 The AARC is given four weeks' notice of the requirement to submit four reports. The reports should be submitted as follows:
 - If a report is in the public domain and related to a planning application, or discharge of planning conditions, a planning portal reference and details of the document title/reference number must be provided. The Scheme Manager will download the report using the link provided by the AARC.
 - Other reports may be submitted in a PDF or MS Word format with editing password protected. The AARC should provide a link to a publicly accessible website where a copy of the report, as submitted to a client or other interested party, can be accessed, where this is available.
- 3.4 Each report is subject to a review against the AARC Scheme standards relevant at the time the report was submitted for the assessment. Against those standards, each relevant element of the report will be evaluated as being in one of the categories set out in the table on the next page:

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Finding	Definition/Impact	Action/Mitigation
Compliant	The report meets the standards set in the AARC Scheme assessment criteria.	No further action is required. Suggestions for development may be offered.
Opportunity for Improvement (OFI)	Elements within the report do not meet the AARC Scheme standard, but risk to the integrity of the scheme is low. Advice and support will be provided to offer an opportunity to improve current practice. Multiple OFIs could become a Minor Non-Compliance.	OFIs should be seen to be minor issues that do not diminish the overall quality of the report. The panel may recommend that the RC gives consideration to a change in practice.
Minor Non-Compliance (Minor NC)	A part of the reviewed report fails to meet the current standard, but not at a level that impacts directly upon the integrity of the AARC Scheme. It presents a medium risk and is one that, if not addressed, will have the potential to become a Major Non-Compliance.	A Minor NC will include areas where the RC may be slipping into poor habits. The panel may wish to: evaluate another of the reports submitted; suggest additional training or review of practice to correct this issue; or recommend re-submission of the report for further review after it has been revised.
Major Non-Compliance (Major NC)	The submitted report fails to meet the AARC Scheme standard and the integrity of the scheme is at risk. A Major NC could come about following the accumulation of several Minor NCs, but any single Major NC will result in the RC failing to pass the quality assurance process.	The RC will have failed the quality assurance process. RC status will be temporarily suspended and the RC removed from the directory. The RC will be subject to a further quality assurance assessment by the panel, to confirm whether the panel's requirements for improvement have been met. If successful, the RC will then be subject to quality assurance again within 12 months from the date they re-enter the directory.

4 How often does the quality assurance process take place?

- 4.1 The AARC quality assurance process operates on a 5-year cycle.
- 4.2 There is a period of process introduction during which all current RCs are being called to undertake the quality assurance process. For the avoidance of doubt, longest-serving members are being called first and recently joined members last.
- 4.3 In addition to this, any AARC who is subject to a complaint that is upheld by the Association may be required to submit to the quality assurance process at a time determined by the Association.
- 4.4 The Association reserves the right to instigate the quality assurance process for any AARC on legitimate grounds, irrespective of when their last quality assurance process took place or next one is due.



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5 Who are the reviewers?

- 5.1 The Quality Assurance Panel consists of a broad range of people representing a wide spectrum of professionals who interact with the industry. The chair of Professional Committee recommends to the Board of Trustees the composition of the panel. It is made up of a minimum of three people who elect one person to be chair of the panel. The panel will always include an existing RC assessor. In addition, it may include, but is not limited to:
- The Lead Assessor of the AARC Scheme
 - Existing RC assessors
 - An existing senior consultant within the industry who is not a Registered Consultant
 - A member of the Association's staff
 - Tree officers
 - A member of an associated industry (e.g. LI, RIBA, RICS, CIEEM, ICF, ICES, CII, RTPI, CIPD)
 - Other professional end users.
- 5.2 There is also an independent scheme moderator to ensure the impartiality and integrity of the quality assurance process.

6 How does the quality assurance process take place?

- 6.1 The process takes place twice a year, once in the spring and once in the autumn. The panel convenes for a single day of each period to review, discuss and conclude the outcome of the quality assurance process for each of the assessed reports.
- 6.2 When selected for quality assurance, the AARC is notified in writing that they must submit reports for review and is also advised of the date by which the reports must be received and when the review will take place. Section 3.3 sets out the ways in which reports can be submitted.
- 6.3 The AARC Scheme Manager reviews the submitted reports for verification prior to copies of the selected report being distributed to the quality assurance panel.
- 6.4 Panel members must declare any conflict of interest as soon as possible prior to the review date.
- 6.5 The panel has the right to review a second report from any RC as part of the quality assurance process if there are concerns over the lack of complexity of the issue addressed by the first report, the standards or the quality of the submitted information or where the same field was assessed at the RC's previous quality assurance review.
- 6.6 On the day of the review, the panel convenes to review the submitted reports and to discuss the panel members' findings. The panel determines whether each AARC Scheme member being reviewed is continuing to provide a quality of service that continues to promote excellence in the field of arboriculture. By the conclusion of the day, the panel will have determined whether each AARC Scheme member reviewed has continued to meet the standards or not.
- 6.7 For successful AARCs, a very simple summary is provided to confirm that the submitted report is compliant and that the AARC continues to meet the standards. The summary may contain guidance and support for the AARC to consider, especially where there is some scope for improvement (e.g. where there are suggestions for development or 'opportunities for improvement').
- 6.8 See section 7 for what happens if the report fails to meet the AARC Scheme standards.
- 6.9 The Lead Assessor prepares an anonymised summary report for the Professional Committee.

7 What are the consequences of failing to maintain the standards?

- 7.1 For AARCs that fail the quality assurance process, the panel provides a more detailed report outlining why they have failed and what changes are required of them. Their RC status is temporarily suspended and the AARC is removed from the directory until such time as the panel's requirements for improvement have been met or an appeal is upheld (see section 8: What is the appeals procedure?). The AARC will be required to submit further reports for quality assurance for the panel's consideration at one of its next two meetings, which are held in the spring and autumn, at approximately six-month intervals.
- 7.2 If the second quality assurance assessment meets the required standards, the panel will recommend that AARC status is reinstated and the member will be re-entered in the Directory. They will then be required to take part in a further quality assurance process within 12 months of the date of re-entry to the directory, to confirm that the improved standards are being maintained.



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- 7.3 Failure to pass a second quality assurance assessment will result in removal from the AARC Scheme. The member will then be required to reapply through the formal application process if they wish to become a member of the AARC Scheme again.
- 7.4 If the AARC fails to submit further reports for the panel's consideration at one of its next two meetings, they will be required to reapply through the formal application process if they wish to become a member of the AARC Scheme again.

8 What is the appeals procedure?

- 8.1 Where an AARC fails to pass the quality assurance process and is suspended or removed from the Directory following completion of the quality assurance process, they have a right of appeal to the Association.
- 8.2 The process is set out in the Association's Procedure for Appealing against Assessment Decisions, which can be found at <https://www.trees.org.uk/Accreditation/Become-an-AA-Registered-Consultant>

Version	Revision	Date	Authorised by
1	New document compiled for the launch of new AARC Quality Assurance Process	2018-19	Simon Richmond
2	Revised to be in line with updated Procedure for Appealing against Assessment Decisions	July 2021	Simon Richmond
3	8: What is the appeals procedure? Changed to be in line with the Association's revised Appeals Procedure	May 2026	Emma Gilmartin